

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

**The Martyrdom of St. Erasmus and Other Lost Wall Paintings
from Holy Rood Church, Ampney Crucis**

by D. J. Viner
2000, Vol. 118, 201-206

© The Society and the Author(s)

probably originally intended as a flushing system for the drains in the abbatial and guest quarter of the west range.

Acknowledgements

Wayne Loughlin, of Gloucester Archaeology Unit, carried out the original survey on which Figs. 2 and 3 are based. Alan Norton, clerk of works at the cathedral, took the photographs. Lowinger Maddison, cathedral librarian, advised on abbey leases.

Note

- 1 A study of this complex of buildings is being carried out by Rochelle Rowell as part of a Ph.D thesis at York University. In the 17th century the building on the site of number 7 Miller's Green consisted of a great timber building in a poor state of repair known as the Old Workhouse, Old Schoolhouse, and once Parliament House (Glos. R.O., D 936/E 1, pp. 281. 274).

Bibliography

- Bond, J., 1989. 'Water Management in the Rural Monastery', in R. Gilchrist and H. Mytum (eds.), *The Archaeology of Rural Monasteries* (BAR British Series 203), 83–111.
- Coppack, G., 1990. *Abbeys and Priors* (London).
- Eward, S., 1985. *No Fine but a Glass of Wine: Cathedral Life at Gloucester in Stuart Times* (Salisbury).
- Fullbrook-Leggatt, L.E.W.O., 1968. 'The Water Supplies of the Abbey of St. Peter and the Priory of the Grey Friars, Gloucester, from Robinswood Hill', *Trans. B.G.A.S.* 87, 111–18.
- Garrod, P., and Heighway, C., 1984. *Garrod's Gloucester: Archaeological Observations 1974–81* (Bristol).
- Hart, W.H. (ed.), 1863. *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae* (Rolls Series 33, 3 volumes 1863–87).
- Heighway, C.M., 1988. 'Archaeology in the Precinct of Gloucester Cathedral 1983–5', *Glevensis* 22, 29–37.
- Heighway, C.M., 1999. *Gloucester Cathedral and its Precinct: an overall archaeological assessment*.
- Hope, W.H. St. John, 1897. 'Notes on the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter at Gloucester', *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, iii (1885–97), 90–131.
- Kirby, I.M., 1967. *Diocese of Gloucester: Catalogue of the Records of the Dean and Chapter including the former St. Peter's Abbey* (Gloucester).
- Massé, H.J.L.J., 1898. *Cathedral Church of Gloucester* (Bell's Cathedral Guides).
- Peile, J.H.F., 1934. *William of Malmesbury's Life of St. Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester* (Oxford).
- Welander, D., 1991. *The History, Art and Architecture of Gloucester Cathedral* (Stroud).

CAROLYN HEIGHWAY

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. ERASMUS AND OTHER LOST WALL PAINTINGS FROM HOLY ROOD CHURCH, AMPNEY CRUCIS

Introduction

Holy Rood church at Ampney Crucis exhibits a building history from the Saxon period to the 19th century (Verey 1970, 86). Its interior is graced in the north transept by a fine group of wall paintings of late 13th-century date, i.e. soon after—if not actually contemporary with—the completion of this part, and indeed of much of the remainder of the church. A series of

figures of saints is depicted along with two archbishops, scenes from the life of Christ and other details, including the arms of FitzHamon of Tewkesbury, founder of Tewkesbury Abbey at the start of the 12th century. These paintings were revealed in the early 20th century from beneath the whitewash which concealed them and they have been discussed in some detail (Keyser 1914, 7-10; Tristram 1955, 133-4). In our own time they are once again to be subject to a programme of conservation, to be undertaken for the parochial church council following a detailed condition assessment, which described this group of paintings as 'of an unusually high quality' (Curteis 1997).

However, fine though the paintings are, they are not the only group of wall paintings which once adorned Holy Rood church. The nave, largely 15th century in date, boasted its own display of contemporary decoration, alas all now lost. However, two illustrations from the nave do survive as copies, one of which depicts the martyrdom of St. Erasmus and is the principal subject of this report.

Wall paintings in the nave

Today the nave walls are rendered, presenting a rather dour image to the visitor. By contrast, the 15th-century timber roof is a striking feature and evidence remains of painting with Tudor roses on the roof beams. Other contemporary or near-contemporary external features include the late Perpendicular ashlar parapet to the nave and a sanctus bellcot.

To this we can add a group of wall paintings discovered when the church was restored in 1870-1, but soon afterwards covered over again and since then lost from view. Indeed, are we correct in assuming that the paintings were only covered over again rather than completely destroyed, as the subsequent re-renderings might suggest? Contemporary recording of the event in the parish magazine for May and June 1871 provides a helpful reference, upon which subsequent descriptions are based, especially those by Keyser (1883, 6-7; 1914, 5-6, 12-13) and Bird (1927, 12-13). In 1921 Daubeney (pp. 133-4) had added his note of regret on the loss of the paintings, apparently irrevocably.

