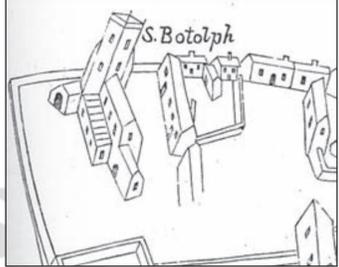


CONSERVATION OF THE CHANCEL PAINTINGS AT ST BOTOLPH'S CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE



THE BUILDING

The present church of St Botolph's appears to have been built at the beginning of the 14th century. The nave, with north and south aisles, dates to this period, with the west tower being added in the early 15th century. The south chapel was added later in the same century. During the 18th century, the chancel was demolished and reconstructed in brick.



St Botolph's Church in 1592

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the church underwent significant interventions on no less than six occasions, under the Revd Dr W.M. Champion, rector from 1862 to 1892, and subsequently president of Queens' College. The church was originally owned by Barnwell Priory, but in 1353 the living passed, through a rather circuitous route, to Corpus Christi College. In 1459, the living was sold to Queen's College, which has remained as patron to the present time.



St Botolph's Church in the late 19th century

EARLY PAINTED DECORATION

The church would have been painted from its earliest incarnation with a number of schemes of decorative and figurative scenes. One fragment of early decoration, showing simple red line foliate scrollwork, survives on the south wall of the north aisle. The painting would have been changed and added to each time the church underwent significant structural alterations or when fashions changed. So, by the later medieval

period, numerous layers of painting would have been present. Most of the painting would have been hidden or destroyed at the time of the Reformation and the Civil War, when the iconoclasm in East Anglia was among the most vigorous in the country.

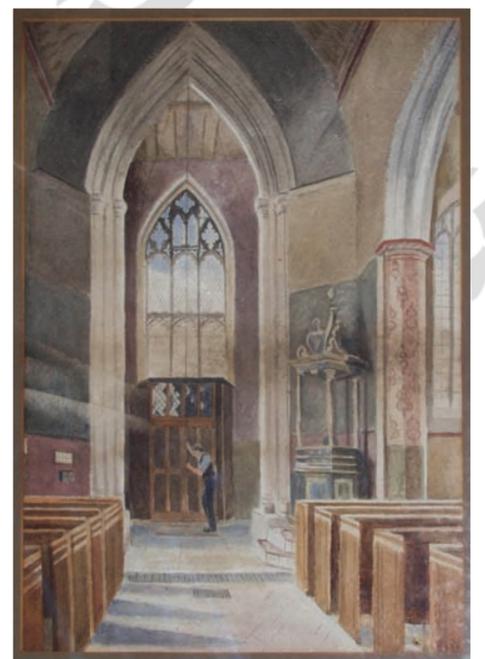
After this date, the church walls are likely to have been painted with numerous phrases of Biblical texts, usually with increasingly ornate frames and borders. A fragment of one such text was found in the south aisle in the latter part of the 20th century. It appears that the nave piers were also painted,



Fragment of scrollwork in the north aisle

as would have been usual at the time. One such area of decoration appears to have been uncovered in 1872 when it was repainted with the same designs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there might also have been painted medieval consecration crosses, which were exposed at the same date.

In the 19th century there were often attempts to recreate the type of scheme that was thought likely to have been present in the medieval period. The current decoration of St Botolph's is typical of this approach and while the full extent of the scheme is unclear, it appears that while the chancel was highly ornately painted, the nave was more simply decorated.



