

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 63/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
HAILES ABBEY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

J Davies
T Manning

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Hailes Abbey 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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Hailes Abbey Gloucestershire

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).

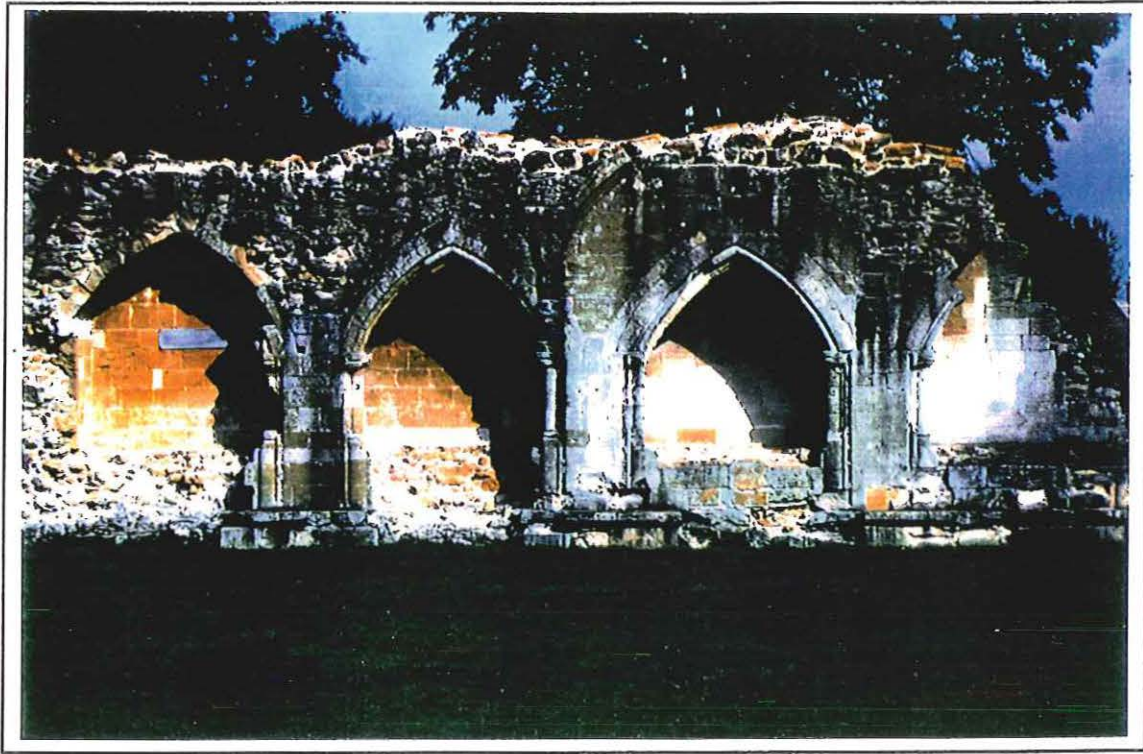
Treatment documents previous interventions and proposed treatment and monitoring strategies.

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.