Particularly striking is the reference to a signed painting of St. Christopher alongside St. Lawrence on the north wall of the nave, and presumably adjacent to a door. If correct, it would be one of the few if not the only recorded signature in English wall-painting (Caiger-Smith 1963, 125). The signature is of Thomas 'ye payntre' of Malmesbury, described by Keyser (1883, 6) as being in black letters and much dilapidated. Was he referring to the contemporary record of 1870-1 or was the painting still visible at the time of his survey a decade or so later? It and the other nave paintings had certainly disappeared from view by the time of Keyser's later and more local study of the Ampney churches, published in 1914. The loss from view of these paintings is considerable enough; that of the rare evidence of a signed piece of work even more noteworthy. Keyser correctly records that the survival of this evidence perhaps would have helped considerably in tracing other works by this artist in the region, presumably working from the abbey in Malmesbury.

Keyser noted that the nave paintings appear to have been recorded, in the form of copy paintings, at the time of the 1870-1 restoration, an arrangement no doubt related to any decision to conceal them again or to destroy them. Only one recording (and the copy of another) now survives; this recording takes the form of a framed painting of the martyrdom of St. Erasmus, painted on linen and measuring 8 ft 4 ins × 5 ft. In view of its size, one wonders whether this was an attempt at a full-sized copy of the original? Presumably the original was on the south wall of the nave?

Originally hung in the vestry, itself a new addition to the church at the 1870-1 restoration, the painting has subsequently been displayed under the bell-tower. Because of its deteriorating



Fig. 1. The martyrdom of St. Erasmus: a representation in Holy Rood Church, Ampney Crucis (photograph by courtesy of and copyright Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England—now English Heritage).

condition, the parochial church council decided in 1997 to remove the painting from display, to undertake its basic conservation (by Gloucestershire Record Office) and to store it for posterity in the church. A modern photographic copy is displayed for the benefit of visitors. More detailed conservation and re-display remain future possibilities as and when funds are available.

The martyrdom of St. Erasmus, a bishop of Syria, is graphically represented (Fig.1). By tradition he is stated to have escaped many attempts at torture but during the persecution by Diocletian in A.D. 303 to have succumbed to being disembowelled, his intestines coiled around a windlass. He is depicted lying beneath the windlass, wearing a mitre. Around him are his executioners, including a king and a man with a sword. The figures are shown at about half-size.

Other St. Erasmus depictions

Interestingly there was a similar representation of this scene in the parish church of St. John the Baptist in nearby Cirencester. That painting, on the north wall to the left of the altar of Holy Trinity chapel on the north side of the church (Verey 1970, 164), was reproduced very clearly in *Archaeologia* 15 (1806), 405, pl. XLII. There is an accompanying and detailed inscription and the arms at the bottom of the painting are those of William Prelatte, a significant benefactor to the church, who died in 1462 and is buried in this chapel. Presumably this painting was one of his benefactions, which suggests a 15th-century date.

Very little of the Cirencester painting of St. Erasmus now survives, only vestiges of his ascension into Heaven; the lower part, depicting the martyrdom, has disappeared. This may well be

an example of changes in taste influencing survival. It is said that Lady Georgina Bathurst, sister of the 5th Earl Bathurst and whose memorial dated 1874 is also housed in the chapel, took exception to the painting and wished to have it removed (Hill 1981, 17). If so, she had an ideal opportunity to have it removed, as she was the benefactor for the substantial restoration of the chapel's reredos in 1867, itself part of George Gilbert Scott's comprehensive restoration programme during 1865–7.

Indeed, on grounds of taste, the painting surviving in Ampney Crucis may not be regarded with universal favour even today. Whether depictions of St. Erasmus' martyrdom were once more common in Cotswold church paintings is not now known. Other examples elsewhere are noted by Keyser (1914, 6) at Whitwell on the Isle of Wight and at Axmouth in Devon, although neither is specifically mentioned in the relevant Pevsner volume entry (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967 revised 1979, 775; Cherry and Pevsner 1989, 145). Kendon (1923) summarised Keyser's 1883 list of subjects in church wall paintings and found 186 references to St. Christopher compared with 10 to St. Erasmus, locations unspecified. In addition to those already noted, we might add Caiger-Smith's reference to the remains of a martyrdom of St. Erasmus at Chippenham in Cambridgeshire (1963, 135). Accessible to visitors to the Commandery in Worcester is another depiction, one of a series in the Painted Chamber and dating from around 1500. Here St. Erasmus is invoked to cure stomach illness in the medieval infirmary.

Other paintings in Ampney Crucis church

On the south wall of the nave at Ampney Crucis was a painting originally identified by Keyser as the legendary morality of the Three Kings Living and the Three Kings Dead. It was subsequently interpreted (Storck 1912, 250 and 314; Carleton-Williams 1942, 38) as showing a king and a queen with an ecclesiastic and a skeleton, a large cross in the centre, and appropriate inscriptions. Keyser (1883, 7) records that this was all painted over again in 1871. A record of part at least of this scene has survived in private possession in the village in the form of a water-colour (Fig. 2). This work is dated May 29 1871, a useful confirmation of progress with the church restoration programme then under way.

