



**Attached: Photographs of the restored medieval wall paintings before and after the restoration.**

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## **Quick thinking church community saves 600-year-old medieval wall paintings at Suffolk church**

**Priceless medieval wall paintings restored to their former glory following act of vandalism in 2016.**

Three medieval wall paintings have been saved thanks to the swift action of the church community at St Mary's Church in Brent Eleigh, Suffolk. Closing the church and notifying specialist insurers, Ecclesiastical, quickly meant that despite the damage done to these priceless paintings, they have now been fully restored.

The paintings, which had been hidden behind panelling, pigment and layers of limewash for almost 600 years, were discovered in the 1960s following repair work to the church's east wall. However, in March 2016, an unknown person entered the church and scratched the paintings, causing significant damage and removing large pieces of the original painted plaster.

Thanks to the swift and knowledgeable actions of the church community, who left the crime scene as it was found and closed the church, the pieces of plaster that were gouged out could be collected and stored safely until the restoration could begin.

David Bonehill, claims director for Ecclesiastical, said: "It can be tempting to clean up after this kind of incident however, with damage of this kind, even the smallest piece could aid an expert in the restoration process. Leaving the fragments where they fell and closing the church enabled our team to collect them, which was hugely helpful in restoring the artwork. Without the smart thinking of the local community, the restoration would have been much more difficult."

The paintings are amongst the most important and sophisticated pieces of medieval schemes in the country and have been a tourist attraction for the church since their discovery in the 1960s.

Derek McBride, church treasurer at St Mary's, said: "Something like this hits you pretty hard. There is an emotional as well as a financial cost, so to have someone holding your hand in the way our insurer, Ecclesiastical has, is a great comfort."

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The full cost of the restoration will be covered under the church's insurance policy. Mr McBride added: "It was such a relief not to have to start fundraising. The insurance company agreed to everything."

Since the incident, the church has installed a CCTV system and the paintings are now back on display.

David Bonehill concluded: "We are privileged to be the guardians of so much of this country's irreplaceable history and are delighted to see these treasured paintings fully restored and available for people to enjoy once more."

**\*\*Ends\*\*\***

## **Media enquiries:**

Issued by: Ann-marie Russell, External Communications Manager

T: 01452 873231/07766 558663

E: [ann-marie.russell@ecclesiastical.com](mailto:ann-marie.russell@ecclesiastical.com)

Emma Smith, External Communications Manager

T: 01452 873233/07391 866584

E: [emma.smith@ecclesiastical.com](mailto:emma.smith@ecclesiastical.com)

## **Notes to editors**

1. Owned by a registered charity, Allchurches Trust, Ecclesiastical is a unique financial services organisation. With its main operations and headquarters in the UK, Ecclesiastical also operates in Australia, Canada and Ireland.
2. Ecclesiastical is a specialist insurer of the faith, heritage, fine art, charities, education and private client sectors.
3. Founded in 1887 to provide insurance for the Anglican Church, the company now offers a wide range of commercial insurances, as well as home insurance, selling through brokers and directly.
4. The Ecclesiastical Group also includes award-winning investment management business, EdenTree Investment Management, which provides a range of ethically screened investment funds.
5. Ecclesiastical is one of the UK's top five corporate donors to charity in the 2016-17 UK Guide to Company Giving. Other 2016 awards include Better Society Awards, Insurer of the Year and Post Magazine, Claims Awards, Customer Care winner.
6. In 2014, Ecclesiastical Insurance Group launched its vision to donate £50million to charity in a three-year period. In March 2016 the Group announced that it had reached its target almost a year ahead of schedule and that figure now stands at £67m.

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