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## THE ST GEORGE SHIELDS

You might remember that in September last year we had a visit paid to our church from Palmer Hamilton from Alabama, USA, a descendent of Sir Richard St. George and Sir Henry St. George. Palmer was keen to look at getting the 28 armorial shields of the St George family restored and he very kindly offered to pay for a report surveying each individual shield and what conservation work needs to be done. Hanging at roof level all around the walls, with eight around the tower arch, the shields are a unique feature of our church.



Some of the Cotton family shields

connections' (as indicated in The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments).

- In his history of Cambridgeshire in 1753, Edmund Carter recorded that on March 15 1643 one of the shields had its inscription removed and burnt and it is likely that conservation would be able to determine to which shield this may have happened to.

- The shields are painted on softwood with vertical grain and vary slightly in size and shape, some are more rectangular than others which are heater shaped, but all are more or less the same scale.

- There are sporadic cases of insect damage to the wood

- There is a white ground layer present on the shields, possibly of chalk or perhaps lead white.

- The paint layers have not been tested but there is a significant difference between the St. George and the Cotton family shields in terms of the pigment used

- The St. George family shields appear to use vermilion, a carbon or bone black, lead white, gold leaf and a presently unidentified blue pigment

- The Cotton family shields use a slightly wider range of pigments, but do not appear to use gold leaf.

Proposed restoration of the shields would be done on a rolling program over a number of years. We would need to get a grant for restoration, perhaps from Heritage Lottery funding and further discussion needs to take place before we embark on this. The environment of the church would also need to be considered as well as part of the shield's restoration, as the current damp conditions are not suited to them, especially after restoration.

The survey of the shields was done in April by painting conservators from the Hamilton Kerr Institute in Cambridge. As well as looking at the condition of each shield, the conservators also established things like carbon dating the wood and whether the wood for each shield came from the same tree. It is likely that the background was probably painted white (it is a rather dull grey/yellow now, so once restored the shields will look quite different. Here are some key snippets from the report:-

- 20 shields refer to the St George family and eight to the Cotton family, and they are not currently in genealogical order.
- The shields were probably made in the last seventeenth century
- Repainting of at least three shields has occurred, to cover 'alliances of the Argentines with whom the St Georges had earlier



St George family shields around the tower arch

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