

ANCIENT WALL - PAINTINGS and MODERN HAND - PAINTINGS - PYRFORD IN 1966-67

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In Pyrford, the paint was still drying on the walls of the new annex to the Church of the Good Shepherd, whilst at St Nicholas' Church the ancient wall paintings (originally discovered during restoration work in 1869) were being lovingly conserved in 1967.

The old church, overlooking the Wey Valley and the ruins of Newark Priory, was possibly built in the grounds of a pagan religious site - the round churchyard reminiscent of an ancient stone circle or some other monument 'Christianised' sometime before the early 12th century.

The date 1140 is often quoted for the foundation, although it is possible that an even earlier wooden structure stood on the site. What is clear is that when the sturdy stone church was originally consecrated, twelve crosses were painted on the walls with other frescos in between, making the whole medieval interior a riot of colour.

Probably few of the parishioners at that time could read (and almost certainly not the Latin of their services), but they could 'read' the images on the walls of 'Christ's Passion' sketched out in red ochre paint - paint that centuries later, during the reformation, was covered over with austere white-wash.



The 12th century locals probably couldn't have afforded to go on pilgrimage, but in the paintings on the wall they could have imagined what it was like, and maybe passing pilgrims coming via Chertsey Abbey or Newark Priory might have been moved by representations of themselves, and given much needed offerings to the tiny church.

In Victorian times careful work on the restoration of the church revealed parts of

The medieval wall-paintings at St Nicholas' church were first re-found in Victorian times, but in 1967 the flaking paintwork had to be restored.

those painted stories once more, but by the mid 1960's the old exposed paint-work was in need of conservation, and experts were once more brought in to Pyrford so that we can still appreciate the work of the 12th century (and the 19th and 20th century) craftsmen today.





Unfortunately the work of some other Pyrford painters from 1960's has probably not survived so well, unless some proud parent of the Pyrford Playgroup squirreled away the work of their little Picassos!

In the spring of 1966 the local press reported on the playgroup organised by a group of mums from Bolton's Lane & Romans Way, where their children (and others), could regularly paint and play. It was set up in the village hall, initially for just a couple of mornings a week, although it rapidly grew so that with thirty-two children, it was one of the largest registered groups in this area.

'Painting, pastry-making, cutting out, plasticine modelling, singing and dancing are among the regular organised items', a local newspaper reported in March 1966, 'and there is also a large dolls house (which was kindly donated by a member of the women's institute), two forts, tricycles, hoops and a shop for the children to play with' – some of the equipment being made by the women themselves ('whose husbands have also been pressed into service')!

The rather sexist reporting at the time noted that for £5.5s. a term mothers could leave their children for a few hours each morning so that they could 'get back home and do the "rough" in the house, so they can have a fairly free afternoon to spend with the children in more communicative jobs like gardening and sewing'!

Presumably at the time the reporter (if not the readers) thought it was only the boys who played with the two forts and the girls who played with the dolls' house, although photographs taken at the time show the children (aged from three to five) happily

playing together with puzzles and books and learning to use the telephone - although the telecommunications equipment may not have been the most up-to-date!

Times have changed, of course, but at least the wall-paintings in the church, and the photographs of the playgroup from the 1960's, are a lasting record.

The children of Pyrford in 1966 happily playing in the village hall playgroup, set up by four local mums.