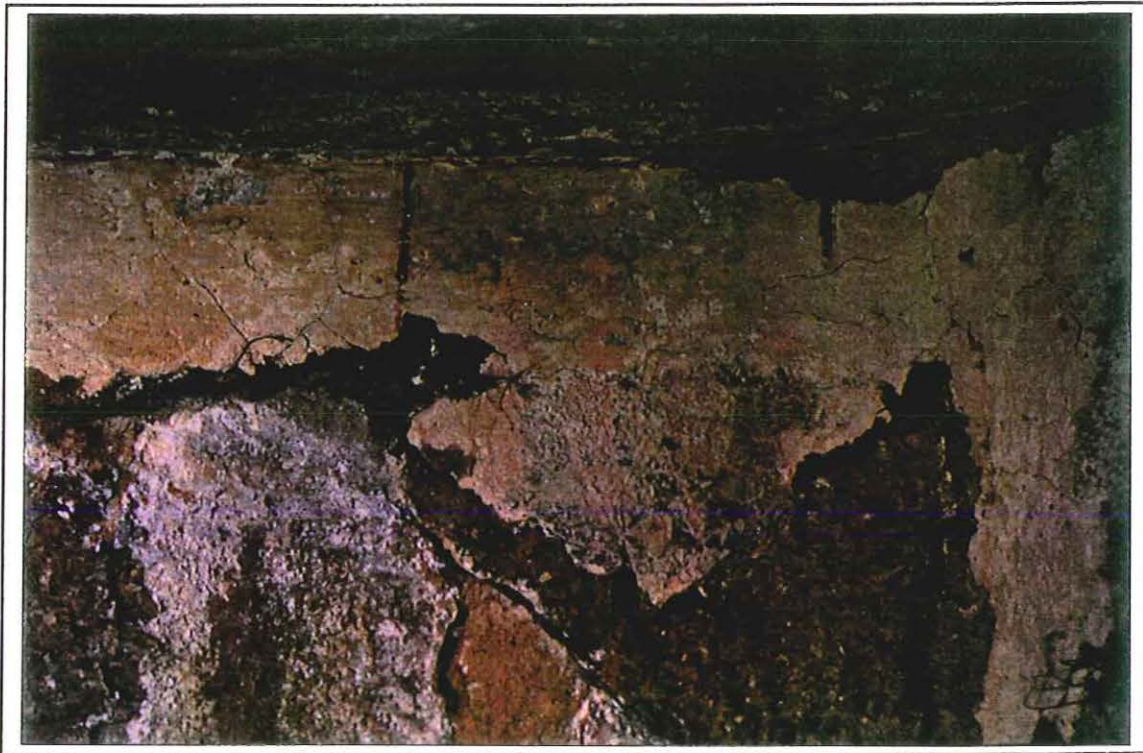
This report is based on information gathered prior to March 1996 and does not include any changes in condition, further research or treatment undertaken after this date. Amended editions will be produced as necessary.

Contents

- 1** Cloister, north side, book cupboards
- 2** Chapter house



Cloister, north side



Detail, third book cupboard from east, masonry pattern within soffit of niche

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	HAILES ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Gloucestershire
Location of painting	Cloister		
Orientation	NORTH SIDE, BOOK CUPBOARDS		
Century 13th	Date	Height (cm) 30	Width (cm) 150
Subjects included			
Masonry pattern			

Description

THE SITE

Hailes was one of the last Cistercian abbeys to be founded in England in 1246 by Richard, Earl of Cornwall. However, much of the abbey was never finished due to financial constraints. It was not until the abbey's acquisition, in 1267, of a relic (a phial of holy blood) that the church was made a viable pilgrimage site (therefore augmenting its income) and the church was rebuilt and extended. This rebuilding was completed in 1277, by which time it was considered one of the richer English houses in the Cistercian Order. During the fourteenth century the population of the abbey greatly diminished, due to the plague and further financial troubles. However, in the fifteenth century, assistance was received from Rome, resulting in a large-scale rebuilding campaign, including that of the refectory, lavatory and cloister.

In 1538, Hailes was dissolved and the holy blood removed to London, where it was soon thereafter deemed counterfeit. In 1542 the abbey was sold to Richard Andrews, a dealer in monastic property, and it is likely that soon after the abbey church was demolished. The west range of the cloister, the barn, and possibly other buildings, remained in repair. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was used as a residence, then as farm buildings, until the late 19th century when it was extensively excavated. Hailes was donated to the National Trust and then to Department of the Environment, in 1948.

