

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 30/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
BRINKBURN PRIORY,
NORTHUMBERLAND

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T Manning

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Brinkburn Priory includes a wall painting record, general audit information, documentation of original materials and execution of the painting, and deterioration and damage including previously used materials and treatment, as well as proposals for treatment and monitoring strategies.

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Brinkburn Priory Northumberland

The following report has been generated by the Wall Painting Section database. This archival system provides a computerised record of all wall paintings in English Heritage Historic Properties and is intended to comprehensively document the collection. Each report has been subdivided into four sections to present the data in a clear format. These include:

1 **Wall Painting Record:**

Includes a description of the site and paintings, as well as archival information, such as bibliographic references and photographic records.

2 **General Audit Information:**

Describes any monitoring undertaken and a synopsis of future conservation requirements.

3 **Technique:**

Documents the nature and condition of the original materials and execution of the painting which is described according to its stratigraphy and any related analysis.

4 **Deterioration and damage, added materials, treatment:**

Deterioration and damage lists the types of alterations which may have occurred, that is either deterioration (natural alterations such as cracking or delamination) or mechanical damage (such as graffiti).

Added Materials documents all non-original materials present on or within a painting. These may include naturally occurring substances (accretions, such as dirt and dust) or deliberately added materials (coatings, coverings and repairs).

Treatment documents previous interventions and proposed treatment and monitoring strategies.

Throughout each section, an area of painting is assigned a number between 1 and 4 which is intended as a general indication of present condition. These are: 1 good, 2 fair, 3 poor, 4 unacceptable.

This report is based on information gathered prior to March 1996 and does not include any changes in condition, further research or treatment undertaken after this date. Amended editions will be produced as necessary.

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	BRINKBURN PRIORY		
Region	North	County	Northumberland
Location of painting	North-west pier, crossing		
Orientation	SOUTH		
Century	17 th	Date	
		Height (cm)	75
		Width (cm)	50
Subjects included			
Text(s)			

Description

THE SITE

'Brinkburn Priory was founded about 1135 as a house for Augustinian canons.' (Clark, 1992:fronticepiece). The church itself is thought to post-date the foundation of the priory 'In the absence of documentary evidence its [the church fabric] date may be assigned to about the final decade of the twelfth century... the gradual development of detail observable throughout the building suggests that its construction probably extended over a period of thirty to forty years, the west front being completed in the first part of the thirteenth century. (Clark, 1992:3)

'In 1550 Edward VI granted Brinkburn to John, Earl of Warwick, who shortly afterwards was created Duke of Northumberland. An ecclesiastical district was attached to Brinkburn, and therefore services continued to be held... The church was kept in a fair state of repair until the end of the sixteenth century, but in 1602 a visitation reported a state of decay, a situation which was again reported the following year in these words: "The church is still in decaie in the rooffe and windowes; they have no communion table and no surpcloth." Apparently little or nothing was done to the fabric and during the course of the century the roof fell in, and regular services ceased.

At about the middle of the eighteenth century, Dr Sharp, Archdeacon of Northumberland, attempted to have the church reroofed and general repairs carried out. The proposal won considerable support, and in 1766 money was obtained, but because of a dispute about the right to appoint the minister, between the Vicar of Felton and William Fenwick, the owner of the site, work could not proceed and the building remained as a ruin... In the middle of the nineteenth century the owner of Brinkburn, Cadogan Hodgson Cadogan, revived the idea of restoring the church, and he chose as his architect Thomas Austin of Newcastle... Considering how many churches were heavily restored during the nineteenth century, the very sensitive and restrained manner in which the work was carried out does credit to both owner and architect. Work began in 1858 and the masonry repairs and new roofs were complete by 1859.' (Clark, 1992:19-21)

The interior of 'the building comprises an aisleless presbytery, transepts, each with an eastern aisle, a crossing surmounted by a low tower... and a nave with north aisle only, a feature common to Augustinian houses.' (Clark, 1992:4)

'The nave and north aisle are of six bays. The arcade arches are of two chamfered orders, and have a label springing from octagonal piers with moulded capitals and bases.' (Clark, 1992:4)

THE WALL PAINTINGS

The wall paintings are fragments of post-reformation text found on the south face of the north-west pier of the crossing.

In addition, D.Park noted fragments of red colour in the south transept, east wall, north splay of the north window during a site visit 18/5/83 but due to the scant remains they were not included in the survey catalogue. Red colour was noted in this position during audit inspection 1995, but again the fragments were not deemed significant enough to merit an audit.

Photographic Record

TM colour slide 8/95

Bibliography

Clark, A.B.E. Brinkburn Priory Northumberland, English Heritage Guide Book, H.M.S.O., London, first published 1988, second edition 1992.

EH internal files; 10591/3 part 1.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	BRINKBURN PRIORY	County	Northumberland
Region	North		
Location	North-west pier, crossing		
Orientation	SOUTH		
Century 17 th	Date	Height (cm) 75	Width (cm) 50
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	01/08/95

Overall condition score **4**

Recommendations

The painting is fragmentary and is in a poor condition. The dimensions above are not those of the painted fragment, but the area over which tiny fragments of it survive. The stone support is contaminated with salts and the site is generally damp. Therefore ongoing deterioration of the painting is unfortunately almost inevitable. In the short term the painting should be documented and recorded and minor edge repairs and flake fixing to the loose areas of limewash ground could be carried out. [Timescale: 1 conservator, 1 week, within 3 years].

