

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 19/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
CASTLE ACRE PRIORY, PRIOR'S
LODGINGS, NORFOLK

J Davies

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WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
CASTLE ACRE PRIORY, PRIOR'S
LODGINGS, NORFOLK

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Castle Acre 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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Castle Acre Priory, Prior's Lodgings Norfolk

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 Prior's Chapel; 14th century scheme.

2 Prior's Lodgings; 16th century scheme.

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY		
Region	Midlands	County	Norfolk
Location of painting	Priors Chapel		
Orientation	EAST AND SOUTH WALLS		
Century 14 th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Subjects included			
Adoration of the Magi			
Chevron pattern			
Figure(s), male			

Description

The Cluniac Priory of Castle Acre is believed to have been founded by William de Warenne, second Earl of Surrey. His father, the first Earl and his wife Gundrada introduced the Cluniac Order to England prior to 1077 after they had visited the Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy and had been admitted into the 'fraternity' of the Order. They established the Priory of St. Pancras at Lewes. The Priory of Castle Acre was formed as a daughter house of the Priory of Lewes, and its foundation is thought to date to around 1090.

The Priory was surrendered to Henry VIII on 22nd November 1537 and thereafter passed into private hands until the Earl of Leicester, in 1929, appointed the Commissioners of H.M. Works guardians of the remains of the Priory under the Ancient Monuments Act, 1913. (Raby, 1952, pp.3-6)

The remains of the Priory lie about a quarter of a mile southwest of the village of Castle Acre, near the river Nar, originally within the outer defences of Castle Acre Castle. The Prior's Lodgings are situated at first floor level within the western range of buildings, originally constructed in the early twelfth century. At the east end of the Prior's chapel there is an altar recess covered by a broad semi-circular twelfth-century arch rising from a string course. The recess is raised one step above the rest of the Chapel and is paved with tiles. In about 1300 the original Norman east window was replaced by a wider one of three uncusped lights with intersecting tracery.

Baillie Reynolds (p.13) provides a valuable record of the paintings in 1952: 'On each of the window jambs and on the east and side walls are traces of painted figures of this period or rather later; a bishop or abbot with crozier, and remains of other paintings can still be seen. Of the later fourteenth century... are the two corbels bearing the Royal Arms and those of Warenne, which still retain their original colour and gilding, though they were re-set in their positions when the ceiling was altered'. (He states that the double barrel-vault was constructed in the 18th century to support the rooms of the Prior's Lodging above)

Tristram (1955) also describes the paintings at that date: 'At the eastern end of the chapel, on the soffit of a Norman arch, on the south side, fragments of figures, originally crowned (one having a green mantle outlined in black), on a vermilion ground; above them, a star, like the crowns, in gold;? and Adoration of the Magi. On the north side, remains of subject framed within a medallion or almond-shaped glory; in the centre a nimbus, and on the left a genuflecting figure, with another behind it. Below the stringcourse, at the springing of the arch, and crossing the east wall, traces of a fret pattern elaborated with a geometrical motif, extending to the floor and also to the adjacent parts of the north and south walls; perhaps a wall-hanging about the altar. On the splays of the eastern window, one on each, two bishops or abbots, holding croziers and a border of lions leopardy; to the north of the window, part of a painted niche with cusping in black, and to the south, similar remains. On two carved corbels, re-used in perpendicular times to support the roof timbers... both are carved, painted and gilt, the chequers in the second having been adorned with 'prints' (generally taken to be carving). (Tristram, 1955, p.149)

There are no records of past conservation treatment but a great deal of correspondence from the Conservation Studio remains relating to the paintings from 1963-1970. A brief summary of the correspondence is as follows:

(1) August 1963: A.N. Stewart to T.A. Bailey, requesting more information about the supposed deterioration of the paintings at Castle Acre; E.R. Throssell then contacted A.N. Stewart, confirming that there has been deterioration and suggesting a visit, which apparently took place on 2 December 1963.

