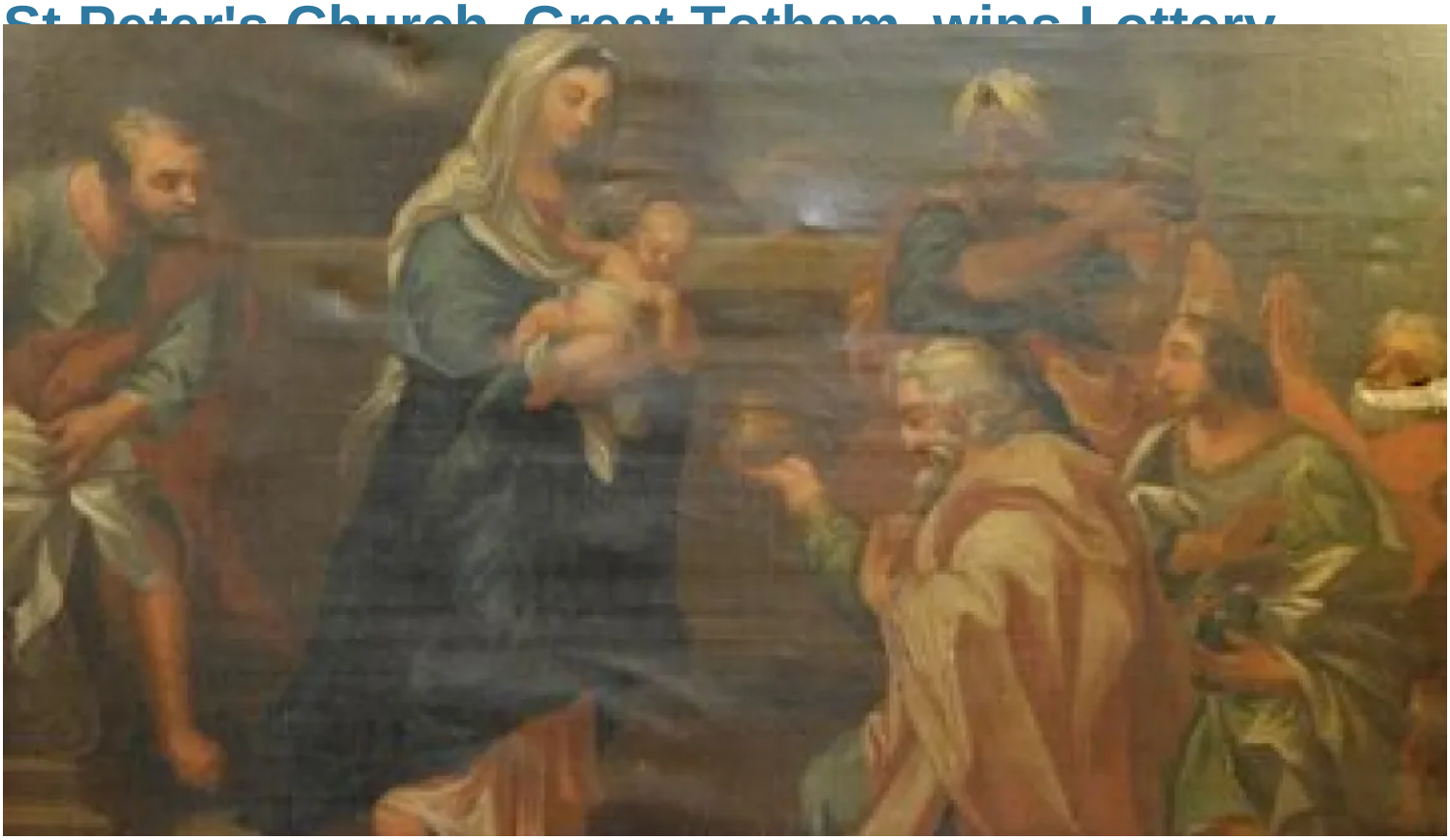
St Peter's Church, Great Totham, wins Lottery



Both the oil paintings have been in St Peter's since at least 1831, but one of them – a painting of the church itself, dating from 1821 – has not been seen for many years. Until last year it was hidden behind a cupboard in the vestry, where it had suffered badly from damp and dirt. It shows the church as it was before changes to the building later in the 19th century, and so is an important historical record as well as a charming work of art. The artist is recorded as Miss Hayter – probably Anne Hayter (1795-1854), daughter of the painter Charles Hayter and herself an accomplished artist who exhibited at the Royal Academy. The emergence of the painting has already sparked much local interest, not least among children from Great Totham Primary School, who have made a special trip to the church to see it.

The other painting is *The Adoration of the Magi*, which was originally given to the church to use as a reredos but in recent years has been hanging by the font. Its artist is not known, but as part of the project, research into the painting is being carried out by members of the local community. The HLF grant includes funding for a new church guide and other explanatory material that will enable visitors to gain a better understanding of these newly appreciated treasures.

Commenting on the award, the project co-ordinator Dr James Bettley said: "We are delighted that we can now go ahead with this exciting project. It was wonderful seeing Miss Hayter's painting emerging from its damp corner of the vestry, and it is even more wonderful to think that within a few months it will be on display in the church for the first time in living memory.'

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “This is a great project that will help reveal new facts about the village and its life in the early 19th century. Following restoration, people will be able to enjoy the newly displayed paintings which are an important part of the community’s heritage.”

Priti Patel, MP for Witham, said: “This announcement is great news for St Peter’s Church and the community in Great Totham. I congratulate everyone involved in fundraising for the paintings to be restored and look forward to seeing them displayed later in the year.”

Conservation work on the two paintings is expected to start in May and to be completed by the end of August. The work will be carried out by paintings conservator Sally Woodcock and textile conservator May Berkouwer. Additional funding has been provided by the Essex Heritage Trust, the Church Buildings Council, and local residents. Before going away for conservation the paintings will be on display at the church’s Flower Festival, 3-5 May. A celebratory event is planned for Saturday 1 November, with short talks on various aspects of the paintings and Great Totham life in the 1820s.

Notes to editors

Anne Hayter (1795-1854) was the daughter of Charles Hayter (1761-1835) and sister of Sir George Hayter (1792-1871), all eminent painters. Anne exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1814-30, a rare distinction for a female artist at that time. In 1830 she married and went to live with her husband in India, where she died of cholera in 1854. In 1821 Charles Hayter lived for a few months in Witham and sketched some of Great Totham’s residents; the painting of the church is thought to date from this time.

Further information

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