

PRESS RELEASE 2

Sunday 13th July 2014



Restoration of Medieval Wall Paintings at Bartlow St Mary's Church Now Complete

The task of conserving and restoring the historic wall paintings in Bartlow church was completed on 13th July.

Although a combination of damp, time and misguided previous conservation efforts have damaged the paintings, under the expert hands of Tobit Curteis and his multinational team of associates, Bianca Madden, Claudia Fiocchi and Miguel Aguilar, the paintings are absolutely coming to life; this is particularly true of St Christopher, who is positively glowing. Details emerging include Christ's robe, St Christopher's beard, the drapery and the Orb. The secret is that the wax and varnish previously applied absorbs light particles and as these layers are reduced, bright new details emerge. St Christopher is our most sophisticated painting, whereas St Michael is actually a grey/white/black monochrome work known as 'griseille' which gives the effect of a relief sculpture. An interesting aside here is that the Devil's scaly elbow turns out to have a face painted on it, proving that so frequently a mediaeval artist will allow some humour to creep into his or her work.

The whole business of conservation is one of reintegration (of the sometimes disparate elements of a picture) rather than retouching – which could be seen as 'faking' the missing bits. That is a terrible word that none of us would permit to describe what is done in our name but we do so sincerely hope that St George can be reconstructed from the evidence and there is a suggestion that might indeed be the case.

In the closing report on this important work we should put this effort and this example in context: most of our churches had fully painted interiors (how many now?) and Bartlow's three paintings would have been part of a colourful collection of images that drew the eye this way and that. Since only three remain to us reinforces just how important they are to future generations. The Church is usually kept open through the day, and the wall paintings, in all their glory, can now be viewed at any time.

The eminent ecclesiastical historian, Rev. Dr. Lynne Broughton, will be giving a lecture in the Church on the evening of 14 October describing the significance and meaning of the three paintings. Tickets will be available nearer the date, at £8/head and there will be a licensed bar.

The restoration programme has been made possible by a grant of £29,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund along with several other grants, and funds raised through The Bartlow Three-Counties Walk.



Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said "HLF is delighted to support this fascinating project that will enable more people to understand and appreciate these very special wall paintings which are so important to Bartlow St Mary's."