

A 'Fifteenth-Century' Wall-Painting at South Leigh

By JOHN EDWARDS

SUMMARY

This paper is confined to one of the several wall-paintings at South Leigh church which were restored in 1872, namely, the Soul-Weighing on the south wall of the nave. In it, from evidence based not merely on the records, but also on several points arising from a detailed examination of the wall-painting itself, it is hoped to demonstrate that the Soul-Weighing can no longer be accepted as even a heavy-handed repainting of a late 15th century original, but is now due for a re-appraisal in its own right as an example of Victorian religious art, which took its subject from the original medieval wall-painting but is about twice as large.

In the late 1860s the Bishop of Oxford, at the instigation of the lord of the manor, Coningsby Sibthorp of Canwick Hall, Lincolnshire,¹ created the parish of South Leigh out of the existing parish of Stanton Harcourt, the first vicar of the new parish, the Rev. Gerard Moultrie, being appointed in 1869.² The church of South Leigh, St. James the Great, has a rebuilt Norman chancel, but the rest is late 15th-century.³ Considerable restoration of the church was necessary, and was already in progress by 27th January, 1872,⁴ in the course of which it was reported that 'on removing the whitewash from the walls remarkable wall-paintings have come to light'.⁵

The restoration of the wall-paintings was carried out at a cost of £85 by Messrs. Burlison & Grylls; they had been appointed on Sibthorp's express nomination.⁶ This was a somewhat curious choice, since they were not restorers of wall-paintings by profession, but after both had trained in the studios of Clayton & Bell, the celebrated makers of stained glass, they themselves had set up in the stained glass business only a few years before, in 1868.⁷ No doubt the pressure of work caused by the amount of Victorian church-restoration was such that those concerned had to turn their hands to whatever was required. The firm 'initially owed a lot to Morris, although they ultimately developed along very different, more historicist, lines',⁸ and it seems safe to assume that, having only been in existence for four years by 1872, they were still under the influence of William Morris when they carried out the restoration at South Leigh in that year.

¹ The Rev. G. Moultrie, *Six Years Work at Southleigh: A Report*, (1875), (hereafter called "Moultrie, 6 Years Work") 3-4. A copy of this pamphlet is in the Bodleian Library. Early works tend to spell the name of the village in one word, but the spelling in two now customary is used throughout this paper save where a direct quotation is being made, as here.

² Ibid. 4.

³ J. Sherwood & N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxon.*, (1974), 769.

⁴ *The Antiquary*, ii (1872), 17.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Moultrie, *6 Years Work*, 8.

⁷ M. Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass*, (1980), 76.

⁸ Ibid. 43.

The restoration of the church as a whole was completed so far as money would allow (the nave roof had to be left until later), the architects being E. Christian for the chancel, and C.C. Rolfe for the nave (which was completed by H.W. Moore in 1888)⁹ and the completion was celebrated on 13 July, 1872, with a re-opening service at which the sermon was preached by the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. J.F. Mackarness; lunch for 200 guests followed in a marquee in the grounds of the Vicarage; and on the 15th there was a dance in the evening, all of which is reported in great detail in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* for 20 July.¹⁰

Today the church is best known for its late 15th-century¹¹ wall-paintings, which, though usually described as having been over-restored or re-painted, form a remarkable collection, of which the most notable are a Last Judgement, or Doom, which covers not merely the customary position on the chancel arch, but also extends from it on to either side of the nave, and a large Soul-Weighing on the south side of the nave. The former could more properly be called a Resurrection rather than a Doom, as indeed it was when first discovered,¹² since the essential feature of a Doom, the presiding figure of Christ the Judge, is missing. In addition to the Doom and the Soul-Weighing, there are paintings of St. Clement of Rome in the north aisle, and on the south side of the altar a Virgin Annunciate. By analogy with the early 15th-century example at Great Hockham, in Norfolk, it can be assumed that a painting of the Archangel Gabriel would originally have been on the other side of the chancel. The wall-paintings consisting of 'repetitive patterns at the east end of the nave are of c. 1888 by Gibbs & Moore of London'.¹³ 'The only paintings to escape restoration'¹⁴ are of a tree of the Seven Deadly Sins over a Hell-mouth at the west end of the north aisle. They were discovered at the same time as the other paintings, when it was remarked that the Vices 'are represented by the figures of fat men'¹⁵ but were presumably excluded from the general restoration, because of the subject-matter, by contemporary prudery, as at Trotton, in West Sussex.¹⁶

