

## Huby's Yard painting fragments



Christ before Herod. Tempera on panel,  
height 29.8 cm, width 33 cm,  
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Two fragments from an early 15th-century panel painting found in Norwich are now in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. They first came to notice in 1872 when Thomas Bayfield (1817-1893) displayed them to his fellow antiquarians at the Annual Meeting of the Norfolk and Norwich Antiquarian Society [*The Antiquary*, 1872, II, p.124]. It was reported that they had been found when some cottages were demolished in Huby's Yard in the parish of St Saviour's. This was Bayfield's own parish ['Obituary', *The Geological Magazine*, 1893, 10:5, p.240]. Although the exact location of the yard is lost, we know that John Huby (d.1835), a whitesmith and the parish clerk of St Saviour's, owned a message in the parish [NRO: NCC will register Harrowing 267]. Bayfield's father, Gabriel (d. 1834),

was an ironmonger and colourman with a shop on Magdalen Street and a member of the vestry of St Saviour's [*London Gazette*, 1825, p.2377 & NRO St Saviour's Parish Book, PD 33/37]. The families of Huby and Bayfield almost certainly knew each other well, linked by trade and parochial business. Quite how the paintings got from the church to a building in Huby's Yard is not known but we might speculate that it occurred in 1822/23 when all the woodwork in the church was repainted, during a period when Gabriel Bayfield was church warden and just after Huby had become parish clerk [NRO St Saviour's Parish Book, PD 33/37]. A subsequent owner of the fragments was George E. Fox, a Norwich man who became a well-known and successful designer of furniture and textiles (works in the V&A) but was also a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries who wrote about the painted screens and roofs of Norfolk churches. An obituary was published in the *Archaeological Journal* for 1908 (vol. 65).

As noted in the catalogue for the exhibition *Medieval Art in East Anglia* (Lasko and Morgan 1973, cat. no. 54), the fragments come from a single large painting of a relatively novel kind, showing a range of episodes from Christ's Passion together in a panorama including Jerusalem and Calvary; a complete early example is the Wasservass altarpiece of c.1420-30 from St Columba in Cologne, now in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum (1.30 x 1.80m). In these pictures the sequence of the narrative is arranged as an itinerary through various sites in the city and out to the place of execution. The principle is rather like that of episodes from the Passion being performed as plays on carts or other stages in different parts of a medieval town.



Christ carrying the Cross. Tempera on panel,  
height 29.8 cm, width 33 cm,  
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It may well be relevant that the chancel of St Saviour's church in Norwich was being rebuilt and glazed in the mid-1420s and new stalls were paid for in 1429, dates that fit well with the style of the Hubby's Yard painting. It is an early witness to the development of this type of picture, but also quite distinctive in the degree of focus on the figures, and especially their faces and gestures, rather than on the setting: there are no details of the cityscape visible in the surviving fragments. Instead we see the English penchant at this period for concentrating on the characterisation of the participants and the psychology of the moment. A crowned figure with sharp, snarling features is presumably Herod who with an oleaginous cleric addresses the mild-mannered but unresponsive Jesus (Luke 23.8-9). The porcine

features of the man crying 'Crucify, crucify', indicate his beastly aggression. The tormentors at the carrying of the Cross, with their open mouths lend a noisy violence to the scene and contrast markedly with the sad resignation of the Virgin Mary gazing eye-to-eye with the clean shaven and fair haired St John. Far more than is the case with continental examples of the genre, viewers of this picture are encouraged to witness the behaviour and emotions of the participants in the drama as though they too were among the crowd.

## Bibliography

Lasko, P. and N.J. Morgan (eds) 1973. *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300-1520*. Norwich