It should also be noted that there was a General Resurrection, part of a Doom, over the chancel arch, and considered at the time of its discovery to be of later date than the other nave paintings. A subsequent study confirmed its likeness to a 15th-century Doom in the church at Mitcheldean, Gloucestershire (Vallance 1936, 22).

The Ampney Crucis parish vestry book entries reveal something of the sequence of restoration activity in the church (Glos R.O., P 15/VE 2/1). In July 1870 alteration and enlargement of the chancel was approved; a year later there was a vote narrowly in favour of taking down the gallery, and subscriptions were sought for re-seating the church. By the spring of 1872 funds were available for this latter purpose, during which task, in this and the following year, a new floor of encaustic tiles was also laid. There is no specific entry in the vestry book referring to any work on the wall paintings.

Conclusion

Holy Rood church at Ampney Crucis retains a fine group of late 13th-century wall paintings. It is a great pity that it does not also retain the later work once depicted in the nave and now recorded only in part. Without the notes and recordings made at the time of the restoration of the church in the early 1870s, very little evidence would survive at all. However, assuming that the paintings have not been destroyed completely, there is enough evidence to suggest that any



Ampney Crucis Church

Fig. 2. Representation, dated 29 May 1871, of a King and Queen, forming part of a 15th century wall-painting from Holy Rood Church, Ampney Crucis (photograph by courtesy of Paddy Thomson, Ampney Crucis).

future campaign of restoration might restore some at least of this part of the life of the church at one of the high points of its architectural history

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Peter Bullock, a member of Ampney Crucis parochial church council for drawing attention to the St. Erasmus representation and to arrangements for its future care. Together with David Park of the Conservation of Wall Painting Department at the Courtauld Institute of Art, he provided much useful advice. John Edwards of Oxford similarly provided both advice and stimulation for this study. Tobit Curteis of Cambridge updated my knowledge

on the state of the existing wall paintings and options for their conservation and care. Dr. John Paddock, Keeper of Archaeology at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester, provided parallels and other local evidence. Linda Viner searched the parish records (held in Gloucestershire Record Office) for information on the 1870–1 church restoration. The former National Monuments Record of RCHM (now English Heritage) kindly gave permission for the reproduction of Fig. 1, from its collections, and Paddy Thomson of Ampney Crucis similarly for Fig. 2, from the original in his possession. Cotswold District Council, through its Cotswold Museums & Arts Service, supported the preparation of this note, and Dr. Steven Blake of Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum kindly commented on a preliminary draft.

References

- Caiger-Smith, A., 1963. *English Medieval Mural Paintings* (Oxford).
- Carleton-Williams, E., 1942. 'Mural paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead in England', *Jnl. British. Archaeol. Assoc.* 3rd series 7, 31–40.
- Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N., 1989. *The Buildings of England: Devon* (Harmondsworth).
- Curteis, T., 1997. *Condition Survey and Proposals for the Conservation of the Wall Paintings: Holy Rood Church, Ampney Crucis, Gloucestershire* (Cambridge).
- Daubeny, U., 1921. *Ancient Cotswold Churches* (Cheltenham).
- Hill, R.E., 1981. *Cirencester Parish Church*. (Cirencester: Friends of Cirencester Parish Church).
- Hobart Bird, W., 1927. *The Ancient Mural Paintings in the Churches of Gloucestershire* (Gloucester).
- Kendon, F., 1923. *Mural Paintings in English Parish Churches during the Middle Ages* (London).
- Keyser, C.E., 1883. *A list of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland having Mural and other Painted Decorations of dates prior to the latter part of the C16* (London).
- Keyser, C.E., 1914. 'Notes on the churches of Ampney Crucis, Ampney St. Mary and Ampney St. Peter', *Jnl. British. Archaeol. Assoc.* new series 20, 1–14.
- Pevsner, N., and Lloyd, D., 1967 revised 1979. *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (Harmondsworth).
- Storck, W.F., 1912. 'Aspects of death in English art and poetry—I', *Burlington Magazine* 21.
- Tristram, E.W., 1955. *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century* (London).
- Vallance, A., 1936. *English Church Screens* (London).
- Verey, D., 1970. *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire, The Cotswolds* (Harmondsworth).

DAVID VINER

REDLAND HILL HOUSE AND REDLAND CHAPEL, BRISTOL

Introduction

Redland Hill House in Bristol is the survivor of a semi-detached symmetrical pair in mid Georgian style (Figs. 1–2). At the front it has three storeys, with a semi-basement storey at the rear over arched cellars. The easternmost bays, front and rear, are canted with three windows through all storeys. The walls are rendered with limestone dressings, a first-floor sill band, a bracketed