

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 41/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,  
TYNEMOUTH PRIORY, TYNE AND  
WEAR

J Davies  
T Manning

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Tynemouth 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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## Tynemouth Priory

### Tyne and Wear

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

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<b>Property name</b>	TYNEMOUTH PRIORY		
<b>Region</b>	North	<b>County</b>	Tyne and Wear
<b>Location of painting</b>	Percy chantry vault		
<b>Orientation</b>	CEILING: NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST		
<b>Century</b> 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Width (cm)</b> 300
<b>Subjects included</b>	Various decorative motifs		

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## Description

Tynemouth Priory was built in two main phases, the earliest being Norman work of between 1090 and 1120, the secondary building phase of Early English development taking place between 1195 and 1220. However the Percy Chantry post-dates the main building works by at least 300 years. 'Projecting from the east end of the church is a small vaulted chapel of the fifteenth century, the so-called Percy Chantry. This is the only complete element of the church (although much restored), and it survives with its low heavy vault and elaborately carved bosses. The design of the interlacing rib-vault is very ingenious, with diagonal, longitudinal and transverse ridge ribs... whether the chapel was a chantry is open to doubt, though the association with the Percy family is clear. It is in the traditional position for a Lady Chapel though the site of a chapel on the north side of the presbytery and projecting one bay farther east is thought to be the Lady Chapel begun about 1326 by Prior Richard de Tewing.' (Saunders, 1993:11-14)

It is understood that J. Dobson restored the chapel in 1842, undertaking structural repairs and inserting new floor tiles and stained glass (pers.comm. Site Custodian) It seems possible that the painted scheme (of silver stars on a bright blue ground) forms part of his work. It is not known whether an earlier painted decoration exists below the surface.

## Photographic Record

29/6/94 EH 'current' contact photo files; Percy chantry, Aug. 1992, J920783, vault of Percy chantry Aug. 1992, K920244.

TM colour slide 8/95

## Bibliography

Saunders, A. Tynemouth Priory and Castle Tyne and Wear, English Heritage Guide Book, 1993.

## 2 General Audit Information

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Property name	TYNEMOUTH PRIORY	County	Tyne and Wear
Region	North		
Location	Percy chantry vault		
Orientation	CEILING: NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST		
Century	19th	Date	
		Height (cm)	Width (cm) 300
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	31/07/95

**Overall condition score**      **4**

### Recommendations

The visible painted scheme probably dates to the nineteenth century restoration of the chantry by J. Dobson, and may even post-date this work. It is not known whether any remains of earlier paint scheme - upon which the present scheme was based - still exist below the surface paint layers. The present scheme is of interest as a (probable) example of a Victorian restoration of a 'medieval' chantry chapel and is certainly worth preserving. (Further examination of the ceiling and technical examination of a few strategic samples could probably provide a firmer dating of the paint scheme.)

The painting is at present in an unacceptable condition and requires a certain amount of conservation, which should include fixing, consolidation and cleaning of the paint layers, and treatment of biodeterioration. In addition the presentation of the scheme could be greatly improved by the removal of unsuitable repairs and their replacement with more sympathetic materials [Timescale: approximately 3-4 people for a period of 4-6 weeks, depending on the level of presentation desired].

The main cause of deterioration appears to be dampness within the building fabric and the consequent movement of soluble salts. It is understood that repairs to the fabric to prevent infiltration of liquid water are planned for the near future when funds are available (pers.comm. Site Custodian). It is essential that these repairs are carried out prior to any conservation of the painting.

### 3 Audit Information: Technique

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Property name	TYNEMOUTH PRIORY		
Region	North	County	Tyne and Wear
Location	Percy chantry vault		
Orientation	CEILING: NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST		
Century 19 <sup>th</sup>	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm) 300
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	31/07/95

**Overall Condition Score 4**

#### Stratigraphy

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Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	3
Thickness	0? cm		

#### Comments

The stone ribs to the vault are exposed. However during audit inspection it was not possible to gain access to the reverse of the panels between the ribs. Presumably there is some type of stone rubble support to the vault construction between the ribs.

The structure of the chantry is thought to date from the fifteenth century.

