

**PRESS RELEASE: 18 July 2018**

**ORIGINAL DRAWING BY SIR JAMES THORNHILL DISCOVERED IN ST ALFEGE CHURCH ARCHIVE**

A centuries old drawing by the man behind the Painted Hall has been discovered thanks to a National Lottery project.

The 17th century drawing by Sir James Thornhill, an English painter well known for the Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College, was recently discovered in St Alfege Church archive boxes which were held on loan at Greenwich Heritage Centre. Rebecca Parrant, our newly appointed Heritage Engagement and Interpretation Manager, discovered the sketch tucked away within an envelope containing more modern, unrelated, documents.

The research trip was organised to gather further information as part of the Heart of Greenwich: Place and People project funded by the National Lottery. Rebecca was accompanied by Alison Fisher, postgraduate student, University of Greenwich, who has been awarded a Vice Chancellor's Scholarship to enable her to look into the church's history and its place in the country's local and national heritage, instantly recognised the work. Alison said: "The drawing style and apparent age of the sketch immediately reminded me of the preparatory sketches for the Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College".

The beautiful drawing appears to be in good condition. Within the drawing two sketches appear side by side and both show a composition that comprises an arch supported by two flat pillars. The drawing on the left is titled "Fettering & tormenting St Elphage" and the right-hand drawing is titled "Death of St Elphage". Initial research suggests that these might have been early concept proposals for the chancel painting at St Alfege Church. The existing painting in the chancel has been attributed to Thornhill's workshop and was extensively restored by Glyn Jones during the 1946-53 restoration project.

Images of the drawing were sent to Dr Richard Johns from the University of York, who is an expert on Thornhill and a member of the Old Royal Naval College Project Advisory Panel. Dr Richard Johns said: "There's no doubt that the drawings are by Thornhill. The handwriting is as much of a giveaway as the drawing itself. You can see the designs have been sketched in red chalk before being defined in ink—still very provisional, but sufficiently detailed to allow a discussion between artist and patron about the two proposed subjects."

Thanks to funding from National Lottery players through the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), our Heart of Greenwich place and people project will make our heritage accessible to a wider audience and this exciting discovery adds to our rich history. We will be working with a paper conservator to identify ways in which the drawing can be included within the interpretation displays being developed for inside the church.

Commenting on the discovery Vicar Chris Moody said: "We are very excited with this recent discovery as it shows the skills of the craftsmen working in Greenwich and St Alfege Church during the re-building of the church by Hawksmoor. Greenwich Heritage Centre, part of Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust, has played an important role in supporting the developmental phase of our Heart of Greenwich project and we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with them.



The discovery of the drawing is timely as St Alfege Church celebrates this year, three hundred years of the rededication of Nicholas Hawksmoor's church building in September 1718. "

Stuart Hoble, Head of HLF London, said: I'm delighted that money raised by National Lottery players has helped to uncover this sketch by Sir James Thornhill. It is a fantastic addition to the 'Heart of Greenwich' project, which will illuminate the rich heritage of St Alfege Church for a wider audience."

**Notes for editors:**

**Rebecca Parrant, St Alfege Church**

Rebecca Parrant, St Alfege Church, started in May as the new Heritage Engagement and Interpretation Manager, part of the Heart of Greenwich Place and People project. She comes to us with a great deal of experience having previously managed cultural engagement programmes across 12 museum and heritage sites in Hampshire working with a wide range of museum collections.

St Alfege Church is a Grade 1 listed landmark church in London, the first church built under the Fifty New Churches Act of 1711 and the first complete church project undertaken by Nicholas Hawksmoor, pupil of Wren and one of England's most original and significant architects. The present building was constructed between 1712 and 1718 and is one of the key buildings within the Greenwich World Heritage Site. Its patron saint was murdered on the site of the church just over 1,000 years ago, and there has been a place of Christian worship on the site ever since. Henry VIII was baptised in the church. His court composer Thomas Tallis, "the father of English church music" was its organist. He and General James Wolfe are buried here alongside other figures of local and national importance. Key historical figures in Greenwich's royal, maritime and scientific history have worshipped here.

St Alfege Church has received a confirmed grant of £1,836,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the Heart of Greenwich, Place and People project, thanks to National Lottery players. The project aims reinforce the church's position as a heritage asset at the heart of Greenwich, reveal and interpret our hidden spaces and heritage for visitors, school children, their families and a diverse local community. We plan vital repairs to the fabric, will bring to light the splendid work of Nicholas Hawksmoor, improve access to and facilities in the church and enhance landscaping, signage and interpretation.

For more information about Greenwich Heritage Centre please visit [www.greenwichheritage.org/](http://www.greenwichheritage.org/)

**About the Heritage Lottery Fund**

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk). Follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLottery.

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