It would be possible to attempt some desalination of the support however this is likely to have only limited success. Removal and replacement of the repointing could be beneficial, however this treatment is very invasive and could cause some damage to the vulnerable original stone and should therefore be very carefully considered.

Cleaning could improve the appearance of the fragments but should not be considered a priority.

Monitoring of the condition of the painting on a bi- or tri-annual basis is recommended.

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name BRINKBURN PRIORY
Region North **County** Northumberland
Location North-west pier, crossing
Orientation SOUTH
Century 17th **Date** **Height (cm)** 75 **Width (cm)** 50
Auditor(s) TM/JD **Start date** 01/08/95

Overall Condition Score 4

Stratigraphy

Layer type Support Layer **Specific condition Score** 3
Thickness 50 cm

Comments

The greyish stone support is in poor condition with spalling, blistering and powdering of the surface. The joints have been repointed flush with a mortar which may contain some cement as an additive.

The structure of the pier appears stable, however there is clearly damp in the area. Green algae is present at high level in several areas throughout the building.

n.b. Bats are roosting within the priory.

Layer type Ground Layer 1 **Specific condition Score** 4
Thickness 0.3 cm

Comments

A limewash ground is present. The ground was clearly applied using a coarse brush as brushstrokes are visible in the limewash.

Identified pigments Colours

lime white white

Layer type Paint Layer 1 **Specific condition Score** 3
Thickness .01 cm

Comments

Fragments of black inscription are present. Sadly not enough of the paint layer remains for the inscription to be legible.

Identified pigments Colours

--- black

4 Audit Information: deterioration and damage, added materials, treatment

Property name	BRINKBURN PRIORY		
Region	North	County	Northumberland
Location	North-west pier, crossing		
Orientation	SOUTH		
Century 17 th	Date	Height (cm) 75	Width (cm) 50

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type losses (paint layer)

Location General.

Comments Only a few paint fragments remain.

Type flaking

Location General, limewash ground.

Comments Several areas of the limewash ground appear to be lifting, loose and in danger of flaking away from the support.

Type salt activity

Location General, especially concentrated in and adjacent to repointing.

Comments A white efflorescence is visible. (The stone support and repointing are deteriorating due to spalling, powdering and blistering of the surface; this deterioration is possibly due to the presence of soluble salts.)

Type spalling

Location Stone support, various.

Comments The stone support and repointing are deteriorating due to spalling, powdering and blistering of the surface; this deterioration is possibly due to the presence of soluble salts.

Mechanical damage

Type abrasion

Location General, interior.

Comments The interior of the church is rather bare and only few patches of plaster and limewash remain. The church was in a poor condition from the end of the sixteenth century until the nineteenth century restoration and was probably partially roofless during the eighteenth century. The majority of the plasterwork could easily have been lost during this period, however some of it could also have been removed during the nineteenth century restoration in order to reveal the stonework.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type dirt

Location Limewash surface.

Comments The surface appears a greyish brown, probably due to dirt embedded in the surface.

Type dust

Location Surface.

Comments Many areas of the surface have a powdery appearance, some of which is probably the result of deterioration of the painting and support. However some is probably also general dust.

Type salt efflorescences

Location Surface.

Comments White salt crystals are present in several areas, they appear to be concentrated in and around the repointing.

Type cobwebs

Location Stone moulding adjacent to painted text.

Comments No cobwebs were noted on the painted surface, although a few are present on adjacent areas.

Repairs

Type cement

Location Repointing.

Comments The stone pier has been repointed. The repointing mortar appears to contain some cement. The surface of the repointing is fairly soft, but this could be the result of salt movements causing disruption of the surface.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 01/01/01

Person Unknown

Comments Repointing has been carried out. The mortar used for repointing appears to contain some cement as an additive.

Proposed Treatment

Type CLEANING **Date** 01/08/95

Person TM/JD

Comments Cleaning may improve the legibility of the remaining fragments and generally improve the appearance of the painting, however it is not a priority.

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 01/08/95

Person TM/JD

Comments Some very minor edge repairs to vulnerable edges of the limewash ground are recommended.

Type FLAKE FIXING **Date** 01/08/95

Person TM/JD

Comments Some flake fixing of the limewash ground is recommended.

Type MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 01/08/95

Person TM/JD

Comments The painting should be documented and recorded. Routine inspection of the painting to assess its condition should be carried out, ideally on a bi- or tri-annual basis.

Type SALT REMOVAL **Date** 01/08/95

Person TM/JD

Comments Salt efflorescences are visible in areas on the surface of the support and painting. These could be carefully removed where possible.



Nave, north side, looking northwest: fragment of painting located on NW pier of crossing, seen on right side of the photograph



Detail, NW pier, traces of painting,