(2) January 1964: A.N. Stewart, following his visit to Castle Acre, submitted a report to T.C. Bailey stating: 'I inspected the wall paintings and beam decorations in the Prior's Chapel and Solar, and found that in the East end of the Chapel some fragments of fourteenth century paintings had been very heavily waxed, (about 30 years ago), but nothing had been done to restore other obvious traces of paintings which appear not only around the fragments but on most of the walls. It will be necessary to remove the old discoloured wax to reveal the original colour and allow the fragments to breathe, at present there is a danger of flaking through wax sealing the surface. After removal of wax, the decorations should be given lime-water treatment to revive them. The same treatment should be used on all walls that have traces of painting. There are interesting patterns of Tudor roses on the roof beams, where there was once a ceiling. These decorations appear to have been superficially treated at some time, and need further restoration. There are two interesting painted and gilded corbels, one bearing the Royal Arms, and the other those of the Warenne family, these should be carefully restored. / The Prior's Solar: The same pattern appears on the beams as in the Chapel, and should be expertly treated. Tests should be made on the walls to see if paintings lie underneath the limewash. Colour appears on the fireplace as in the Chapel. It is a pity that there is so much written and incised graffiti on the walls and decorations[,] all should be removed and damage repaired. So work on the wall paintings etc., might be carried out during the summer if my programme permits, starting at the East end of the Chapel.'

(3) February 1966: R.L. Connelly contacted A.N. Stewart regarding the status of the above recommendations. A.N. Stewart replied that he hoped to send a restorer to carry out the work 'sometime during the summer... we will include this restoration, treating the worst areas first this year. We can then continue next year with the rest of the items.' There are no further records regarding this treatment.

(4) July 1969-July 1970: J.A. Stent to A.N. Stewart, apparently concerned about the paintings' condition and stating that '...way back in the past he (the Area Supt) was instructed to wax the paintings periodically, and that the custodian kept a tin of special wax for this. It may well have been Mr Palmer, or even Mr Jack who started this. Nothing has been done to the paintings as far as I know for 5-10 years.'; There is no reply in the files until a visit was requested in January 1970. On 6 July 1970 Stewart reported to Mr Stent: 'The wall paintings have not faded, but the wax layer over them has discoloured. The use of wax is now regarded as a dangerous form of preservation. At some future date this will have to be removed. There are traces of colour and decoration under lumps and coats of plaster. These should be revealed.' No record of treatment following these comments has been found.

(5) March-April 1980: D. Sherlock requested P.J. Keevil to inspect the paintings, and Keevil found the paintings to be in 'a reasonably stable condition with the exception of a small area of incipient flaking... I suspect the cause of this is incomplete removal of the previously applied wax coat. Keevil promised to send a conservator to treat the flaking and suggested a full photographic survey. There is no record of any such treatment.

Photographic Record

29/6/94 EH 'current' contact photo files; no images of wall paintings.

Bibliography

Raby, F.J.E. and Baillie Reynolds, P.K. Castle Acre Priory, Norfolk, H.M.S.O., London, 1952.

St John Hope, W. 'Castle Acre Priory', Norf. Arch., XII, 1893.

Tristram Archive, Courtauld Institute.

Tristram, E.W. English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1955 p.63 and 149.

Borenius, T. 'Medieval Paintings from Castle Acre Priory', The Antiquaries Journal, Vol. XVII, April 1937, No.2, pp.115-121.
(On painted panels, now at Holkam Hall)

Keyser, C.E. A List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland having mural and other painted decorations etc., 3rd Edn., Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1883, p.2.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY	County	Norfolk
Region	Midlands		
Location	Priors Chapel		
Orientation	EAST AND SOUTH WALLS		
Century 14th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	JD	Start date 23/04/95	

Overall condition score **3**

Recommendations

The paintings are fragmentary, however some fine passages of decoration remain, for example, the south side of the arch reveal bears traces of gold leaf with stars and leaves painted over it in fine black lines.

The paintings have been heavily waxed, and flaking, with consequent losses, has occurred. The white appearance of areas exposed by paint loss suggest that they are relatively recent and therefore a cause of concern.

Emergency flake fixing, minor repairs and recording of existing decoration should be carried out, preferably within the next year. A programme of treatment should also include testing to assess the feasibility, desirability of reducing any remaining wax coating. [Timescale: 2 conservators, 1 month, within 2-3 years].

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY		
Region	Midlands	County	Norfolk
Location	Priors Chapel		
Orientation	EAST AND SOUTH WALLS		
Century 14 th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	JD	Start date	23/04/95

Overall Condition Score 3

Stratigraphy

Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	2
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Thickness

Comments

The thickness of the support varies with the design of the wall. Chalk, limestone dressings and flint were all noted as part of the support structure. The arch appears to be constructed primarily of coarsely dressed chalk blocks, clearly intended to be rendered over with a plaster layer. The width of pointing also varies with the different areas and degree of finish, i.e. the stone dressings have narrow joints with flush pointing, chalk blocks have flush or recessed broader pointing. Visible pointing may be re-pointed in several areas, but this was difficult to confirm during the brief audit inspection.

Layer type	Render Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

The walls are uneven and there are many patches which appear to be repairs. The render identified as the original layer one is present on the walls behind existing paint layers.