It would be as well to refer to the general position regarding the concept of soul weighing, since the wall-painting representing this is to be the subject of this paper. The leading article on the subject of Soul Weighing by Mary P. Perry appeared in two parts in the *Burlington Magazine* for 1912/13.¹⁷ It deals with the genesis of the weighing of souls in the civilisations and religions of ancient Egypt, Greece, and India, and so far as Christianity is concerned makes it clear that it was originally a process of impartial judgement of the balance between good and evil deeds during the life of the soul being judged, which would determine his fate in the hereafter. It was only after the appearance of the *Golden Legend* in the late 13th century that the Virgin Mary began to participate in the process, to such good effect that her intercession could have the result of saving souls who might on the basis of strict justice have found themselves damned.¹⁸ This assertion as to dating is confirmed by the Soul Weighings painted earlier than the *Golden Legend* at Clayton, in West Sussex, and Stowell, in Gloucestershire, where St. Michael, the traditional balance-bearer, is perform-

⁹ Sherwood & Pevsner, *Oxon.*, (1974), 769.

¹⁰ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 20 July, 1872, 7.

¹¹ Save where otherwise indicated, all datings of wall-paintings are taken from the Selective Catalogue appended to A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings*, (1963).

¹² *The Antiquary*, ii (1872), 248.

¹³ Sherwood & Pevsner, *Oxon.*, (1974), 770.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Oxford Architectural & Historical Society*, n.s. iii (1872-1880), 28.

¹⁶ Where the naked male figure of Pride was emasculated — E.W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the 14th century*, (1955), 259.

¹⁷ Mary P. Perry, 'On the Psychostasis in Christian Art', *Burlington Magazine*, xxii (1912/13), Part I, 94-105, Part II, 208-218, both with Plates.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 104.



Plate 1. The Soul-Weighing wall-painting at St. James' Church, South Leigh. (1983) Photo: John Edwards.

ing his task without interference. The majority of the surviving wall-paintings in England of this subject were, however, made after the *Golden Legend* had appeared and thus show souls being saved because the Virgin was prepared to intervene on their behalf, usually by placing her rosary on the soul's side of the scales and so miraculously out-weighing both his evil deeds and the machinations of the devils seeking to claim the soul for their own. Thus are Soul-Weighings portrayed in late medieval wall-paintings which the present writer has seen in six churches and one former medieval hospital. Perry points out that though intercession is usually confined to the Virgin, this is not invariable, and she refers to a wall-painting at Preston, near Brighton, where the function of intercession is 'probably'

being performed by St. Margaret.¹⁹

Perry mentions that towards the 15th century St. Michael in his capacity as a warrior had become increasingly popular, perhaps because of his representation as such in contemporary drama. She goes on to say: 'In England especially, though not exclusively, a feathered St. Michael is depicted . . . The St. Michael of the wall-painting at South Leigh . . . though restored, is still a fine example of this type.'²⁰

At South Leigh the Soul-Weighing measures at least 11ft. by 10ft.²¹ The Virgin is depicted as Queen of Heaven, standing on a crescent moon to the left of the painting. She wears a mantle, covered with stars, over a super-tunic and gown. Her head is not merely crowned, but has also a golden halo. The whole scene is set against a white background covered with red dots, those 12 nearest the back and top of her head turning out on close examination to be stars. She places her rosary on the balance-arm above the pan of the scales containing the soul being weighed, but she looks neither at the Archangel nor at the soul she is saving; instead her gaze is bent on vacancy. She is drawn, as are all the other characters, rather than painted, and in a strongly linear style. St. Michael is portrayed in his feathered-warrior aspect: feathers cover his arms and legs save for the hands and feet, which are bare, and his red tunic is trimmed with rows of feathers along its lower edge. His hair is golden, and on it he wears a gold diadem with a cross rising from it against a halo of red. His great golden wings are held over his head. He stands on a hillock on which flowers are growing. His cloak is held by a great gold morse, or brooch, over his left breast; with his left hand he holds a sword over his head, and with his right holds the scales. His eyes have 'the cold gaze of the passionless archangel'.²² In the bottom right-hand corner of the painting is the Hell-mouth with various devils trying to pull down into it their end of the scales, while another devil flies up armed with what can be identified from an illustration to the Ellesmere Chaucer as the sort of meat-hook used by cooks.²³ The whole painting is surrounded by a deep border based on a pattern of leaves. (Plate 1)

The *Antiquary* for 6 April, 1872, reporting a visit to the church by the Oxford Architectural & Historical Society the previous month, when the members were shown round by the Vicar, says: 'on the south wall of the nave . . . one of the figures . . . was that of the Virgin Mary and the other that of St. Michael the Archangel. Between them stood an angel with half spread wings, holding a balance in his hands, in the scale of which was a devil with horns and tail'.²⁴ Such a representation of a Soul-Weighing would be unique. Perry agrees that though St. Michael is most often in charge of the scales, there are exceptions, the one most exactly in accordance with dogma being on the tympanum of the cathedral at Autun, where the sculptor Ghisleburtus shows the balance, held by the hand of God, hanging from a cloud, though there are other cases where it 'hangs from any convenient support'. She strongly emphasises that these are the exceptions to the rule,²⁵ and does not cite any case where the scales are held by an angel. It is indeed noteworthy that the *Antiquary's* description of 6 April, 1872, never reappears, and that only six months afterwards, in its issue for 19 October, 1872, the *Antiquary* completely altered its description

¹⁹ Ibid. 215 and Fig. 2.

