

Digital Chapter 3: The fort: the internal buildings
Part 2 : The wall-plaster from the courtyard building

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(file name : Ch3Dwallplaster)

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Fig. D3.1 Wall-plaster found in courtyard building room 4W D3.12

(figs. 3.5-3.7 from the letterpress volume are also included for reference)

The Wall plaster from the Courtyard Building and the Bath-house

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(This section reproduces three figures from the letterpress volume (figs. 3.5-7) to aid comprehension)

1 Courtyard Building Rooms 2 and 6

Thirteen boxes of painted plaster were recovered from Rooms 2 and 6. Most of the fragments appear to have a heavy *Opus Signinum* base with a 5mm layer of a finer plaster below the painted surface.

The predominant colour scheme in these areas appears to have been panels of stripes in red, greens and black. The largest area of stripes that it has been possible to reconstruct is in the following sequence : Black stripe / white area / red stripe / white area / black stripe / area shading from dark to light green / white area / red stripe / white area.

The stripes are 5mm wide, the white areas 50mm and the shaded bands 30mm. One fragment, possibly belonging to this group shows the corner edge of a black line panel, with an arrangement of five black dots at the corner edge.

Other groups of striped fragments have narrow red stripes on a white ground, and wide shaded bands of green on a white ground. Some fragments have a more freehand design. Five small pieces which are particularly noticeable are painted in bright orange with lines of pink and red bordering on to an area of stripes in black white and shaded green.

One other fragment showing part of a freehand design has a 'U' shape in a light red on a yellow/orange ground, with an area of pale green on one side. The colours are very similar to those found in the BB. 77 WW material.

Nearly all the fragments described have been covered with a thin lime wash, possibly before redecorating.

It is impossible to give a completely overall picture of the plaster in these rooms as the groups of colours are too small and varied. One box contains three red painted rounded corner fragments, possibly coving, and one fragment slightly concave, also five almost right angle fragments painted a pale green.

All the fragments have a flat reverse side, some with a combed texture to give better fixing to either the stonework or another plaster layer. One piece has a ridge showing where the mortar apparently filled in a gap between two stones.

2 Room 4 W

The plaster recovered from Room 4 W suggests this to have been painted in a design of coloured panels, bordered with stripes of varying thickness, each with a petal motif either

in the centre or in the corners. One fragment has a white blob, possibly from a petal motif close to the top left corner of the panel. The fragments have been partially restored to form the sides of an incomplete panel, each strip being approximately 1m long and 0.2 - 0.3m wide. The main panel recovered is painted a plain green, bordered by a 10mm white stripe, a 20mm pink stripe, then a broad white area approximately 100mm wide leading to a 20mm green stripe, a 10mm white stripe and then traces of what is probably the next panel, in dark red (see fig. 3.5 and D3.1)

Recovered from the same area were fragments of plaster in green and red each with a petal design in white, very similar to the petal design found in the ceiling plaster from the area outside the courtyard building.

The quality of the painted surface is rough and worn and has definite brush marks. The reverse sides of the plaster from this area shows distinct wattle marks.

3 Material from outside the courtyard building area Rooms W 4,7,8/9

In 1977 a further area to the north was excavated, also outside the actual building. Among the quantity of plaster recovered was a large amount with a similar design to that described above. Fragments of this design were found scattered over a wide area along the length of the building, and up to four metres from the outer wall of the building. The scatter of the fragments and the wide area covered suggest that it may have been a ceiling design.

Fragments with this design were also found in the area marked No. 22 The Green. Enough fragments were recovered from the whole area to reconstruct a design consisting of interlocking octagons of alternating colours of red and green, painted in bands of 15mm - 20mm in width (fig. 3.6).

Within each octagon, four elongated hexagons are formed around a central square. The hexagons have an inner narrow border with a blob in each corner. The square also has an inner narrow border with a blob in each corner, and this encloses a geometrically painted circle approximately 180mm diameter, inside which is a design of four petals with a spot in the centre. Three spots decreasing in size form a line from the centre outer edge of each petal to the edge of the circle. Sometimes the petals have a line drawn between them.

