

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PAINTINGS

From: Historical and Antiquarian Notes, Gawsworth Church, Nr Macclesfield, Cheshire. Ancient Mural Paintings. By Joseph F A Lynch dated 1879.

I have now to speak of the destruction of the three paintings I was fortunately, after considerable anxiety, enabled to uncover. A duty devolves on me of condemning in the strongest terms the course adopted soon after their discovery, when they were wantonly scraped and chiselled off the walls – a proceeding that has excited indignation ever since. There seemed to be no consideration that they were national property, and as such deserved protection instead of destruction, and to be consistent the same authority should have organised a raid on all the quaint old gargoyles and figures adorning the exterior of this venerable building. I was prepared with others to adopt the most effectual means for their preservation, and if the objection had been raised that they were not consonant with modern ideas, means would have been generously forthcoming to meet the expenses of a safe and appropriate covering so that they could be examined by future generations. I have no hesitation in censuring the presumed individual and private authority to destroy these works, in the presence of the manifest rights of the public, and the interests of Early English art, both of which were ignored in this stampede of vandalism. I have experienced a melancholy satisfaction in examining the walls up to a very recent period, and although the scraper and chisel had done their work, I yet can find in the interstices of the stone – which could not be reached by the tools – small fragments of colour, particularly brilliant in the St George, a strong proof, if any was wanted, of the success that would have attended their preservation. This interesting discovery in Gawsworth opens up many important features in the history of painting and ecclesiastical art in England. It is a subject of great extent, and one on which I have but lightly touched, selecting such points as bore more immediately on the history and manipulation of the paintings. The object in these works was twofold – the decoration of the church and information on the great religious truths of Christianity. The facilities for education among the people were very limited. Therefore, painting became a powerful source of instruction. The distortion and want of acknowledge of perspective produced a very crude result. Nevertheless, the story is told with effect. The influence of Byzantine art may be clearly traced in these works, an investigation of deep interest to the archaeologist and art student, their special value being that they are one of the great connecting links in the progress of art in this country; and although the original paintings are now numbered with the things of the past, I feel the satisfaction of knowing that the labour I experienced in bringing them again to the light of day was rewarded by securing faithful and authentic copies before their destruction, and thus being enabled to contribute in a humble degree to our local and county history.