

SALLY WOODCOCK
PAINTINGS CONSERVATION

Church of St Mary the Virgin, Belchamp Walter
Treatment report for the paintings by G. W. Brownlow on the
Altar and Pulpit



July 2011

Sally Woodcock, MA, Dip. Paintings Conservation, ACR, FIIC
130 Coleridge Road Cambridge CB1 3PR
Tel: 01223 562244 Mobile: 07939 261895
mail@sallywoodcock.co.uk

Contents

- **Acknowledgements**
- **Painted altar and pulpit**
Treatment Report
- **Plates**

Report no.: BEL/03
Date: July 2011
Author: Sally Woodcock
130 Coleridge Road
Cambridge
CB1 3PR
Tel. 01223 562244
Photographs: Sally Woodcock, 2009

© Sally Woodcock 2011

This report is submitted subject to the following conditions:

1. That it is not used in legal proceedings without the express permission of the author.
2. The author does not hold herself responsible for any use that may be made of this report, or for any consequences, legal or otherwise, that may arise from its submission.

Church of St Mary the Virgin, Belchamp Walter
Treatment report for the paintings by G. W. Brownlow on the Altar
and Pulpit

Ref: BEL/03

For a full description of the paintings prior to treatment, please see condition report BEL/02, *Church of St. Mary, Belchamp Walter: Preliminary examination of the paintings*, dated March 2010.

The set of paintings were treated according to their condition and conservation requirements with the intention of ensuring the stability and improving the appearance without disguising the age of the paintings or ignoring the fact that they have suffered some degree of deterioration in the past.

Acknowledgements

The treatment of the paintings was generously funded by the Essex Heritage Trust, their support in this project is very gratefully acknowledged. The author would also like to thank Mr Terry Raybould, Church Warden, for his help and assistance while the treatment was being carried out on site.

Treatment of the Altar

Examination of the wooden supports showed no further deterioration due to woodworm infestation, indicating that the insects are no longer likely to be active. Loose dust and debris was removed from the front of the paintings and the surrounding woodwork with a soft brush and vacuum cleaner. Surface cleaning was carried out with a solution of ammonia diluted in deionised water and applied with cotton swabs. Accretions which were not removed through surface cleaning were carefully removed with the aid of a scalpel. The surface of both paintings had a slight hazy coating and the appearance improved significantly when the paint surface was saturated. It seems probable that furniture polish with a wax content has been used on the surrounding wooden elements has also been applied to the surface of the two main paintings at some time in their history. It was decided to apply a light coat of MS2A varnish (conservation grade synthetic resin) to saturate the paint layers and protect them against future build up of dirt and possible bird excrement. Small areas of loss and abrasion were retouched using artists' quality watercolours.

Treatment of the Pulpit

Loose dust and debris was removed from the surface of the paintings and the surrounding wooden elements with a soft brush and vacuum cleaner. Areas of raised paint on the panel of St Luke were consolidated and laid flat using Lascaux 4176 adhesive. The adhesive was brushed onto the fine cracks in the paint surface and excess was cleared with deionised water. The raised areas of paint were then massaged back into plane using a heat-controlled spatula. Surface cleaning was carried out using a solution of ammonia diluted in deionised water. What was believed to be areas of mould growth in the preliminary report, on the blue paint of St Matthew, was not readily removed following cleaning. These circular areas of discolouration may be connected with pigment deterioration within the paint.

As with the paintings on the altar, all four large paintings on the pulpit had a hazy surface coating that is particularly disturbing and opaque on the figures of St John and St Luke. It seems likely to be caused by an application of a wax containing polish used on the wooden elements of the pulpit. Attempts were made to remove this layer with different solvent mixtures. A 1:3 mixture of industrial methylated spirits and white spirit was found to be effective at thinning this layer. The waxy layer had also imbibed a considerable amount of dirt. Although the solvents thinned the layers it was not possible to completely remove the coating without affecting the paint layers below. A thin layer of MS2A was applied to the surface of the four large paintings, to saturate the paint surface and minimise the hazy appearance of the wax coating. Losses in the paint layers and areas of discolouration were retouched using artist quality watercolour.

The Crucifixion and The Resurrection

The two oil paintings hanging on the east chancel wall above the altar were surface cleaned with deionised water. Surface cleaning removed a layer of sooty dirt as well as bird excrement and other accretions where possible.

Conclusion

Treatment of the Brownlow paintings has stabilised areas of vulnerable and flaking paint and removed unsightly surface dirt and accretions. The application of a varnish layer has helped to minimise the hazy effect of a waxy coating. However, because the pulpit paintings of St Luke and St John are near a south facing window and exposed to high light levels, it is possible that this hazing may reappear in the future and should be monitored. Losses and discolourations on the paint surface were retouched so the paintings can once more be enjoyed as coherent images.

Plates



Plate 1. Detail of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* on the altar, before treatment



Plate 2. Detail of *The Last Supper* on the altar, before treatment



Plate 4. Detail of white spots on the painting of *The Sacrifice of Isaac*



Plate 3. Detail of white accretions on the painting of *The Last Supper*



Plate 5. Detail of surface dirt on the painting of *The Last Supper*



Plate 6. Detail of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* on the altar, after treatment



Plate 7. Detail of *The Last Supper* on the altar, after treatment



Plate 8. Panel of *St Matthew* on the pulpit, before treatment



Plate 9. Panel of *St Mark* on the pulpit, before treatment



Plate 10. Panel of *St Luke* on the pulpit, before treatment



Plate 11. Panel of *St John* on the pulpit, before treatment



Plate 12. Detail of *St Matthew*, before treatment



Plate 13. Detail of *St Matthew*, showing loss and discoloured areas



Plate 14. Detail of discoloured retouching on *St Mark*



Plate 15. Detail of *St Mark*, before treatment



Plate 16. Detail showing areas of raised paint around the head of St Luke



Plate 17. Detail of loss and abrasion on the panel of *St Luke*



Plate 18. Detail of hazing, *St Luke*



Plate 19. Detail of hazing and cleaning tests, *St John*



Plate 20. Panel of *St Matthew* on the pulpit, after treatment



Plate 21. Panel of *St Mark* on the pulpit, after treatment



Plate 22. Panel of *St Luke* on the pulpit, after treatment



Plate 22. Panel of *St John* on the pulpit, after treatment