²⁰ Ibid. 103.

²¹ J.G. Waller, 'On recent discoveries of wall-paintings at . . . South Leigh, Oxon.', *Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxx (1873), 53.

²² *The Antiquary*, ii (1872), 248.

²³ Illustrated in M. Hussey, *Chaucer's World: A Pictorial Companion*, (1967), 97, Plate 65.

²⁴ *The Antiquary*, ii (1872), 82. The visit was indeed reported even earlier in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 16 March, 1872, though the fact that it has an identical description of the Soul-Weighing probably means that the source of the information was the same.

²⁵ M.P. Perry, 'On the Psychostasis . . .', *Burlington Mag.*, xxii (1912/13) 102, 103.

so that it reads like one of the painting more or less in its present form,²⁶ as indeed does the official report of the O.A.H.S. of its visit in March, 1872, which appeared some months after that date.²⁷ Further consideration will be given below to this odd episode.

The next article to deal with the Soul-Weighing, along with the other paintings at South Leigh, was by J.G. Waller, in 1873,²⁸ the year after the restoration. This author does not seem to have been the most prolific of writers on medieval wall-paintings, yet in the Preface to J.C. Wall's book on the subject Waller is mentioned with one other in the following terms: 'No great number of antiquaries has exhibited enthusiasm over English wall-paintings but among those who have done so there stand[s] pre-eminent — Mr. J.G. Waller.'²⁹ Waller's opening words on South Leigh are worth quoting since they set the tone of scepticism about the genuineness of the restoration which pervades the whole of his subsequent remarks,

Having seen a long notice of this discovery in one of the papers, with an intimation, however, that they had been restored, and finding that photographs could be had by application to the Rev. G. Moultrie, the incumbent, I at once wrote for them. With them came a description, which, unfortunately not being written by one acquainted with the principles of ecclesiastical art, had of necessity some errors. The misinterpretation which will invariably follow when this is the case, has led, in one instance to a false restoration, wherein the original painting was obscure. With this exception, after giving the photographs a close inspection, I believe, as Mr. Moultrie has told me, that the restoration was effected line for line; always remembering, however, even to do this thoroughly requires the operator to be acquainted with the conventions, if he would avoid error; and it is easy to suppose you follow a line when, nevertheless, you may be deviating in some details of importance. It would have been far more interesting, in an archaeological point of view, could we have had photographs prior to any retouching.³⁰

Waller then proceeds to a general summary of all the wall-paintings beginning by mentioning that he had been told that 'all the paintings now preserved had been covered by others of a subsequent date'.³¹ These were presumably the post-Reformation paintings commonly found over wall-paintings of so late a date as those at South Leigh. Though no record appears to have been kept of them they can be assumed to have been of such safe subjects as approved texts and the Royal Arms. Whatever they were there is certainly no trace of such subjects now.

Waller begins his consideration of the Soul-Weighing by describing it as 'without doubt the most important example yet discovered'.³² A detailed description is followed by a number of criticisms of Burlison & Grylls' restoration. These he submitted in a letter to the vicar, and they may be summarised as follows: the moon was a mistake; the stars were in the wrong formation; the draped, kneeling soul was against accepted conventions; the rosary failed to touch the balance; and certain ornament had been introduced which was not in accordance with the period. Waller continues: 'I received a very courteous reply,

²⁶ *The Antiquary*, ii (1872), 248.

²⁷ *O.A.H.S.*, N.S. (1872-1880), 28.

²⁸ J.G. Waller, 'On recent discoveries . . .', *Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxx (1873), 52.

²⁹ J.C. Wall, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, (not dated, but believed to be c. 1913), pp. xii, xiii.

³⁰ J.G. Waller, 'On recent discoveries . . .', *Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxx (1873), 52, 53.

³¹ *Ibid.* 53.