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Layer type	Render Layer 1	Specific condition Score	4
Thickness	.5 cm		

#### Comments

Access during audit inspection was limited, however it appears that there is a brown-beige render layer, slightly darker than the colour of the ribs. The surface of the render appears rough and striated.

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Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	4
Thickness			

#### Comments

The scheme consists of a bright purple/blue field (possibly cobalt, or French ultramarine) upon which silver stars are scattered.

The blue ground (paint layer 1) appears to be slightly water soluble in areas and therefore may have a moisture sensitive medium, such as distemper.

**Identified pigments Colours**  
--- blue

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Layer type	Paint Layer 2	Specific condition Score	4
Thickness			

#### Comments

Paint layer 2 consists of silver stars, which appear to have been applied using a stencil, presumably in an organic medium.



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

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<b>Property name</b>	TYNEMOUTH PRIORY		
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<b>Location</b>	Percy chantry vault		
<b>Orientation</b>	CEILING: NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST		
<b>Century</b> 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Width (cm)</b> 300

### DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

#### Deterioration phenomena

**Type** staining  
**Location** various areas, especially north side, east end  
**Comments** Evidence of infiltration; darkening and staining.

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**Type** losses (paint layer)  
**Location** various  
**Comments** Several areas have suffered complete loss.

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**Type** salt activity  
**Location** render and paint layers, especially east and west ends  
**Comments** Salts are visible as a bloom within the vault areas and as hard crusts on the lower walls.

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**Type** spalling  
**Location** south side, central area  
**Comments** The surface of the render has been lost in a few panels on the south side of the ceiling.

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**Type** flaking  
**Location** general, paint layers 1 and 2  
**Comments** Much loss has occurred due to flaking which appears to be still active.

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**Type** loss of cohesion  
**Location** general, paint layers 1 and 2  
**Comments** The surface of the paint layers has a soft 'powdery' appearance in many areas. If the paint layers have lost cohesion it may result in loss of pigment particles.

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## ADDED MATERIALS

### Accretions

**Type** salt efflorescences

**Location** general, but especially east and west ends

**Comments** White salt blooms are present on many of the ceiling panels. White hard crusts are present on the walls, many of which appear to be associated with cement repairs.

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**Type** biodeterioration

**Location** general, but especially east and west ends

**Comments** A dark, green-black accretion is present on several areas.

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**Type** black surface crust

**Location** various, for example east end, piscina area

**Comments** Much of the original stone has a black crust. In addition the surfaces of cement repairs have darkened.

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### Repairs

**Type** cement

**Location** various, especially noticeable on stone ribs

**Comments** Very dark grey repairs, which appear to be cement, have been inserted in numerous locations throughout the chantry. These repairs are hard and unsuitable, and are also extremely disfiguring when they are situated adjacent to the yellowish original stonework of the ribs.

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## TREATMENT

### Past Treatment

**Type** VARIOUS **Date** 01/01/54

**Person** J. Dobson

**Comments** It is understood that J. Dobson extensively restored the chapel in 1854. His work included structural repairs and insertion of a new tiled floor and stained glass windows. He may have been responsible for the painted scheme on the ceiling.

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### Proposed Treatment

**Type** BIODETERIORATION REMOVAL **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** The appearance and condition of the scheme could be improved by removal of visible salt efflorescences.

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**Type** CLEANING **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** The appearance of the scheme could be improved by careful cleaning.

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**Type** CONSOLIDATION **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** Paint layers 1 and 2 require consolidation in several areas.

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**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** The appearance of the scheme could be improved by careful removal of unsuitable cement repairs, followed by insertion of sympathetic repairs using lime-based mortars which match the original stonework more closely.

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**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS REMOVAL **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** The appearance of the scheme could be improved by careful removal of unsuitable cement repairs.

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**Type** FLAKE FIXING **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** Paint layers 1 and 2 require flake fixing in several areas.

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**Type** MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 31/07/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** If scaffolding is erected within the chantry for any reason it would be possible to undertake a more detailed examination of the ceiling.

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**Type** SALT REMOVAL **Date** 31/07/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** The appearance and condition of the scheme could be improved by careful desalination treatments.

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General view to east



Detail, painted decoration between ribs