

500-year-old masterpiece restored thanks to student research

June 17 2015, by Kath Paddison



Research by a Manchester student has led to a 15th century Renaissance painting being restored and put back on display in a museum which originally had it on show during the Victorian era.

The rare German Renaissance [painting](#) was part of the inaugural exhibition of West Park Museum in Macclesfield when it opened in in 1898.

Anna Rhodes, who works as a Collections Manager for Macclesfield Museums, is studying for an MA in Art History and Visual Studies at The University of Manchester.

She recognised the significance of the work whilst researching for an essay for a course module on Northern Renaissance Art taught by Dr Edward Wouk from the University's School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.

Dr Wouk said: "When Anna was writing her essay she chose to focus this painting at West Park Museum which was not forgotten but was essentially totally misunderstood and overlooked. Her outstanding research has changed our understanding of when the painting is made, where it was made, for whom it was made, and crucially, what it represents."

The painting shows Saint Catherine of Alexandria who is also known as Saint Catherine of the Wheel. She was a Christian saint who was martyred in the early 4th century at the hands of the pagan emperor

Maxentius.

It is thought the panel, which was painted by an unknown artist in the German city of Nuremberg, would have once been part of a larger altar piece dedicated to Saint Catherine.

Anna Rhodes continued: "When the painting came into the Museum's collection in 1898 it was titled 'The Virgin Mary Releasing a Soul from Purgatory at the Intercession of King David'. This had never been questioned and the panel was displayed throughout much of the last century with this interpretation.

"My research shows the painting to actually depict Saint Catherine and the burning philosophers and to originate from the Nuremberg region of Germany.

"The Northern Renaissance module gave me the opportunity to research the painting in detail and gain advice from experts in the field. It became apparent that the panel was very unusual and deserved to be conserved and put back on display at West Park Museum."

The Museum's oldest painting will be back on display in November thanks to Anna Rhodes' research and funding from the Association of Independent Museums, supported by the Pilgrim Trust, which will pay for the cleaning, conservation and rehousing of the panel.

Provided by University of Manchester

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