³² *Ibid.*

admitting that the portion I had spoken of was originally obscure and indistinct . . . comprising the lower half of the figure of the Virgin'. Moultrie did not accept the criticisms as to the stars and the rosary, however. On this, Waller comments: 'I do not for one moment question the good faith of this statement, nevertheless my experience tells me how easy it is to glide into error in matters of this kind, with the full conviction of your truthfulness',³³ and embarks on a detailed justification of his views, with particular reference to the part which had come to be played by the Virgin Mary in representations of the Soul-Weighing.³⁴ He concludes his consideration of this painting by underlining his earlier view that no restoration 'should ever be undertaken without a record of the previous state'³⁵ and by dating the Soul-Weighing with the words 'cannot be before the 15th-century'.³⁶

Waller's reactions so soon after the completion of the restoration show the disquiet which it immediately aroused in the mind of a scholar of some eminence who had devoted himself to the study of English medieval wall-paintings.

J.C. Wall, writing some 40 years later, describes the painting in detail, calling it '... probably the finest example of Soul-Weighing'. But he too had reservations about it, since he concludes with a remark which, like those of Waller, casts doubt on its authenticity, writing that 'it is too much restored to illustrate as a faithful reproduction of the original'.³⁷

Apart from this, writers about the Soul-Weighing seem, however, to have accepted it as basically a 15th-century wall-painting, though no doubt over-restored in 1872. Thus it passes without comment in the report by the Newbury District Field Club of a visit in 1907.³⁸ A. Caiger-Smith, whose *English Medieval Mural Paintings* was published in 1963, refers without comment to the painting in the body of his text,³⁹ and in the Selective Catalogue with which his book concludes merely says: '(Heavily restored) . . . of the late 15th century'.⁴⁰ E.T. Long, writing in *Oxoniensia* in 1972, describes the Soul-Weighing as a 'striking example . . . largely repainted a century ago'.⁴¹ In the Catalogue appended to this article he calls it 'heavily restored', but proceeds to describe it in detail without further comment.⁴² J. Sherwood, in her part of *Oxfordshire* in the *Buildings of England* series, which appeared in 1974, says 'mostly heavily restored' but gives a short description of the Soul-Weighing without further comment.⁴³ It is not mentioned in E.W. Tristram's three volumes on medieval wall-paintings, since even his work on the 14th century had to be published posthumously in 1955, three years after his death.

The present writer regards the wall-painting as being, on stylistic grounds, much what one would expect from a firm of Victorian makers of stained glass called upon to deal with a wall-painting in the early days of their existence when they still 'owed a lot' to William Morris, or perhaps more precisely to one of his circle. The outstanding feature of the

³³ Ibid. 54.

³⁴ Ibid. 55, 56.

³⁵ Ibid. 56.

³⁶ Ibid. 58.

³⁷ J.C. Wall, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, (c. 1913), 190, 191.

³⁸ *Newbury District Field Club Proc.*, v. (1895-1911), 138, 149. The next reference, in chronological order, which is sometimes given is *Country Life*, xcvi (1945), 694, but this turns out to be no more than a letter from a correspondent describing the Soul-Weighing in enthusiastic terms to encourage other readers to see it.

³⁹ A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings*, (1963), 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 168.

⁴¹ E.T. Long, 'Medieval Wall Paintings in Oxon. Churches', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1972), 88.

⁴² Ibid. 99.

⁴³ Sherwood & Pevsner, *Oxon.*, (1974), 770.

composition in the view of the present writer is its unity; it could only have been designed by one man at one period of history, though the question of whether this was the 15th century will occupy the rest of this paper. The highly subjective nature of any opinion based solely on style is however fully realised; it is proposed therefore to deal next with more factual matters.

Burlison & Grylls continued in practice until as recently as 1953,⁴⁴ but unfortunately it transpires that despite the great interest which had by then developed in Victorian art, all the firm's records were thereupon destroyed,⁴⁵ so that no help is available from that quarter.

The wall-painting itself, however, provides a certain amount of internal evidence in support of the Soul-Weighing being a new creation, rather than a restoration. The very neatness with which it stretches across the whole space available to it, so as to go right up to the extreme edge of the stonework of the window and door on either side looks out of character to the experienced eye. It would have been more customary for the painter to have respected the quoin-stones on either side, and if he had the elegance and wit of the artist of the Soul-Weighing at Swalcliffe he would have made use of one of these stones for a devil to use as a purchase to strain against in his endeavours to pull down the evil side of the scales into Hell.

