



St Mary's Church, Kempford

Polychrome decoration on the tower vaulting and east end of the chancel

Kempford is of significance historically and strategically as it stands on a key defensible crossing of the river Thames. It was attached to Kempford Manor, built originally by Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster, who endowed it a collegiate church with Dean and Canons. Henry Plantagenet's arms are displayed on the tower vault. Henry was succeeded by the Duke of Leicester and Blanche of Leicester who married John of Gaunt in 1354 and became mother of Henry IV.

In 1858 St Mary's was restored under the direction of the architect G E Street. By 1862 the interior had been extensively polychromed with decoration on the tower vault and at the east end of the chancel (east wall, reredos, east window moulding and celure).

Following detailed preliminary investigations and treatment trials, practical conservation measures comprised paint consolidation, cleaning, filling and retouching. With polychrome decoration lying on a number of supports – plaster, stone and wood – a range of methods and materials were employed. In the case of work to the east window moulding, some remodelling of deteriorated stone was carried out with lime mortar in preparation for retouching.

An interesting puzzle was the blazoning on one of the four main shields in the tower which appeared to be a very poorly shaped glove. With the aid of close inspection and advice from the College of Arms it was identified as a 'Gamb', the lower leg and claw of an animal which in this case is that of a lion.

