

Mural Paintings in Berkshire Churches.

PART III.

By E. T. LONG, F.S.A.

PADWORTH.

THIS interesting little twelfth century church with its vaulted apsidal chancel has some remains of mural paintings discovered during the restoration in 1890.

On the north and east walls of the chancel are two consecration crosses executed in white on a red ground and probably contemporary with the fabric. In the nave are three more similar crosses on the north, south and west walls respectively.

To the south of the chancel arch are considerable remains of colour decoration, probably dating for the most part from the first half of the thirteenth century. At the top are traces of two shields and below under a trefoiled arch with a masonry pattern background is the large figure of a bishop wearing a low early form of mitre with his right hand raised in blessing and holding a crozier in the left. Below on a much smaller scale are three figures with uplifted hands beneath a sort of tent supported on a central pole, while a bishop stands close at hand. This scene probably portrays the miracle of St. Nicholas raising the three boys to life. In this case the large figure above may also represent St. Nicholas. There are slight traces of another subject on the south wall of the nave of much the same date.

RUSCOMBE.

On the splays of the two thirteenth century lancets in the east wall of the chancel are more or less contemporary paintings. To the south are St. Peter on the right holding a large key and St. Paul on the left with a sword. To the north are two figures vested in dalmatics, probably St. Stephen and St. Laurence, though no distinctive emblems are now visible. The figures, which are about 4ft. 6in. in height, are somewhat crudely executed in red and yellow ochre on a cream ground.

There is no chancel arch and the division between the nave and chancel is marked by a plastered partition supported on a beam in place of an arch. It is probable that originally the Doom was painted on the west face of this partition, but of this there are now no traces. In the seventeenth century when the present nave was built part of the plastered surface was decorated with a table of the Commandments in a pleasing border. (*Berks, Bucks and Oxon. Arch. Journ.* XXV (1919), 6.)

STANFORD DINGLEY.

Extensive remains of colour decoration were discovered in this church during the nineteenth century, and much of the scheme still remains, though some of it has been much retouched. The most notable discovery was a thirteenth century St. Christopher, which was, unfortunately, afterwards destroyed. It was situated over the north arcade and opposite the main entrance. To the east of this painting a representation of the Doom was found, and part of this still survives though in urgent need of preservative treatment. Like all the surviving work here it dates from the second half of the thirteenth century, but only a small portion now exists. At the top an angel is blowing on a trumpet to summon from their graves the dead, who may be seen in various compartments with uplifted hands. The rest of the picture is lost. On the west side of the soffit of the arch below the Doom is the figure of St. Edmund crowned and holding a sceptre in one hand and a heart pierced with three arrows in the other. (*Plate No. IV.A.*) The figure shows considerable skill in draughtsmanship and is decorative in effect. On the opposite side of the soffit is the head of a Bishop. The rest of the soffit is decorated with scroll pattern in red, which has been considerably restored. Round the outer edge of the arch and on either side of the scroll work are bands of blocking in red and cream, all much renewed. Similar decoration occurs on the other arches and is no doubt a faithful restoration of old work, though one could wish that those responsible had contented themselves with preservation rather than wholesale renewal. On the west respond of the western arch of the south arcade is a figure with uplifted hands and clad in a girded robe, now in a somewhat fragmentary condition, the identification of which is obscure.

SULHAMSTEAD ABBOTS.

Remains of numerous wall paintings were discovered here in the nineteenth century including a St. Christopher over the north arcade and opposite the main entrance. The only surviving traces of medieval colour decoration are found on the easternmost arch of the north arcade and consist of a simple floral pattern in red dating from the thirteenth century.

SUTTON COURTENAY.

This interesting church contains considerable remains of mural colour decoration, but with the exception of a much defaced St. George of the fifteenth century, all are of Post-Reformation date.

In the north aisle are remains of a fine painting of St. George. The Saint is on horseback in the act of driving his spear into the

dragon's mouth. He wears plate armour of about 1450 and has a coronet on his helmet. The colours are mainly red and green.

Over the chancel arch and superimposed on earlier work are the Royal Arms of Charles II with the Hebrew monogram in rays above. On either side are the tables of the Commandments. On the west wall of the nave is a large table of benefactions in an architectural border dating from the latter part of the seventeenth century.

In the south-west corner of the south aisle is a table recording the benefaction of William Andrews for six poor women. At the bottom Andrews and the beneficiaries are depicted. Andrews died in 1641 and the picture is more or less contemporary. A similar table is found in a corresponding position in the north aisle. It records the charity of Edmund Scorer, who died in 1609. He left money for the benefit of six old men, who are depicted at the bottom with their benefactor. (*Berks, Bucks and Oxon. Arch. Journ.* XXII (1916), 37-40.)

TIDMARSH.