Further, the report of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society of the visit in March, 1872, when referring to the part of the painting where the weighed soul should have been, says that the figure in this pan of the scales '... is gone, a bracket for a statue having been inserted in its place.'⁴⁶ If the surface of the painting is examined, it will be seen that there is a continuous oval crack in the plaster (discernible in Plate 1) covering a roughly oval-shaped area which includes within its perimeter not merely all of the soul, except the top of his head, but also the greater part of the Archangel's right leg and a small amount of the right-hand side of the Virgin's robe; it seems reasonable to conclude that this crack marks the outer edge of the infilling of the space left behind when the bracket was removed. Moreover, a year later Waller was told by the Vicar that before restoration, the painting 'was obscure and indistinct' in the 'corner comprising the lower half of the figure of the Virgin',⁴⁷ which roughly corresponds to the area covered by the oval area of the new plasterwork. The restorers must therefore have had little or nothing to go on in this area and might well have been left to their own discretion in deciding what to put in it.

Further evidence supporting the Victorian nature of the present painting is supplied by the painting itself: vestiges of paintwork can be seen which duplicate the content of the Soul-Weighing (See Plate 2). First, there is a second Hell-mouth about a yard nearer the middle of the painting than the one at the bottom right-hand corner, and about half its size. The well-fanged jaws of the second Hell-mouth point towards, and are very close to, the feathers on the outer side of the Archangel's left leg. A Hell-mouth could not be of post-Reformation date, since it formed no part of the iconography, such as it was, of post-Reformation wall-painting.⁴⁸ Thus, this second Hell-mouth is almost certainly that of the original 15th-century wall-painting. Secondly, a considerable amount of painting can be seen near the second Hell-mouth which, though largely indecipherable, has nothing to do with the present Soul-Weighing; these additional subjects perhaps include the original devil now to be seen 'line for line' in the present Hell-mouth holding the shaft of a

⁴⁴ M. Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass*, (1980), 76.

⁴⁵ Information kindly supplied by Mr. M. Harrison. The only exceptions were some of their cartoons commissioned by the architect T. Garner, which have, of course, no relevance to South Leigh.

⁴⁶ *O.A.H.S.*, n.s. iii (1872-1880), 28.

⁴⁷ Waller, 'On recent discoveries . . .', *Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxx (1873), 54.

⁴⁸ Wall, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, (c. 1913), 115.

