

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 65/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
MUCHELNEY ABBEY, SOMERSET

C Babington
P Welford

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WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
MUCHELNEY ABBEY, SOMERSET

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Muchelney 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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Muchelney Abbey

Somerset

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** First floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour, north wall, area between windows
- 2** First floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour north wall, centre

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY			
Region	South West	County	Somerset	
Location of painting	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour			
Orientation	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS			
Century 16 th	Date	1520	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Subjects included				
Chevron pattern				
Fictive hanging				

Description

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

Muchelney Abbey is the second oldest religious foundation in Somerset after Glastonbury. The abbot's house (c.1508) is built of blue lias, a local stone and Ham stone, from the Ham Hill quarries near Montacute. After the Dissolution the house remained in occupation as a farmhouse. The site was excavated in 1873 and acquired by the nation in 1927.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTINGS

The decoration includes:

NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS:

Fictive hanging with alternating broad decorative bands of black on white and red on black pomegranite motifs, spearted by narrow red on white chevron bands. Dimensions: 14x175cm(wxh) approx.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE:

Fragmentary remains of three pomegranates and continuation of fictive banding with pomegranites. Dimensions: 210x33cms(hxw) approx.

Photographic Record

16/6/93 other?

Bibliography

Archaeological Journal, 107 (1950), p.120.

P. Eames, Furniture in England, France, and the Netherlands from the 12th to the 15th Century, London 1977, 213-214.

Lord Montague of Beaulieu, English Heritage, London 1987.

N. Pevsner, South and West Somerset (The Buildings of England), Hammondswoth, 1950, 248-250.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY	County	Somerset
Region	South West		
Location	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
Orientation	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS		
Century 16th	Date 1520	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	CB/PW/DP	Start date 16/06/93	

Overall condition score 3

Recommendations

These significant decorative remains are now in need of remedial treatment. This should include:

NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS:

Consolidation of the paint layer, flake fixing, replacement of repairs and surface cleaning. Analysis of the pigments would also be preferred. [Time-scale for treatment: 2-3 weeks within 5 years].

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE:

Plaster repairs are required within the central detached area. [Timescale: 2 days within 5 years].

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Somerset
Location	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
Orientation	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS		
Century 16 th	Date 1520	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	CB/PW/DP	Start date	16/06/93

Overall Condition Score 3

Stratigraphy

Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	1
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Thickness 60 cm

Comments

Rough coursed stone support, made up of Golden Ham (a sandstone) and blue lias. The wall is 60cm thick and flush pointed.

Layer type	Render Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness 1 cm

Comments

Lime/sand render, <0.5cm-1cm thick, fine-medium aggregate with an undulating surface, striated, trowel-marks.

Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

A lime white ground appears to be present.

Identified pigments Colours

lime white white

Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Paint layer includes two types of red (one more orange, perhaps lead, and one dark, perhaps earth) a white, yellow and black.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE: Smudged and abraded paint layer, up to 98% loss. Two types of red (earth and lead?) visible. Trace of yellow (earth?) at upper left.

Identified pigments Colours

--- black
 --- orange
 --- white
 --- yellow
 --- red

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

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY			
Region	South West	County	Somerset	
Location	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour			
Orientation	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS			
Century 16th	Date	1520	Height (cm)	Width (cm)

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type loss of cohesion (paint layer)
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments The paint layer is powdering.

Type flaking
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments Macro-flaking.

Type pigment alteration
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments Possible conversion of red and/or white lead to the black alteration product, plattnerite.

Type losses (render layer)
Location north wall, east side
Comments Small losses throughout.

Type cracking
Location north wall, east side
Comments Cracking of render layer throughout.

Type delamination (render layer)
Location north wall, east side
Comments Large cracked and delaminating bulge at centre.

Type staining
Location north wall, east side
Comments Water damage streaks and smudging.

Mechanical damage

Type cracking/fracturing
Location north wall, area between windows

Comments Render appears sound, but hair-line cracks are present throughout. These do not appear recent or dangerous.

Type nail holes

Location north wall, area between windows

Comments Small nail (?) holes throughout.

Type chisel marks

Location north wall, area between windows

Comments Chisel marks from uncovering in places.

Type abrasion

Location general

Comments Paint layer in all areas is abraded and has a generally 'smudged' appearance.

Type substantial losses

Location general

Comments NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Substantial paint loss. Losses to edges.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE: up to 98% of surface; virtually no lime ground survives and the paint layer is smudged and abraded.

Type scratches

Location north wall, east side

Comments General.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type dirt
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments General.

Coatings/Coverings

Type unidentified
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments Traces of waxy material around edging repairs, but does not appear on painting.

Type limewash
Location General
Comments Traces of overlying limewash throughout, more than one layer. Pencil outlining of bands.

Type perspex covering
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments Secured by 8 brass bolts around edges. Can be removed for examination purposes. See correspondence Keevil 1968 (cf. Cleeve sacristy piscina). Appears to be causing no harm, but should be monitored.

Type emulsion
Location north wall, east side
Comments Band of white emulsion along right edge.

Type unidentified
Location north wall, east side
Comments Patchy grey-white overpaint.

Type wax
Location north wall, east side
Comments Streak of wax (candle?) at centre.