Watercolour showing the painting on the pier

GEORGE FREDERICK BODLEY AND THE RESTORATION OF ST BOTOLPH'S

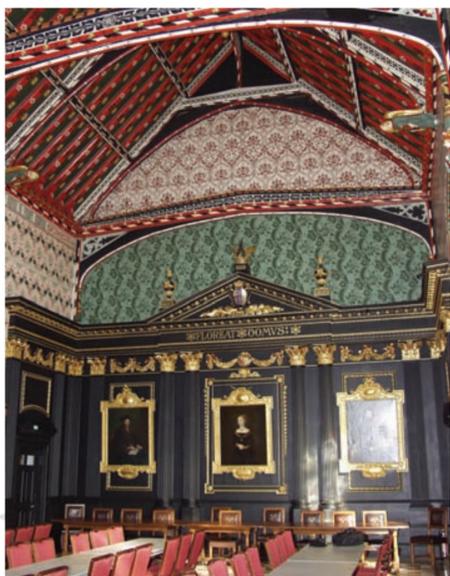
The man commissioned to restore and redecorate St Botolph's in the 19th century was the architect and designer George Frederick Bodley. Despite the immense influence that he has had on the aesthetic of the Anglican Church, Bodley remains relatively unknown in comparison to his contemporaries and those whose work he influenced. Born in Brighton in 1827, he studied under the notable architect of the High Victorian movement, George Gilbert Scott. Bodley formed his own practice in 1860 and among his early commissions was All Saints, Jesus Lane in Cambridge.

Bodley's churches are typically late 14th or early 15th century English Gothic in style, with ornate Decorated tracery and elaborate and detailed painted decoration. The design of the rebuilt chancel at St Botolph's is typical of this style, as is the decorative scheme inside. The roof is decorated with six rows of coffered panels with ornate molded frames with gilded barber pole decoration and gilded bosses at the intersections. The eastern two rows are more ornate with each small panel being decorated with a large gilded lead sun flanked by four gilded lead stars, on a red background with stencilled star or floral motifs.

Above the ornately decorated cornices on each side are black letter texts, which read *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth, Alleluia.* Lower on the north wall,



George Frederick Bodley



The hall of Queen's College, Cambridge

the organ space is ornamented with further painting and gilding, reflecting the 15th century designs on which Bodley was basing his decoration.

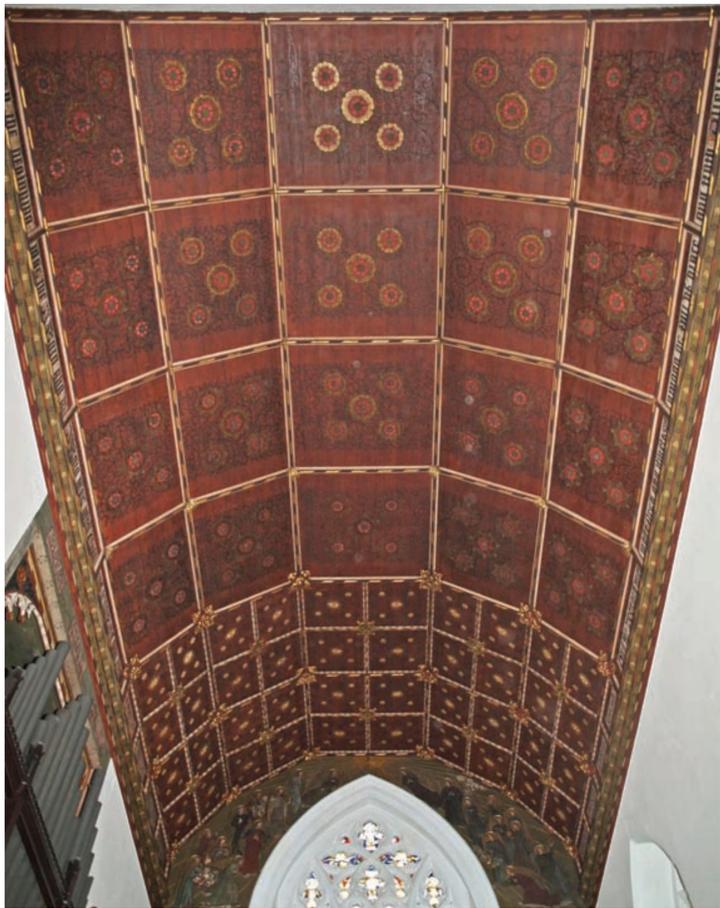


Text above the wall plate in the chancel

Sadly, the painting which would have adorned the walls, has been lost, and so it is difficult to get a complete impression of the original appearance. However, one can gain an idea of how the fully painted chancel might have appeared by visiting the nearby chapel of Queens' College, which retains its complete scheme of wall painting, or in the magnificent and vast interior of All Saint's, Jesus Lane, less than a mile from St Botolph's.