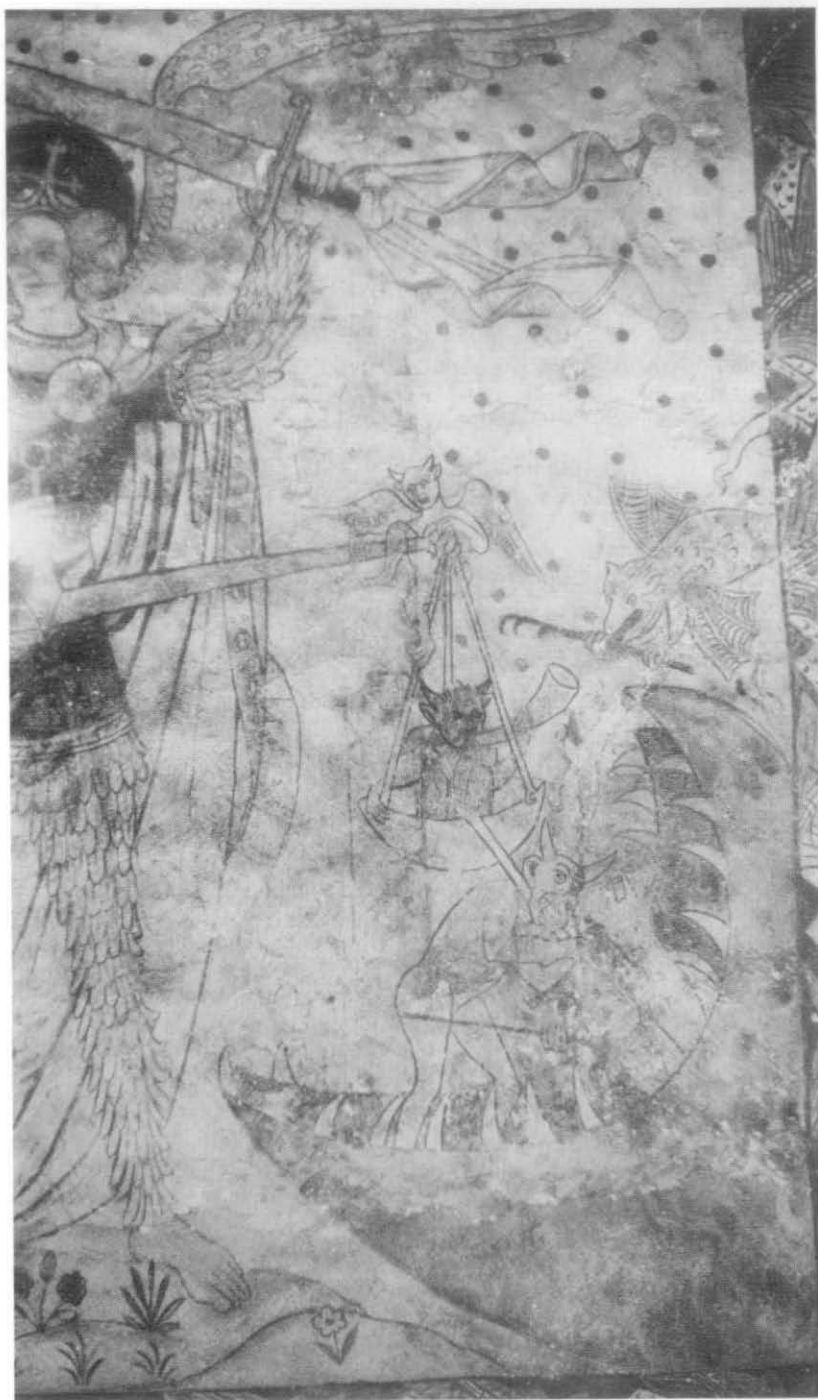


Plate 2. Detail of the Soul-Weighing wall-painting at South Leigh showing the original Hell-mouth and frame alongside the right-hand edge of St. Michael's cloak. (1983) Photo: John Edwards.

pitch-fork. Thirdly, between the two Hell-mouths can be seen two parallel vertical lines *c.* 9 ins. apart which rise from the floor until they meet two parallel horizontal lines coming from behind the Archangel's left arm; there is even a vestigial, but strong, suggestion that they meet in a painted mitred joint. The present painting is itself surrounded by a painted frame which stands in the same spatial relationship to the larger Hell-mouth as do the two vertical lines to the second Hell-mouth, and this strongly suggests that the two vertical lines represent the right-hand upright of the original frame. If so, then the two horizontal lines met by it represent the top of the frame for the painting as it originally was. No mirror-image of the vertical lines appears on the opposite, left-hand, side of the painting, and it is suggested that the simplest explanation for this is the most likely, namely, that the left-hand edge of the 15th-century painting, corresponded to the left-hand edge of the present one. In other words, the enlarged painting is not on the axis of the original one, but is asymmetrical. It follows also that the original painting was between one-half and two-thirds of the size of the present one, fractions which roughly equal that suggested when comparing the sizes of the two Hell-mouths.

Against all this there is of course Moultrie's statement to Waller 'that the restoration was effected line for line',⁴⁹ although it could apply as well to an enlargement as to a copy on the same scale as the original; except that an enlargement does not come within the definition of a restoration.

Two photographs of the Soul-Weighing, dated respectively *c.* 1870 and 19— show no signs of the inner frame nor of the second Hell-mouth,⁵⁰ nor does the illustration of it in Perry's article in the *Burlington Magazine*⁵¹ already mentioned and published in 1912/13. On the other hand, a photograph of the Soul-Weighing taken in the 1950s⁵² shows the inner frame and second Hell-mouth as described above. This suggests that at some time between 1912 and the 1950s there had been another restoration which had revealed the remains of the original painting, and that whoever carried it out might have left some record. According to the undated pamphlet available in the church, 'A Short History and a Description of the Church of St. James the Great at South Leigh Oxfordshire, compiled by G.H. Bletchly, M.A., Oxon.' a restoration took place in 1933. No further information was available about this from the Diocesan authorities, the various parish records deposited in the Bodleian Library, nor the Local History Department of the County Libraries, and G.H. Bletchly was found to have died in 1974.⁵³ The only other printed reference to the restoration of 1933 is contained in an article which appeared in the *Oxford Art Journal* in 1979,⁵⁴ which adds the information that in the course of it the wall-paintings were waxed. The use of waxing suggested that the restorer might have been none other than E.W. Tristram, who is well known for his unfortunate predilection for this particular treatment. The *Oxford Times* confirms Tristram's responsibility, its report of the restoration of 1933 adding 'The frescoes which have already been uncovered and are now under repair are the great representations of the Weighing of Souls at the Last Judgement by St. Michael . . .'⁵⁵

A considerable collection of Tristram's water-colour copies of wall-paintings is deposited in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and with them are notes by Mrs. M. Bardswell, the Professor's collaborator, including notes made of their work at South Leigh

⁴⁹ Waller, 'On recent discoveries . . .', *Archaeol. Jnl.*, xxx (1873), 53.

⁵⁰ Local History Department's photographs OCL 37961 & OCL 77/5466 at the Central Library, Westgate, Oxford.

⁵¹ Perry, 'On the Psychostasis . . .', *Burlington Mag.*, xxii (1912/13), Part I, Plate IID, opposite page 101.

⁵² Local History Department's photograph 78/0816.

⁵³ *The Bloxhamist*, September, 1974. A copy is kept in the Local History Department.

