

New painting puts Sir John Gresham in the frame at Holt school

It's been revered by generations of pupils as a painting of Sir John Gresham, the founder of the Holt school that bears his name.

But it's now been revealed that it's not him and it could be a likeness of King James I.

Art historian Charlotte Crawley, who worked for many years at Norwich Castle Museum, first spotted the mistake while she was sitting in the Big School, where it hung for 93 years, about 20 years ago.

She said: "My children went to the school and one day I suddenly thought that it could not be the portrait of a man who died in 1556, as Sir John did. The costume and the style of his clothing was all wrong. Ruffs did not come in until 1560, and Sir John died in 1556.

"It could be a portrait of

King James I from early in the 17th century.

"After doing my spadework in the libraries, nothing was done for a long while; but then I tracked down an original painting of Sir John.

"The new painting, which will replace the old one in the Big School, is a reproduction of a Tudor portrait of Sir John in the National Trust property Dunham Massey Hall in Cheshire, dated 1550. It was probably painted in Antwerp."

Mrs Crawley, who lives at nearby Hunworth Hall, said there was also a copy of the same painting at the Pushkin Museum in Russia, which was part of the 2013



Pictured with the new portrait of Sir John Gresham, left to right, headmaster Douglas Robb, art historian Charlotte Crawley and former Gresham teacher John Smart.

Picture: ANTONY KELLY

Houghton Hall Revisited exhibition.

Her research was helped by John Smart, on behalf of the Old Greshamians, who are sharing the cost of the project with the school.

The old painting has now been moved to the new sixth form centre and music school, where it will remain.

The new painting, which was framed at the Fairhurst gallery in Norwich, will be unveiled at about 6pm on Friday, May 12.

Simon Gresham, who is a first cousin 15 times removed of Sir John, will be present.

The school's headmaster Douglas Robb said the old painting was a copy of what was believed to be Sir John Gresham, from Titsey Place, in Surrey, and had been in the Big School since 1924.

He said: "I would like to thank Charlotte for drawing our attention to it. It will be nice to have the image back where it belongs."