The colour combinations are of red and green stripes, red or yellow circles and green or red petal motifs, all on a white ground. The colour combinations for the ceiling design are as follows

	<i>Inner band</i>	<i>Outer band</i>	<i>Circle</i>	<i>Petals</i>
1	Green	Green	Yellow	Red
2	Green	Red	Yellow	Red
3	Red	Green	Red	Yellow

Similar types of ceiling design using octagons, squares and circles were found at Wroxeter (Davey and Ling 1982, 200 no. 51) and Dalton Parlours (Davey and Ling 1982, 102 no. 12A, see also now Ling 1990, 151-5).

The remaining plaster from this excavation all came from an area within 1 metre of the outer building wall.

The design showed a free hand pattern in reds, greens, cream and pale orange. It could possibly represent foliage but this is not certain because the fragments are all very small.

The texture of the paintwork is quite different from that of the geometric ceiling design, where the brush strokes are very pronounced and coarse. The free hand design has a very much flatter surface, the brush strokes being very fine and in places hardly visible.

The mortar is fine and white and most of the fragments are very thin, only 10 - 30mm with a flat reverse side.

Other fragments from this area are of a blackish yellow background overpainted with blotches of pale green, probably imitating a marble, to form a Dado.

4 Group from BB77

A group of fragments from outside the courtyard building appear to differ from any other plaster found in this area.

The mortar itself is of a different yellow sandy consistency compared with the grey/white lime-like appearance of the other fragments. Also, all the pieces are very thick, up to 70mm in some cases.

There are 25 fragments of varying size in a tray 0.6 x 0.4m. The condition of the paintwork is very worn, but by close examination a possible design has been decided upon.

The fragments show that the original design consisted of red, pink, green and yellow discs 60mm in diameter, each with a surrounding ring of a different colour, 80mm in diameter, on a white background. There are other fragments with parts of sprays of leaves in light and dark green, and also yellow circles enclosing similar sprays. All the circles and discs have been painted geometrically (fig. 3.7). The design can be restored as a repeating pattern of four discs with surrounding rings, in a square linked by sprays of leaves, and having a circle in the centre (Davey and Ling 1982, 131 no. 23, 154 no. 33)

5 Plaster from the Sewer Excavations S/W of the Courtyard building

The plaster from the sewer divides into two groups. The first contains several trays of plain white plaster, very coarsely painted. A few fragments, all very small are painted in a mottled pink and red, while others are painted in a mottled yellow and grey.

With this group were some slightly larger pieces painted in a freehand design of pink and red lines, sometimes with a touch of green, on grounds shading from pink to a pale yellow. These are very similar to those pieces found in BB 77 and in 4, 7 and 8/9 W/W in the 1973/74 excavations.

The second group from the sewer consists of about 50 very small pieces approximately 20 - 27mm with grey/black stripes on a white ground. Some of these stripes are curved and branching. A similar quantity of small fragments have dark red stripes on a white ground. The stripes are unevenly painted and cross the grain of the background paint in various directions. The mortar of the first group of fragments is a fine sandy coloured mix, but the mortar for the second group is fine and grey/white in colour. All the pieces in the second group are very thin, only 10 - 20mm probably having flaked off the first mortar layer.

6. Summary of the plaster from Glen View (S/W of the Courtyard building)

Plaster from Glen View 76 comes from several different areas and contains only a few fragments in each area. Some of these are quite large – approximately 80 - 100 mm. One very large corner piece 190 x 240mm - painted in red and green, is moulded around some large fragments of tile.

Plaster from the Plunge Bath contains several very small fragments painted in light and dark blues on a white ground. This is interesting because blue is the least common colour found among the plaster recovered from Piercebridge. Other fragments from the Plunge Bath are larger, approximately 80 x 190mm - and are painted with curved and branching lines in light and dark greens on a white ground, possibly representing foliage.

The texture of this plaster is generally coarse, containing small fragments of tile and larger grits. The backs of several fragments have combed keying marks. One fragment from the Plunge Bath is still attached to a piece of stone. The painted surface is very worn but shows distinct brush marks.

As well as the painted plaster, a large quantity of a dense white unpainted plaster was found in the C. V. 5A area. These fragments all have clear impressions of wood, twigs, grass and stone. Possibly this is the remains of a mixing pit (see Davey and Ling 1982, 54).

7 Plaster from the back garden of No. 22 The Green

Two boxes contain fairly large fragments of very fine dense white plaster similar to that found in Glen View 76, possibly from a mixing pit. All the fragments have sharp impressions of wood and stone/tile. The wood impressions are of lathes 30 x 40mm wide. One angled piece has two end on impressions of tiles, then timber impressions parallel to the tiles. The few fragments of painted plaster from this area had the geometric design of red and green stripes described in the courtyard building.