Repairs

Type gypsum
Location north wall, area between windows
Comments Plaster of Paris edges, and small losses throughout. Overpainted in grey, or to imitate original scheme. Functioning, but very poor quality and appearance. Overpainted, poor texture and uneven application.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date**

Person Unknown

Comments NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Plaster of Paris repairs, non-professional, 1950's/60's.

Type UNCOVERING **Date**

Person Unknown

Comments Rough uncovering of limewash overpaint, non-professional, 1950's/60's?

Proposed Treatment

Type CLEANING **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB, PW

Comments NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Surface cleaning required within 5 years.

Type CONSOLIDATION **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB, PW

Comments NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Consolidation of friable paint required within 5 years.

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB, PW

Comments NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Replacement of repairs required within 5 years.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE: Plaster repairs required within central detached area. Timescale: 2 days within 5 years.

Type FLAKE FIXING **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB, PW

Comments NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Flake fixing required within the next five years.

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Somerset
Location of painting	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
Orientation	NORTH WALL, CENTRE		
Century 16 th	Date	1520	Height (cm) 260 Width (cm) 245
Subjects included			
Fictive hanging			
Foliate decoration			
Grotesque(s)			

Description

Fragmentary remains of fictive hanging with foliate forms in white on red background, with black skirting (20cms width), and at top of wall frieze (25cms width) with red Renaissance foliate decoration, and below this a broader frieze (40cms width) containing Renaissance grotesque ornament in black and white.

Photographic Record

EH photo library, computer keyword search;
March 1990, Abbot's House, upper floor of former cloister, B900927, K900086. Also, Studio 16/06/93.

Bibliography

Archaeological Journal, 107 (1950), p.120.

P. Eames, Furniture in England, France, and the Netherlands from the 12th to the 15th Century, London 1977, 213-214.

Lord Montague of Beaulieu, English Heritage, London 1987.

N. Pevsner, South and West Somerset (The Buildings of England), Hammondsorth, 1950, 248-250.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY	County	Somerset
Region	South West		
Location	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
Orientation	NORTH WALL, CENTRE		
Century 16th	Date 1520	Height (cm) 260	Width (cm) 245
Auditor(s)	CB/PW/DP	Start date 16/06/93	

Overall condition score 3

Recommendations

These significant decorative remains are now in need of remedial treatment. This should include consolidation of the paint layer, plaster repairs, grouting and surface cleaning. Analysis of the pigments would also be preferred. [Timescale of treatment: 2 weeks within 5 years].

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name MUCHELNEY ABBEY
Region South West **County** Somerset
Location first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour
Orientation NORTH WALL, CENTRE
Century 16th **Date** 1520 **Height (cm)** 260 **Width (cm)** 245
Auditor(s) CB/PW/DP **Start date** 16/06/93

Overall Condition Score 3

Stratigraphy

Layer type Support Layer **Specific condition Score** 1

Thickness 60 cm

Comments

Rough coursed stone support, made up of Golden Ham (a sandstone) and blue lias. The wall is 60cm thick and flush pointed.

Layer type Render Layer 1 **Specific condition Score** 3

Thickness 1 cm

Comments

Lime/sand render, <0.5cm-1cm thick, fine-medium aggregate with an undulating finish, trowel-marks.

Layer type Ground Layer 1 **Specific condition Score** 3

Thickness

Comments

A white limewash ground appears to be present.

Identified pigments **Colours**

lime white white

Layer type Paint Layer 1 **Specific condition Score** 3

Thickness

Comments

Pigments visible are white, red, black (earths/lead/lime?).

Identified pigments **Colours**

--- white
--- red
--- black

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

Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY		
Region	South West	County	Somerset
Location	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
Orientation	NORTH WALL, CENTRE		
Century 16th	Date	1520	Height (cm) 260 Width (cm) 245

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type pigment alteration

Location red and white pigments

Comments Possible alteration of red/white lead to the blackish alteration product, plattnerite.

Mechanical damage

Type abrasion

Location general

Comments Paint layer badly abraded and scratched.

Type scratches

Location general

Comments Paint layer badly abraded and scratched.

Type substantial losses

Location 80% of paint layer

Comments Smudging and loss over 80% of the surface.

Type cracking/fracturing

Location general

Comments Substantial cracking/fracturing of render layer, minor losses.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type cobwebs

Location general

Comments

Coatings/Coverings

Type limewash

Location general

Comments More than one layer present on the surface.

Repairs

Type modern lime plaster

Location centre right edge, and at base

Comments Functioning but poor appearance.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

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

Person Unknown

Comments No formal treatment, modern repairs. Date unknown, possibly 1950's/60's as for adjacent room.

Type UNCOVERING **Date** 01/01/01

Person Unknown

Comments No formal treatment, uncovering of limewash overpaint. Date unknown, possibly 1950's/60's as for adjacent room.

Proposed Treatment

Type CLEANING **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB/PW/DP

Comments Surface cleaning required.

Type CONSOLIDATION **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB/PW/DP

Comments Consolidation of the friable paint layer required.

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB/PW/DP

Comments Fills/repairs required.

Type GROUTING **Date** 16/06/93

Person CB/PW/DP

Comments Grouting required.