THE WALL PAINTINGS

The paintings in the north range of the cloister consist of remains of single red line masonry pattern within two niches, the third and fourth from the east, which were apparently used as book cupboards. The remains are scant, but worthy of note, as no remains of painting in situ were recorded previously. No precise dimensions are cited as the traces vary in width, running along the join of the apex of each niche with the wall. The third from the west is a minimum of 2 cm deep, and a maximum of 30 cm deep (in places) running along the apex for approximately 150 cm. The fourth from the west contains very small fragments, no more than 5 cm wide in places. It should also be noted that the supports of niche 3 and niche 4 are different, suggesting they are of different builds. This would correspond with the fact that the building was begun in 1246, but not completed until thirty years later, in 1277. Remnants of the later (15C) rebuild of the cloister can be seen in the fabric surrounding the niches.

Photographic Record

JD, TM colour slides 21/9/94

Photograph search, DOE files, EH photo library (JD24/03/95)
Hailes Abbey; no relevant DOE photographs found.

Bibliography

J.G. Coad, Hailes Abbey, English Heritage guidebook, 1993 (first ed. 1970).

History of Hailes [date? author?] in EH files, p. 53.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	HAILES ABBEY	County	Gloucestershire
Region	South West		
Location	Cloister		
Orientation	NORTH SIDE, BOOK CUPBOARDS		
Century 13th	Date	Height (cm) 30	Width (cm) 150
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	21/09/94

Overall condition score **3**

Recommendations

These fragments of painted plaster have only survived due to their protection within the apices of the book cupboards. Their existence has been recorded and photographed, and the custodian apprised of their survival.

Necessary conservation treatment includes some minor edge repairs, grouting and consolidation which should be carried out by a conservator [Time scale: 1 person, 1 week within the next 2 years]. Plaster repairs have been undertaken to these fragments in the past, such as pointing, which was probably conducted by site workmen. The most crucial issue is that these paintings have now been recorded (as they are the only remaining evidence in situ of the 13C decoration within the abbey) and that staff are aware and sensitive to their existence. Cleaning and other cosmetic treatments are made redundant not only because of the scant remains but because of the hidden location of the paintings.

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name	HAILES ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Gloucestershire
Location	Cloister		
Orientation	NORTH SIDE, BOOK CUPBOARDS		
Century 13 th	Date	Height (cm) 30	Width (cm) 150
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	21/09/94

Overall Condition Score 3

Stratigraphy

Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

Thickness varies as the support above the apex of the niches is ruined and therefore also varies in thickness. The structure is an exposed, ruined site and is therefore susceptible to damage, although it seems fairly stable. The support varies between niche 3 and 4 but they will be audited as one painting because they are of the same decorative scheme. The soffit of niche 4 (fourth from east) consists of stone rubble faced with finely cut ashlar blocks approximately 20cm thick, with fine flush pointing. The soffit of niche 3 (third from east) is constructed of rough dressed stone with coarse raised pointing.

Layer type	Render Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

This thick, rough, yellowish plaster exists only on niche 3 (third from east) and not on niche 4. It was presumably applied as a thick construction skim to smooth out the roughness of the support. As noted under 'Support', the support of niche 3 is of rough-dressed stone, different to the smooth fine ashlar of niche 4. This construction skim contains black and red slate-like particles. It is crumbly and soft, lacking cohesion but its adhesion to the support seems good.

Layer type	Render Layer 2	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

This layer fine lime mortar exists on both niche 3 and niche 4. It is smooth, white, and lime-rich with fine sand aggregate and slate inclusions as at Cleeve Abbey (Painted Chamber).

Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

Thin lime skim, pale yellowish cast, vertical brushstrokes visible.

Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	1
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Thickness

Comments

Probably red ochre.

Identified pigments	Colours
---	red

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

Property name	HAILES ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Gloucestershire
Location	Cloister		
Orientation	NORTH SIDE, BOOK CUPBOARDS		
Century 13 th	Date	Height (cm)30	Width (cm) 150

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type loss

Location general

Comments Exposed site. Painting only survives in fragmentary condition.

Type delamination (render layer)

Location render layer 2, both niche 3 and niche 4, but especially on west side of niche 3.