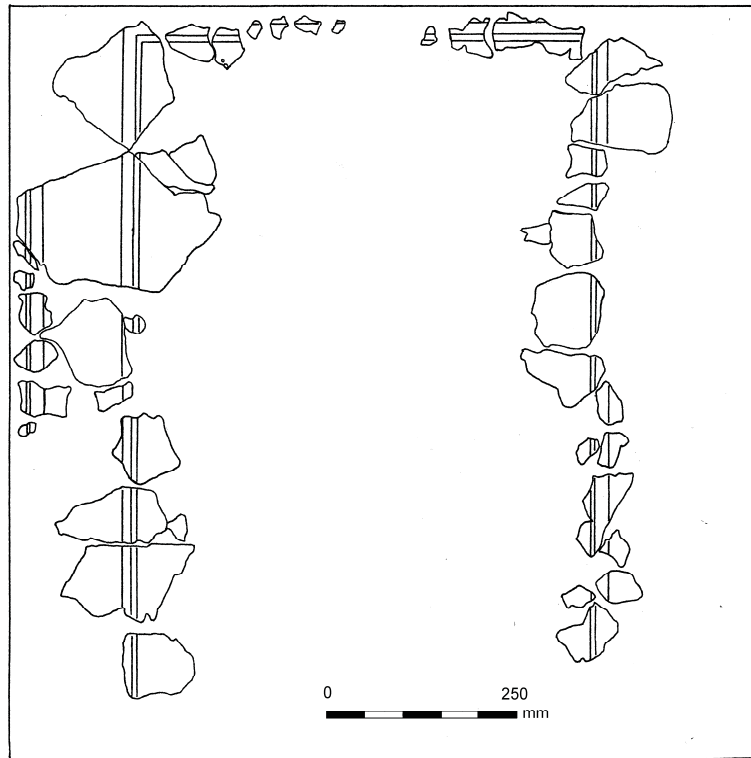


Fig. 3.5—A reconstruction of the wall plaster found in Room 4W

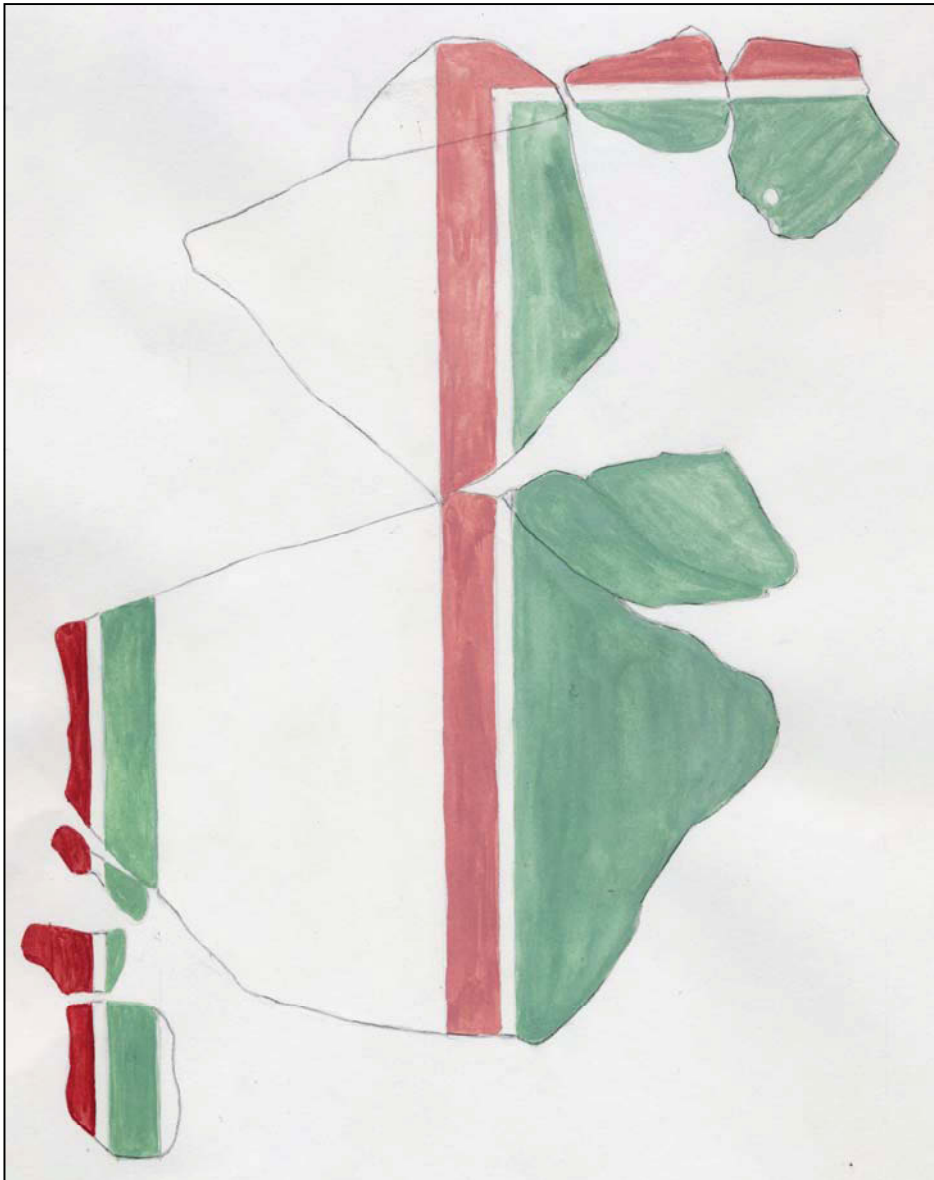


Fig. D3.1 The wall plaster from Room 4W (detail).
See fig. 3.5 for reconstruction

