



Plate I

The wallpainting at Cley-next-the-Sea, as revealed at its maximum.
Photo by Derek Edwards

SHORTER NOTICES

A MEDIEVAL WALLPAINTING FROM CLEY-NEXT-THE-SEA

by Edwin Rose and Graham Pooley

SUMMARY

During renovations of a house in Cley-next-the-Sea in 1976 a wallpainting was revealed, which appeared to have been deliberately concealed. It has been paralleled with a tapestry in the Musée de Cluny of c. 1500 A.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are most grateful to Miss Pamela Tudor-Craig, F.S.A., for her identification of the wallpainting. Our thanks must also go to the Art Department of Norwich Castle Museum, the Warburg Institute, and to Professor Martindale of the University of East Anglia for their comments; to Derek Edwards for taking the photograph published with this article; and of course to Mr. Cook, the owner of the house, without whose help and tolerance of archaeologists invading his home this discovery could never have been published.

DISCOVERY

In March 1976 Mr. Cook decided to improve the access to the first floor of his home, site 12051 at The Longhouse, Cley-next-the-Sea. A steep ladder-type stair was already set into a recess where the chimneybreast protruded inwards from the original east wall of the house. Work began on demolishing a corner of this chimney in order to insert a wider staircase, and it immediately became evident that the house wall was of earlier date, for the chimneybreast had been constructed so as to leave a gap of approximately 25 cm behind, but with the sides being taken right back to the wall, so that the space was not visible before the demolition began. On the section of wall so concealed was a wallpainting executed on a prepared plaster surface; the other walls in the room were not so prepared. It appeared that the painting had been deliberately preserved when the chimney was built.

The Norfolk Archaeological Unit was informed and after preliminary investigation the painting was photographed by the Norfolk Archaeological Rescue Group's Building Recording team. The householder then decided to remove a little more of the chimneybreast to reveal more of the painting, and after this was done a second photograph was taken (Plate 1). The necessity to gain access to the bedrooms meant that the walling had to be replaced, but with the painting carefully preserved as before. The chimneybreast could not be dated by any feature; it was of brick and rubble, and though it was said that some of the bricks were unusually long, perhaps suggesting an early date, these were unfortunately destroyed before Unit staff had a chance to examine them.

THE PAINTING

The photograph (Plate I) was published in a local newspaper in the hope that there might be some knowledge of it in the area, but no response was forthcoming. Neither could any relevant details in the history of the house be found. Copies were sent to several authorities, who made helpful comments, mostly negative, but emphasized that these were only surmises.