Comments

Type loss of cohesion (render layer)

Location render layer 1, niche 3

Comments

Mechanical damage

Type substantial losses

Location support

Comments Site largely destroyed, only survives as ruin.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type dirt

Location Entire

Comments Exposed site

Type dust

Location Entire

Comments Exposed site

Type cobwebs

Location Entire

Comments Exposed site

Type salt efflorescences

Location especially west side of niche 3

Comments Possible salt or calcium carbonate crust. Appears as a white veil in places, as a greyish blistering layer in others.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION Date

Person Unknown

Comments Greyish edge repairs, restricted to render layer 2 in Niche 2, and to both render layers in Niche 3. Appears cement-like, fine aggregate, but soft, perhaps due to damp and exposure and probably age. Seem to still be fairly effective.

Proposed Treatment

Type CONSOLIDATION Date

Person JD, TM

Comments Some consolidation of render layer 2 is necessary, as it lacks cohesion in places.

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION Date

Person JD, TM

Comments Some limited edge repairs would be useful.

Type GROUTING Date

Person JD, TM

Comments Some consolidation of render layer 1 in Niche 3 is necessary, as it has detached from the support in places.

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	HAILES ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Gloucestershire
Location of painting	Chapter house		
Orientation			
Century	13th	Date	
		Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Subjects included	Various decorative motifs		

Description

Hailes was one of the last Cistercian abbeys to be founded in England in 1246 by Richard, Earl of Cornwall. However, much of the abbey was never finished due to financial constraints. It was not until the abbey's acquisition, in 1267, of a relic (a phial of holy blood) that the church was made a viable pilgrimage site (therefore augmenting its income) and the church was rebuilt and extended. This rebuilding was completed in 1277, by which time it was considered one of the richer English houses in the Cistercian Order. During the fourteenth century the population of the abbey greatly diminished, due to the plague and further financial troubles. However, in the fifteenth century, assistance was received from Rome, resulting in a large-scale rebuilding campaign, including that of the refectory, lavatory and cloister.

In 1538, Hailes was dissolved and the holy blood removed to London, where it was soon thereafter deemed counterfeit. In 1542 the abbey was sold to Richard Andrews, a dealer in monastic property, and it is likely that soon after the abbey church was demolished. The west range of the cloister, the barn, and possibly other buildings, remained in repair. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was used as a residence, then as farm buildings, until the late 19th century when it was extensively excavated. Hailes was donated to the National Trust and then to Department of the Environment, in 1948.

A collection of fragments of painted sculpture, some with traces of paint, survive in the site museum at Hailes. These include:

- 1) Six painted vaulting bosses (late 13C) found in the chapter house. Paint appears dull red, over orange, over a white ground. This has previously been interpreted as a mordant for gilding, and traces of gilding were indeed found upon excavation. One of the bosses was included in the Age of Chivalry exhibition, and stylistically they have been tentatively attributed to the sculptors of Westminster Chapter House.
- 2) One fragment of 'babwyn' with traces of red.
- 3) Group of three fragments, one a large fleur-de-lys, with traces of red paint. The fleur-de-lys appears consolidated.
- 4) Head of a lioness from an effigy, with traces of red paint over a white ground.
- 5) Fragments of chain mail from an effigy, with traces of orange and red.
- 6) Engaged pilaster with traces of red in neck moulding, alternating with black [number 1 in group].

The remaining audit forms have not been completed as these fragments do not fall within the remit of the wall painting audit. However, they are recorded here as they are important evidence of the original painted decoration.

Photographic Record

JD, TM colour slides 21/9/94

Bibliography

Age of Chivalry, exhibition catalogue, p. 320, entry 289, for one of the Chapter House bosses, that of Samson and the Lion, which was included in the exhibition.

Pevsner, Gloucestershire, p.267 [mentions bosses]

History of Hailes [date? author?] in EH files, p. 53 [mentions bosses]

'On recently discovered mural paintings in our English churches,' [date?author?] in EH files, p.53.