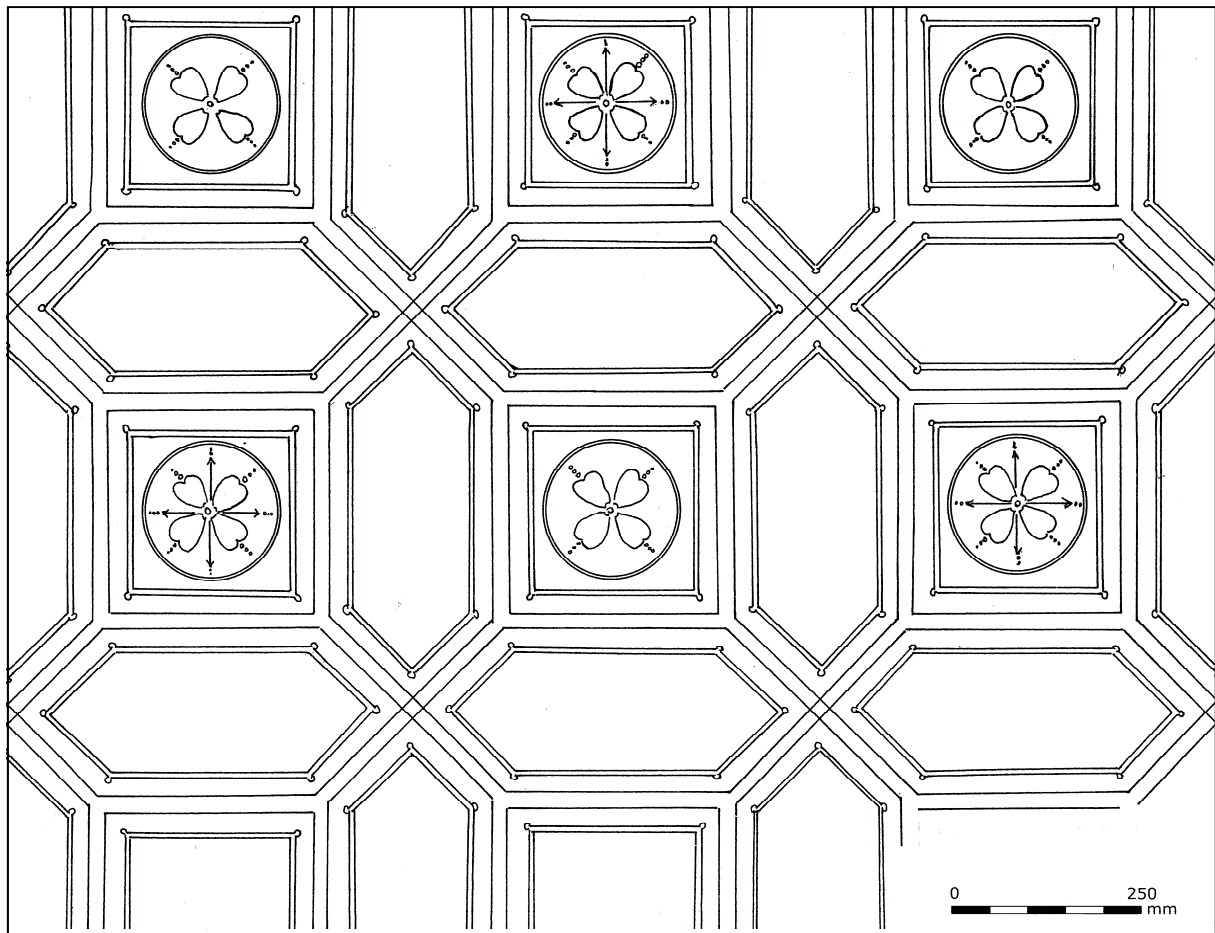


Fig. 3.6. A reconstruction of the wall plaster found in Room 4W and outside the building to the west