Layer type	Render Layer 2	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

This lime render appears very similar to render 1 and is only clearly visible as a separate application in places. The surface of render 2 is quite smooth. It appears that there may be black painted underdrawing on the surface of render 2 however this is not clear.

Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	4
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Thickness

Comments

Limewash ground, striations of brushmarks visible.

Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	4
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Thickness

Comments

The paint layer is finely executed but now sadly only fragments of the entire painting remains. Colours visible include black, red and green.

Identified pigments	Colours
---	black
---	red
---	green

Layer type	Paint Layer 2	Specific condition Score	4
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Thickness

Comments

Gilding is present on the south reveal of the arch. Stars and gold leaves with overlying black line decoration were noted. This ornamentation is very finely executed.

Identified pigments **Colours**

---	black
gold leaf	gold

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

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY		
Region	Midlands	County	Norfolk
Location	Priors Chapel		
Orientation	EAST AND SOUTH WALLS		
Century 14 th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type flaking

Location Various areas, ground layer.

Comments Extensive previous losses have occurred. Flaking and loss of the ground layer appears to be still active and has probably been exacerbated by the presence of a wax coating.

Type flaking

Location Various areas, paint layers.

Comments Extensive previous losses have occurred. Flaking and loss of the paint layers appears to be still active and has probably been exacerbated by the presence of a wax coating.

Type general erosion

Location Render, ground and paint layers, various areas.

Comments A considerable amount of erosion, weathering and loss of all layers has occurred.

Type delamination (render layer)

Location Various areas.

Comments The render layers appear to be delaminating from the support in various places. This deterioration phenomena may be exacerbated by the presence of wax on the surface of the paintings.

Type loss

Location Renders, ground and paint layers.

Comments Extensive loss of renders, ground and paint layers has occurred. Many areas of the support are exposed.

Mechanical damage

Type minor losses

Location Stone moulding to arch, south side.

Comments Two circular holes, c. 2.5 - 5 cms wide and c. 5 -10 cms deep are present to the stone moulding of the arch. It is not apparent what purpose these served, nor at what date they were inserted.

Type graffiti

Location Various.

Comments Numerous pieces of graffiti are present to many areas of the chapel. Some appears to date from the earliest quarter of this century (see for example, upper area, north side of east window).

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type cobwebs
Location Numerous.
Comments Not too disfiguring.

Type dust
Location General.
Comments Not too disfiguring.

Coatings/Coverings

Type wax
Location Surface of all paintings.
Comments The wax has darkened, in addition it seems to be exacerbating the flaking and loss of paint and ground layers.

Type repainting
Location Numerous areas, see for example, south side of east window.
Comments Crude retouching and infilling of losses has occurred, probably at the same date as the initial wax coating was applied.

Type limewash
Location Various, noticeable over the centre and south side of the arch reveal.
Comments White limewash is present in some areas, either directly overlying the support or over render (and other?) layers.

Repairs

Type stone
Location North side of arch reveal.
Comments The north side of the arch reveal may have been sympathetically repaired using chalk blocks, however this was not entirely clear from limited site inspection.

Type unidentified
Location South side of arch reveal, eastern edge.
Comments A grey cement-type? edge repair is present. The lower half of this repair has been covered by limewash. Other repairs of this type may be present elsewhere and be disguised by overlying limewash.

Type lime:sand
Location Various, to east and south walls and arch reveal.
Comments Plaster fills, which appear to be lime-based, are present. These seem reasonably sound. However further losses have occurred and more repairs are now required.

Type lime:sand

Location Various, noticeable especially on east wall, north side of window.

Comments Edge repairs, which appear to be lime-based, are present. These seem reasonably sound. However further losses have occurred and more edge repairs are now required.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 01/01/64

Person A.N. Stewart

Comments There is a great deal of correspondence about the paintings from the late 1960s and early 1970s, and conservation was recommended in 1964. It appears that this was probably carried out during the summer of 1964. However, there are no records of this work. See the summary of correspondence in the description section at the beginning of this report.

Proposed Treatment

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 24/04/95

Person JD

Comments Minor repairs are required.

Type FLAKE FIXING **Date** 24/04/95

Person JD

Comments Flake fixing is urgently required.