⁵⁴ Jane Ashby, 'Medieval Doom Paintings in Oxon. Churches', *Oxford Art Journal*, iii (1979), 59.

⁵⁵ *Oxford Times*, 13 January, 1933, 17. To journalists all wall-paintings are frescoes. The Soul-Weighing is not.

in 1933.³⁶ After a description of 'St. Michael weighing souls', the notes proceed (with Mrs. Bardswell's abbreviations expanded as indicated), 'Preservation treatment 1933 — rem[ainder] of orig[inal] p[aint]t[ing] became visible. Scale of original was about $\frac{1}{2}$ that of restored p[aint]t[ing]. Gen[eral] outline followed but details of drawing different'.

This quotation provides the conclusive confirmation needed that the wall-painting of the Soul-Weighing can no longer be regarded as even a heavily-restored 15th-century wall-painting. Though the subject-matter of the original medieval wall-painting was adopted, with different details of drawing, the present painting dates from 1872. Mrs. Bardswell's notes also confirm the conjecture that the original painting was about half the size of the present one, from which it seems reasonable to assume they imply that the inner frame and the second Hell-mouth are in fact the frame and Hell-mouth of the original painting.

The present writer has tried to discover whether Tristram or his collaborator made their discovery public, but, so far as he can trace, the only reference in Tristram's works published after 1933 to the wall-paintings at South Leigh is contained in the volume dealing with the 14th century, and is confined to the painting of the Seven Deadly Sins.³⁷ In any event, if they had made a public disclosure of their discovery, it would surely not have escaped the attention of all those who have written about the South Leigh wall-paintings since 1933. Assuming, therefore, that there was no such disclosure, it may well be accounted for by the likelihood that Tristram meant to deal with the case when he wrote a volume on wall-paintings of the 15th century to complete the series actually published and covering the 12th, 13th, and (posthumously) the 14th centuries; sadly, he did not live to do so. In the meantime, his restoration having revealed the inner frame and second Hell-mouth, his integrity³⁸ impelled him not to cover them up again, but to leave them exposed to the gaze of posterity, well knowing that sooner or later their significance would be appreciated.

The fact that the present Soul-Weighing is an enlargement of the original 15th-century one may have the incidental advantage of clearing up the odd episode of the *Antiquary's* report of the visit of the O.A.H.S. to the church in early March, 1872, where the wall-painting was said to show the Virgin, an angel holding scales and weighing a devil, and St. Michael; a representation which would be unique in the iconography of Soul-Weighing. It is unlikely that a report made so soon after the event would have been made under a misapprehension, and the fact that other reports made months afterwards give a different description of the Soul-Weighing does not mean that the initial report was inaccurate at the time of making. Indeed, the fact that the March visit was made when the 'restoration' was in progress suggests that the latter was at a transitional phase. If therefore it is supposed that at the time of the visit Burlison & Grylls had only got as far as painting their own St. Michael, then the asymmetrical nature of the enlargement would mean that the original 15th-century Virgin Mary and St. Michael would still be visible, but that the visitors would assume that the latter could only be an ordinary angel because he would be only one-half or two-thirds the height of the new Burlison and Gryll's Archangel. They would also see that he was apparently only weighing a devil, because, as already stated, the part of the 15th-century painting which once showed the soul being weighed was in what

³⁶ The manuscript is in the Victoria & Albert Museum Library, reference MSS. English, c.1930-1964, Boxes 1 & 2, 213G, and is contained in one of the 24 notebooks written by Mrs. M. Bardswell. Great gratitude is expressed to Miss Jean D. Hamilton, Senior Research Assistant, Department of Prints and Drawings and Photography at the Museum, for having referred me to the relevant pages.

³⁷ Tristram, *English Wall painting of the 14th century*, (1955), 191.

³⁸ *The Times*, 17 January, 1952, obituary of E.W. Tristram by Dr. G. Bell, Bishop of Chichester, *passim*.

had become the 'obscure and indistinct' area mentioned by Moultrie to Waller. The fact that the 15th-century Virgin would also be considerably shorter than Burlison & Grylls' St. Michael need have caused no difficulty, since the convention of showing in a Soul-Weighing a monstrous St. Michael, towering over everyone else, is known elsewhere.⁵⁹ Then, after the O.A.H.S. visit, the 'restorers' completed their work, with the consequent obliteration of the 15th-century Virgin and St. Michael, so that by the time the re-opening ceremony took place on 13 July the painting would have looked as it does now (except that no part of the original would be visible) and would have been an orthodox Soul-Weighing once more.

Not only does this seem to be the only way to reconcile the description of the visit of March, 1872, with all the later ones, but it is also a useful confirmation of the asymmetrical theory; the foregoing explanation would not work otherwise.