The roof and the organ loft were painted in 1872 by Frederick Leach, whose company F.R. Leach and Sons worked with Bodley on a number of projects associated with Queen's College, including painting the roof of the restored hall at the college in 1875.

On either side of the altar are two large canvas paintings in ornate gilded frames. The painting on the north side depicts St John and the two Marys at Christ's tomb and on the south the empty tomb. Both paintings are signed and dated by Godfrey Gray. The painting to the north is signed *CG Gray Easter A.D. 1885*" And that to the



The painted ceiling in the chancel

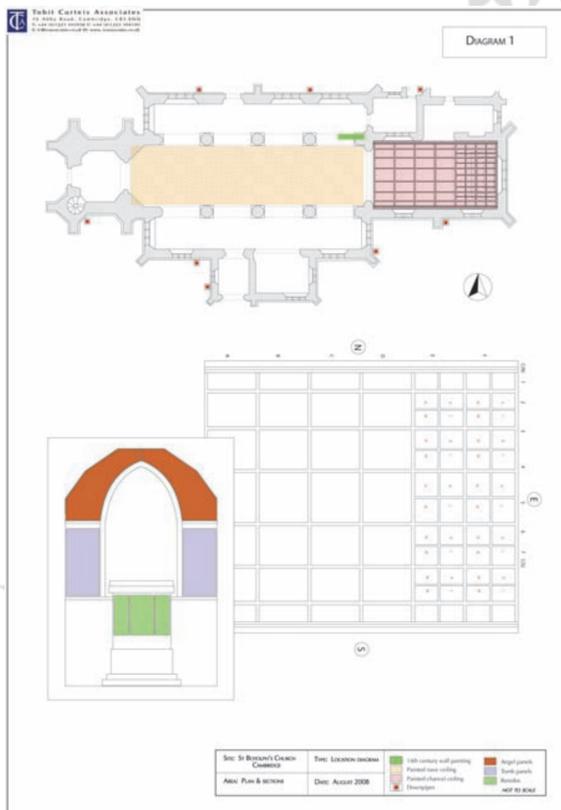
south *CEG Gray. Christmas 1885*. The stained glass window is also signed *CG Gray fecit*.

On the upper part of the east wall are two large canvas panels depicting groups of angels with musical instruments and censers. The canvases are unsigned, but it seems possible that they were carried out by Gray as part of the 1880s scheme of decoration.



The paintings on either side of the altar

In the centre of the chancel is the elaborate reredos, which comprises a canvas painting of the Crucifixion set into a painted and gilded wooden framework, surmounted by a canopy with a wooden fretwork upper rail. The crucifixion is understood to have been purchased in Antwerp by a John Smith, the University Printer, and given to the church in 1818. The reredos was designed to incorporate the picture and was given to the church by Dr Campion.



While the original structure of the rood screen appears to be 15th century in date (albeit heavily restored), the paintings of the Annunciation are part of the 19th century scheme of decoration and are also by Gray.

THE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

A survey of the paintings undertaken in 2006, by Tobit Curteis Associates in collaboration with Sally Woodcock Conservation, two Cambridge practices specialising in the conservation of historic painting, showed that they had been badly damaged in the past by water infiltration and adverse environmental conditions. However, while the paintings remained damaged and unstable, repairs made to the church in recent years had addressed the underlying causes of deterioration and the rate of damage had been controlled.



Flaking of the paint layer before conservation

Therefore, over a twelve week period in the summer of 2008, a team of fifteen specialist conservators undertook a programme of conservation treatment to stabilise and clean the paintings. The work involved painstakingly reattaching the tiny paint flakes and removing the accumulation of dirt and grime over the entire surface of the wall and ceiling paintings. Some retouching was also undertaken in order to reduce the visual impact of losses, but fictive reconstruction of missing elements



Conservator undertaking treatment tests



Cleaning tests on the ceiling and rood screen

was not considered appropriate. The work was made possible by the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Pilgrim Trust, the Church Building Council and numerous private donors.