Type MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 24/04/95

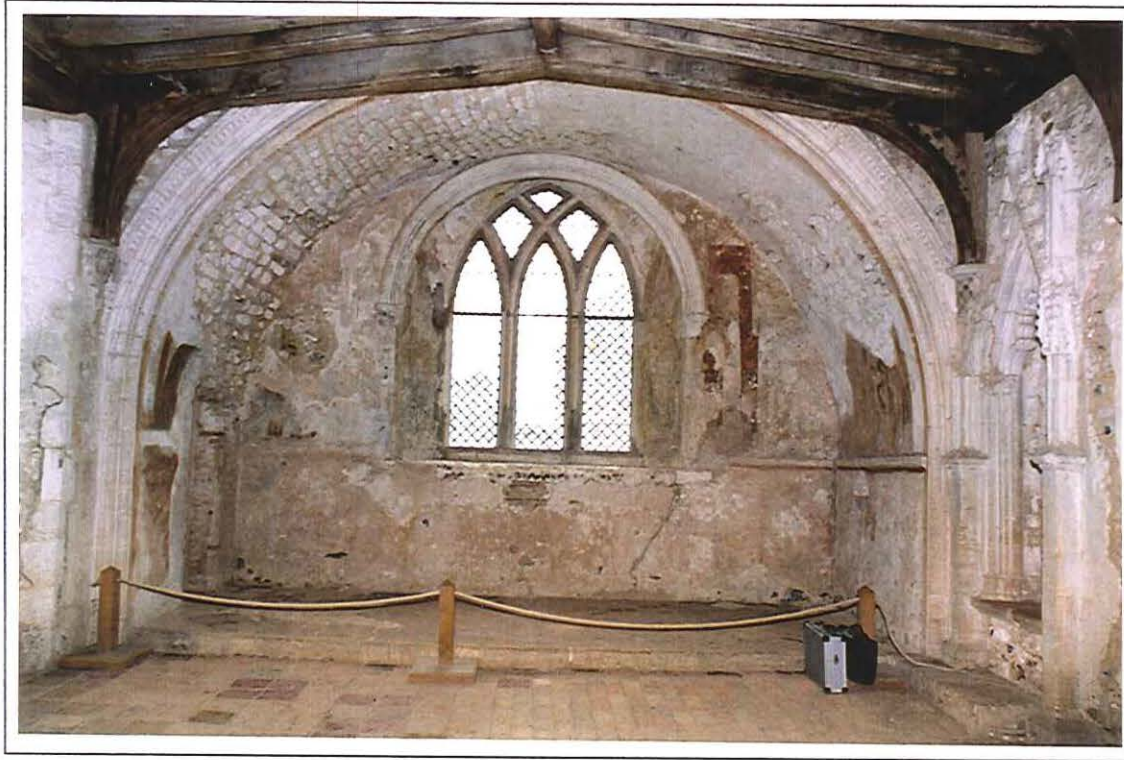
Person JD

Comments It is important to record and document the remaining paint fragments before and after any conservation intervention, and to monitor the condition of the paintings following such treatment.

Type UNSPECIFIED **Date** 24/04/95

Person JD

Comments The feasibility of attempts to remove some of the wax present in the paintings could be considered.



Prior's Chapel, general view to east



Prior's Chapel, east end, detail south side, showing remains of high quality painted and gilded decoration

1 Wall Painting Record

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY		
Region	Midlands	County	Norfolk
Location of painting	Priors Lodgings		
Orientation	CEILING AND FIREPLACES		
Century 16 th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Subjects included	Rosette(s)		

Description

The Cluniac Priory of Castle Acre is believed to have been founded by William de Warenne, second Earl of Surrey. His father, the first Earl and his wife Gundrada introduced the Cluniac Order to England prior to 1077 after they had visited the Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy and had been admitted into the 'fraternity' of the Order. They established the Priory of St. Pancras at Lewes. The Priory of Castle Acre was formed as a daughter house of the Priory of Lewes, and its foundation is thought to date to around 1090.

The Priory was surrendered to Henry VIII on 22nd November 1537 and thereafter passed into private hands until the Earl of Leicester, in 1929, appointed the Commissioners of H.M. Works guardians of the remains of the Priory under the Ancient Monuments Act, 1913. (Raby, 1952, pp.3-6)

The remains of the Priory lie about a quarter of a mile south-west of the village of Castle Acre, near the river Nar, originally within the outer defences of Castle Acre Castle. The Prior's Lodgings are situated at first floor level within the western range of buildings, originally constructed in the early twelfth century. The west wall of the Chapel was [at the end of the fifteenth century?] demolished and its west end incorporated in the Prior's Solar, from which it was separated by a wooden partition. It and the solar were now re-roofed as a single unit with a low-pitched roof, the line of which can be seen outside the west wall. Beneath this roof was a wooden ceiling with moulded beams painted white and ornamented with red and white Tudor roses. Parts of this ceiling survive, including the beam which supported the dividing partition, at which the centre-line of the roof changed, owing to the Prior's Solar being wider than the Chapel. (Baillie Reynolds, 1952, p.14)

