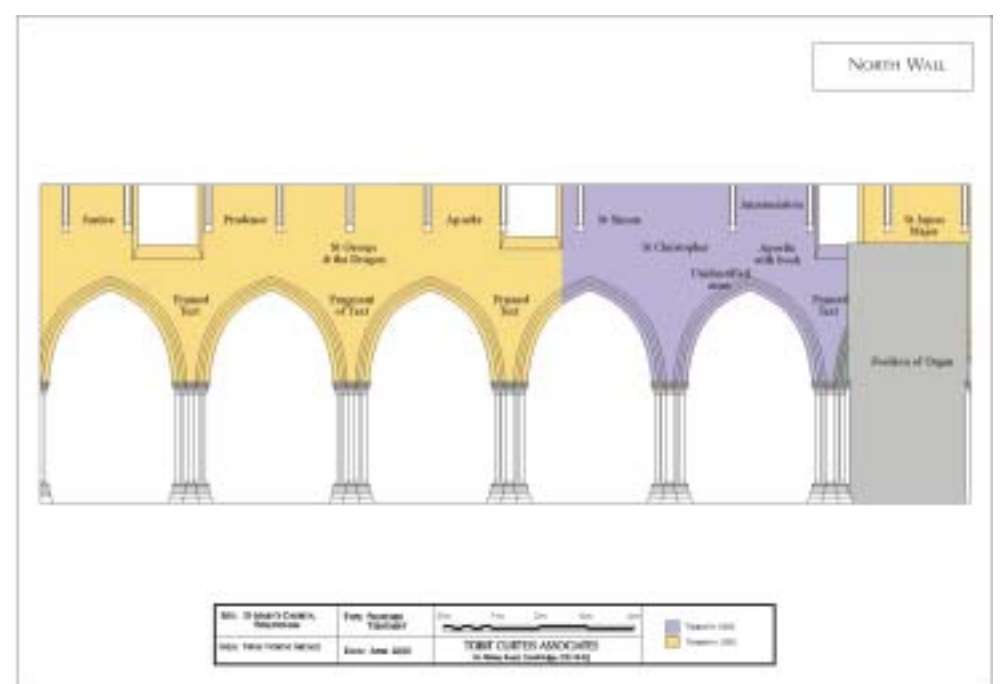
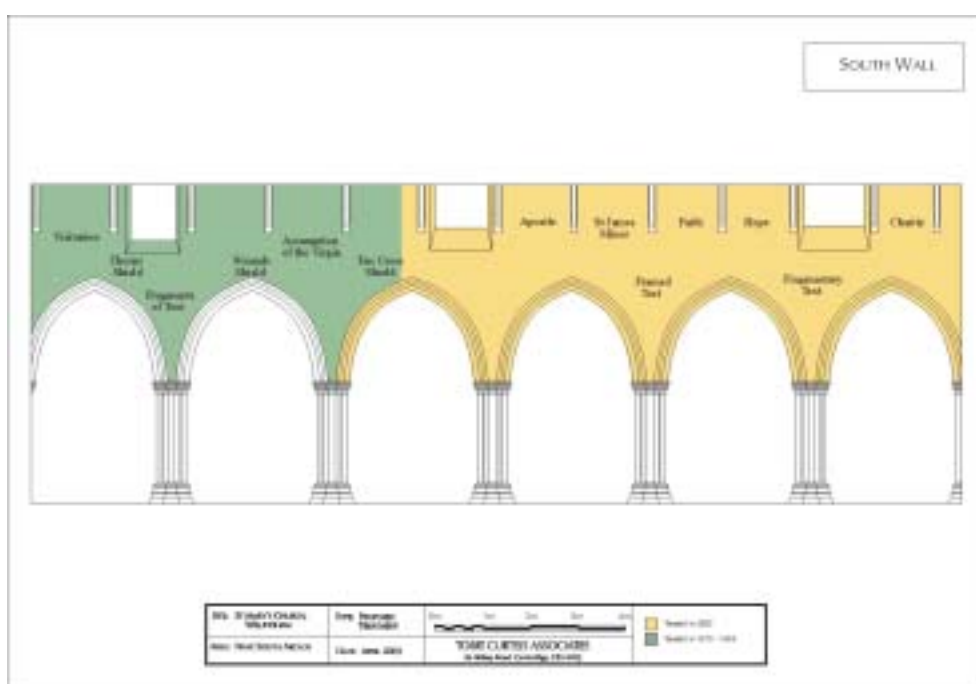


THE CONSERVATION OF THE WALL PAINTINGS AT ST MARY AND ALL SAINTS CHURCH WILLINGHAM

The wall paintings and architectural polychromy in the church date from at least five different periods, from the 13th to 17th centuries. The earliest paintings are the masonry pattern and figures of saints in the small windows in the south aisle. Next come the paintings of St Christopher and St George on the north wall of the nave, which appear to be mid 14th century in date. The Doom, the Visitation, the Annunciation and the coats of arms which cover the east end of the nave all date to the early 15th century. Following the reformation, the figurative paintings were covered with biblical texts, some of which can be seen on the nave walls towards the west. More significant are the large figures of the Apostles and Cardinal Virtues, which date to the early 17th century. For further details, see Alan Fawcitt, *The Wallpaintings of Willingham*, Cambridge 1990, which is on sale by the south door of the nave.



14th Century figure of St Christopher



Diagrams showing the phases of conservation Treatment

Since they were uncovered in 1895, areas of the paintings have been restored on a number of occasions. The most notable of these was in the 1930s when areas of the paintings were treated with a wax coating, which subsequently deteriorated and absorbed ambient dirt, making them dark and hard to read. Between 1979 and 1994 most areas of the later paintings at the east end of the nave were cleaned and restored.



Head of St Simon on the north wall

A survey of the paintings undertaken in 1995 showed that the areas of the wall paintings which had been treated in the recent past were in a relatively good condition. A number of small areas of flaking were noted but such damage was very limited. However, the later paintings, towards the west end were far less stable and were likely to deteriorate further if left untreated.

In 2000 a programme of treatment was undertaken on the painting of St Simon, on the north wall. This allowed the treatment techniques for the remaining areas to be developed and refined.

Following a fund raising programme by members of the parish, and the award of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, a programme of conservation is being undertaken on the remaining areas of wall paintings towards the west end of the nave. The aim of the work is to stabilise the wall paintings in order to prevent further deterioration and loss. In conjunction it is intended to reduce the level of accumulated surface dirt, so that the paintings can be more clearly seen and the subject matter made more accessible to the viewer.



Figure of Faith on the south wall



Conservator consolidating the paint layer

The work is being undertaken by a group of independent conservators and is being coordinated by Tobit Curteis Associates, a Cambridge based practice specialising in the conservation of wall paintings. It is anticipated that it will be completed at the beginning of July. If you are interested in knowing more about the wall paintings or their conservation, please contact Tobit Curteis 01223 501958 or Jon Edney 01954 205739. Visits to the scaffolding, to see the work in progress, can be arranged by appointment.