thought to have come from the ceiling.

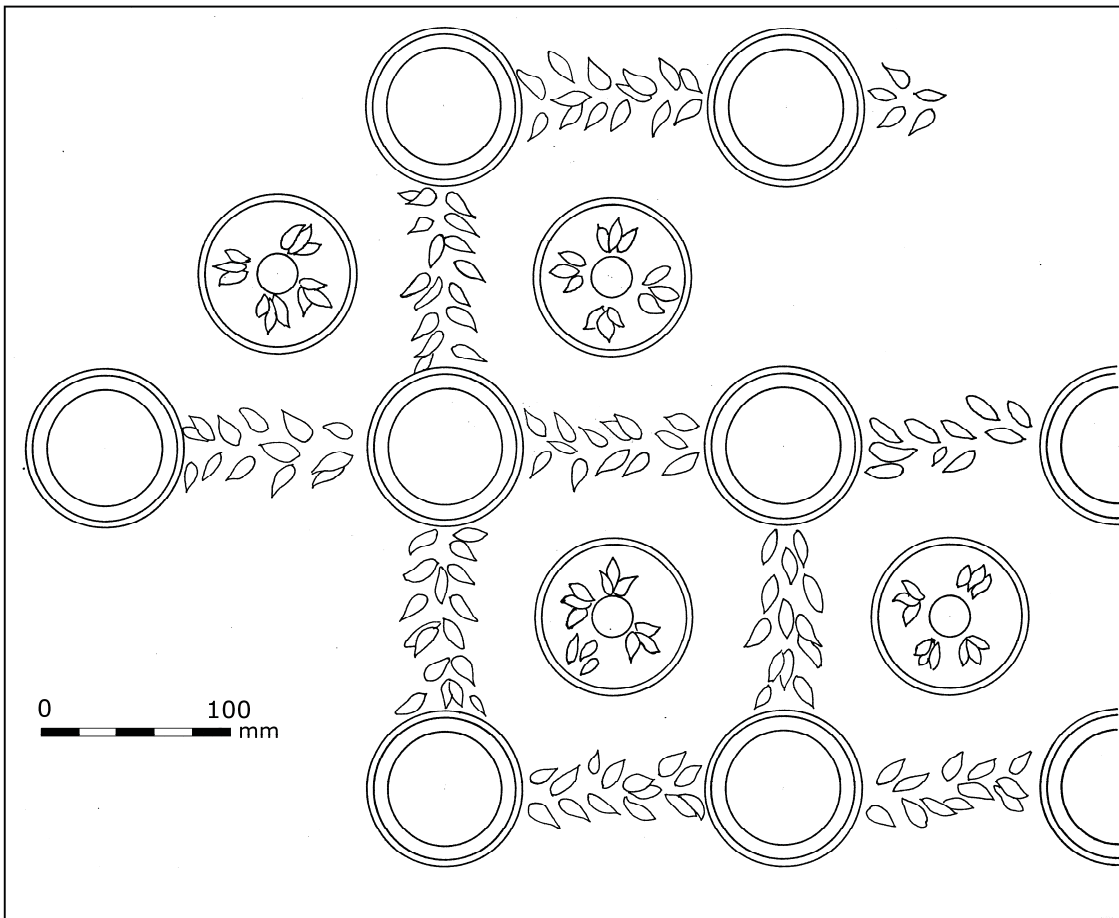


Fig. 3.7 A reconstruction of wall plaster from outside the building