If the motives of those who in the 16th-century reversed the centuries-old practice of wall-painting in churches, and instead had the walls covered with whitewash and texts, are of importance to social history as being one of the manifestations of the Reformation in this country, then those of the men responsible for the "restorations" of the 19th-century, accompanied as they were by iconoclasm unparalleled since the dissolution of the monasteries, must be equally so, not to mention our own indignant reactions to both. Among such 'restorations' the case-history of the South Leigh Soul-Weighing dealt with in this paper must be one of the most unusual.

It will probably never be known who put forward the proposal for the enlargement of the original Soul-Weighing; the newly-formed partnership of Burlison & Grylls might have thought it a pity not to fill the whole of the space at their disposal, and could also have seen the enlargement as a useful way of emphasising that they had now extended their expertise from stained glass to wall-painting. It is equally likely that, as a minor member of the Oxford Movement⁶⁰ which, we are told, was 'obsessed by the hallowed stones and the beauty of holiness',⁶¹ Moultrie himself might have thought of it. These possibilities are paralleled by the fact that in a parish of only 'five farmhouses and labourer's cottages appertaining',⁶² and with Sibthorp an absentee landlord living in Lincolnshire, only Burlison & Grylls or Moultrie could have been responsible for adding, at the same time, the Latin inscriptions to the Doom.⁶³ Even if the vicar had not been personally responsible for proposing the enlargement in the first place, he must have acquiesced in it in view of the terms of his correspondence with Waller, in which he was able to combine defence of the 'restoration' with concealment of the enlargement. Before the modern reader hastens to condemn Moultrie, it should be remembered that he saw so little unusual about what was happening that he allowed the local Architectural and Historical Society to visit the church at a crucial stage of the 'restoration'; perhaps if challenged he would have claimed it to be an improvement. He could certainly claim that the wall-paintings at South Leigh as a whole had been dealt with in an enlightened way compared with their fate in those many churches — for example, nearby Bampton —⁶⁴ where, in the course of 19th-century 'restoration' all the plaster had been scraped off the interiors along with all the

⁵⁹ For example, at Catherington, in Hants, and at Swalcliffe.

⁶⁰ That Moultrie was a Tractarian is taken from the foreword to a scrap-book containing a collection of hymns written by him, on display in the church in September, 1982.

⁶¹ M. Binney & P. Burman, *Change and Decay: the future of our Churches*, (1977), introduction by Sir R. Strong, 9.

⁶² Moultrie, *6 Years Work*, 4.

⁶³ O.A.H.S., n.s. iii (1872), 29n.

⁶⁴ Sherwood & Pevsner, *Oxon.*, (1974), 429. This was carried out by E. Christian, one of the architects engaged on the restoration at South Leigh.

wall-paintings which were almost certainly under the whitewash. It is even possible that the whole of the original Soul-Weighing at South Leigh is still there. Nor, unlike G.E. Street, a contemporary diocesan architect (apart from his better-known achievements), was Moultrie responsible, on discovering the wall-paintings, for having their surfaces hacked into to form a 'key' to enable them to be once more obliterated, not with whitewash, but with a 'hideous dull-grey cement plaster', as happened at Chalfont St. Giles.⁶⁵ One of the leading living restorers of medieval wall-paintings has summed up the whole Victorian attitude thus,

Victorians regarded wall-paintings as mere curiosities unworthy a place in the decoration of God's house. The best preserved were sometimes allowed to remain as quaint memorials to 'primitive' craftsmen and to excite the superior amusement of an 'enlightened' age. Their crudeness of line and colour (and sometimes subject!) offended the decorous dullness and precision of the Victorian tradition in painting and Church decoration. Their archaeological value and their supreme value as specimens of English native medieval art was . . . never grasped.⁶⁶

One should have all these considerations in mind before passing judgement on the Rev. Gerard Moultrie and Burlison & Grylls.

This paper is intended merely to demonstrate that the Soul-Weighing at South Leigh dates from 1872 rather than the 15th century, and to touch on some of the implications. The present writer would regret having given any impression of denigrating the painting from the aesthetic point of view and hopes, indeed, to have cleared the way for its proper appreciation as an example of Victorian religious art which, though necessarily savouring of pastiche, is not without some character. Having seen some of their insipid productions elsewhere, however, he cannot believe that it is the unaided work of Burlison and Grylls; he suggests that at least a sketch for it must have been provided for them by one of the great Victorian — and probably pre-Raphaelite — masters.

⁶⁵ E. Clive Rouse, 'Mural Paintings in Chalfont St. Giles' Church', *Records of Bucks*, xii (1927-33), 108.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 115.