

## Chapel of St Mary & St George – The Lunettes

In each bay, beneath the windows and above the stalls, lunettes, or painted panels, illustrate the Ministry of Angels, with scenes from the Old Testament on the north side of the nave facing scenes from the New Testament on the south side. Running from east to west on the north side are the Expulsion from Eden, the Escape from Sodom, **the Vision of Jacob**, the Offering of Isaac by Abraham, **the Angel appearing to Hagar**, and the Burning Bush. On the south side, from east to west, are the **Annunciation**, the Flight into Egypt, the Ministry of Angels to Christ after the Temptation, the Agony in the Garden, the Resurrection (part of the Myers Memorial), and the Ascension. They are all memorials to Old Cheltonians and, with one exception, were all by J.E. Reid<sup>1</sup>. The one exception is the Angel appearing to Hagar, which was painted by John Batten, a relative of Francis Winterbotham (1856-1857, Day Boy) who died at Peshawar in 1879 and is commemorated by it. The mural paintings are marouflage<sup>2</sup> on canvas, executed in oil. The three works highlighted in bold listed above, are the works restored by Hirst Conservation in 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr James Eadie Read was an Art teacher at Cheltenham Ladies' College during the 1920s

<sup>2</sup> Marouflage is a French term for a technique of affixing a painted canvas to a wall to be used as a mural, using an adhesive that hardens as it dries, such as plaster or cement – in this case, lead paste

## Restoration

Hirst Conservation<sup>3</sup> worked on restoring 3 of the 12 paintings, between 23rd August and 2nd September 2016. A build-up of dirt had obscured the details of the original works, and it was discovered that no varnish layer was currently protecting the paintings. Due to water seeping into the paintings, the paint layer had become detached from the priming layer and was flaking away in areas. For the thin flakes of paint it was found that Lascaux, Medium for Consolidation 4176<sup>4</sup> was ideal, whilst Plextol B-500<sup>5</sup> diluted 50% in water was best for the thicker layers of paint.

Cleaning was undertaken with tri-ammonium citrate<sup>6</sup> in de-ionised water, applied by a cotton swab and cleared with de-ionised water. Areas of canvas that had delaminated from the wall were firstly treated with a humidifier to avoid the paint cracking. Beva 371 Gel<sup>7</sup> was applied to the surface of the wall and Beva film was cut to fit the contour of the delaminated canvases. A heated spatula was then used to re-adhere the canvas to the wall. A layer of isolating varnish was applied before filling and colour retouching. Fractures and areas of significant paint loss were filled with chalk and Moviol 4-98<sup>8</sup> and a base colour applied with acrylic paints for retouching. A final protective coat of varnish was applied on top of all surfaces after conservation. This was a mixture of gloss and matt MS2A resin dissolved in white spirit applied by brush.

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<sup>3</sup> Hirst Conservation is based in Loughton, Sleaford in Lincolnshire and Cowcross St. London:  
[www.hirst-conservation.com](http://www.hirst-conservation.com)

<sup>4</sup> An aqueous dispersion of an acrylic copolymer based on acrylic ester, styrene, and methacrylate ester

<sup>5</sup> An aqueous dispersion of an ethyl acrylate and methacrylate based co-polymer

<sup>6</sup> Tri-ammonium citrate is a chelating agent commonly used in conservation for the removal of particularly intransigent dirt

<sup>7</sup> A solvent-based heat seal adhesive, available in both gel formulations (38% solids content) and film formulations sandwiched between silicone release materials

<sup>8</sup> Mowiol 4-98 is a polyvinyl alcohol (15%) dissolved in demineralised water

### **The resultant effect**

The three newly restored works glow with a freshness and a luminosity hitherto unseen. The greater clarity is plain to behold, and the colours have been returned to their former splendour. The artist's delineation is clearer, particularly in the crisper folds of the drapery, which are now marked by more emphatic contours. The figures have greater corporeality due to the enhanced contrast of light and shade. Greater detail can be picked out, in the halos, hair and the surrounding naturalistic contexts.

Hirst Conservation has breathed new life into these works, and should the funds become available, it is very much hoped that the remaining lunettes can be restored in time.