At the restoration of the church in 1897 several wall paintings were brought to light, but all save two were speedily obliterated. Recently remains of two more have been recovered from beneath the limewash. All have now received careful preservative treatment at the hands of Mr. E. Clive Rouse, F.S.A.

The surviving paintings consist of single figures on the splays of the north-east and south-east windows of the nave and date from the middle of the thirteenth century. On the north are probably St. John Evangelist and St. Bartholomew. The former (*Plate* No. IV.B.) is depicted as a young man holding a book and the other, though now without any emblem, was stated when first discovered to be holding a knife. The figures on the south are very fragmentary. One, bearded and holding a book, may be intended for St. Peter, but no distinctive emblem is visible. The other is tonsured and holds in his right hand an instrument with small sharp teeth, which suggests a wool-carder's comb, the emblem of St. Blaise. It is worthy of note that the figure on the west splay in each case is drawn full-face, while that on the east splay is shown in three-quarter view, so that all the figures face out towards the altar. The figures are executed in red outline with yellow and pink in the draperies and exhibit considerable skill in line drawing. (*Berks, Bucks and Oxon. Arch. Journ.* XVII (1912), 105.)

UPTON.

The chancel arch and the south-east window of the chancel, both of twelfth century date, retain slight traces of contemporary colour decoration in red.

MURAL PAINTINGS IN BERKSHIRE CHURCHES

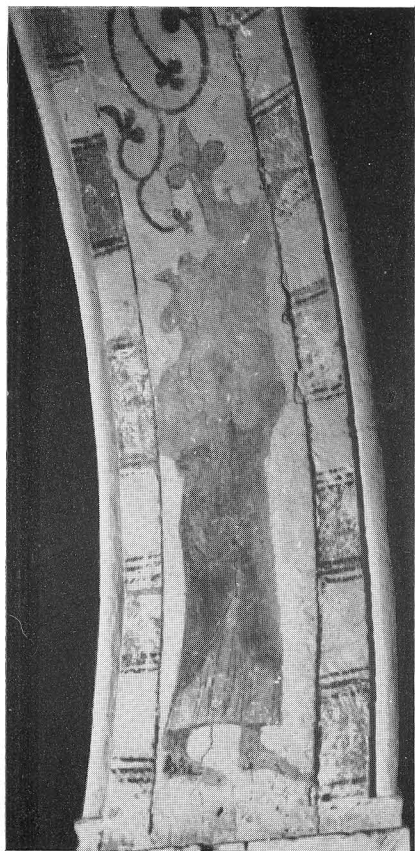


Photo : F. M. Underhill, 1941.

A

Stanford Dingley.
St. Edmund.

PLATE IV.

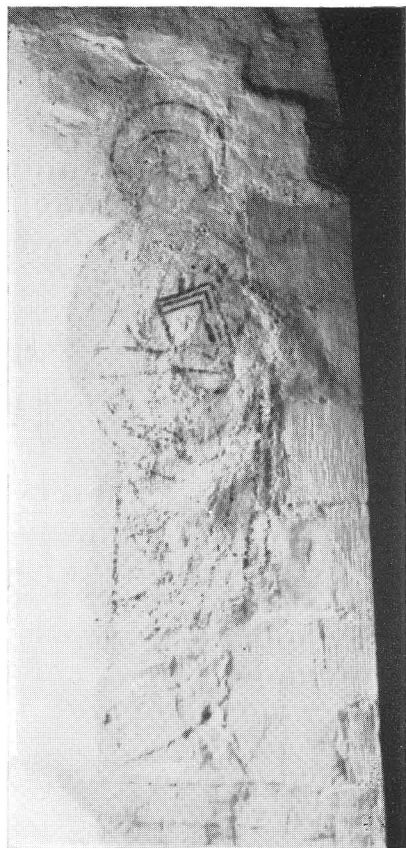


Photo : F. M. Underhill, 1941.

B

Tidmarsh.
Probably St. John Evangelist.

WALTHAM ST. LAWRENCE.

Here there are some remains of mural painting on the nave arcades. The principal portion occurs on the first pillar from the east on the north side. On one face of the pillar is a sadly mutilated figure of Our Lady in a red cloak. The Blessed Virgin holds the Holy Child on her left arm. The upper portion has been destroyed, but enough remains to show that when complete it must have been a very charming example of fourteenth century figure painting. Below is a well preserved scroll pattern in red and yellow ochre, which was, doubtless, continued round the column. The capital was decorated in red. On the corresponding pillar of the south arcade are fragmentary remains of what appears to be a figure in buff. The capital is decorated in red. Similar traces of red appear on all the capitals.

WARFIELD.

On a pillar of the nave arcade of this very lovely fourteenth century church are slight remains of colour and traces of lettering, which would appear to have read *Christus Redemptor*, and probably formed part of a painting of the Crucifixion.

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