After the dissolution of the Priory, the buildings of the Prior's Lodging continued to be inhabited, and in the seventeenth century further structural alterations were made. The fireplaces may have been in situ from the 16th century as the colour scheme of the decoration is very similar to that of the ceiling. The Chapel, no longer required for sacred purposes, was put to secular use. The partition between it and the Solar was moved further west, and two finely carved and painted re-used early sixteenth-century fireplaces were built back to back to warm these two rooms. The space between the fireplaces and the south wall was filled by a timber-framed partition, covered with lath and plaster, while to the north a communicating passage was left between the two rooms. In the later years of the century the roof was raised and the existing high-pitched roof was put on. In the early eighteenth century the existing double barrel-vault was constructed to support the rooms of the Prior's Lodging above. (Baillie Reynolds, 1952, pp.15-16)

The ceiling beams retain the Tudor rose decoration, and the fireplaces contain traces of paint that appear to be contemporary.

Photographic Record

29/6/94 EH 'current' contact photo files; no images of wall paintings.

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

Bibliography

Raby, F.J.E. and Baillie Reynolds, P.K. Castle Acre Priory, Norfolk, H.M.S.O., London, 1952.

St John Hope, W. 'Castle Acre Priory', Norf. Arch., XII, 1893.

Tristram Archive, Courtauld Institute.

Tristram, E.W. English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1955
p.63 and 149.

Borenius, T. 'Medieval Paintings from Castle Acre Priory', The Antiquaries Journal, Vol. XVII, April 1937,
No.2, pp.115-121.
(On painted panels, now at Holkam Hall)

Keyser, C.E. A List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland
having mural and other painted decorations etc., 3rd Edn., Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1883, p.2.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY	County	Norfolk
Region	Midlands		
Location	Priors Lodgings		
Orientation	CEILING AND FIREPLACES		
Century 16th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	JD	Start date 05/01/95	

Overall condition score **2**

Recommendations

Full access to the ceiling beams was not possible during the present audit, but the painted decoration appeared to be stable.

No conservation treatment appears to be necessary at present. However, the painting should be fully recorded and documented, and the condition of the ceiling should be monitored periodically.

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY		
Region	Midlands	County	Norfolk
Location	Priors Lodgings		
Orientation	CEILING AND FIREPLACES		
Century 16 th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	JD	Start date	05/01/95

Overall Condition Score **2**

Stratigraphy

Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	2
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Thickness 25 cm

Comments

The timber ceiling, which is both smooth and carved, is partially lost and it appears that some structural repairs have been carried out. Decoration remains on both timber beams and intervening panels. There are traces of similar decoration on the carved stone fireplaces.

Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	2
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Thickness

Comments

Access during audit inspection was limited, however it appears there may be a white ground layer.

Identified pigments **Colours**

--- white

Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	2
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Thickness

Comments

The paint layer has suffered some loss and flaking in the past. In addition the surface may be friable. Access was limited during audit inspection. Pigments include white, red, green and black.

Identified pigments **Colours**

--- white

--- black

--- red

--- green

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

Property name	CASTLE ACRE PRIORY		
Region	Midlands	County	Norfolk
Location	Priors Lodgings		
Orientation	CEILING AND FIREPLACES		
Century 16th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type loss

Location Various

Comments Timber from the ceiling has been lost.

Type flaking

Location Various

Comments Some flaking and loss of paint has occurred in the past.

Type loss of cohesion (paint layer)

Location Various

Comments It appears that the paint layer may have become friable and certainly has a 'dry' surface. However access was limited during inspection and loss of cohesion cannot be confirmed without further examination.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type cobwebs
Location Various
Comments Not too disfiguring.

Type dust
Location General.
Comments Not too disfiguring.

Coatings/Coverings

Type wax
Location First intervening board, east of easternmost rafter (not end brace), north side.
Comments A small rectangular area appears darker and more saturated than the rest of the ceiling. It is possible that this area represents a test of the effect of 'wax' (as used on the wall paintings) on the condition and appearance of the painted ceiling.

Repairs

Type wood
Location Various.
Comments It appears some structural repairs have been undertaken to secure the ceiling.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 01/01/01

Person Various

Comments Correspondence in EH files shows that there was an awareness, and concern, for these paintings, as for those in the Prior's Chapel, throughout the 1960s. However, there are no records relating to any conservation treatment of the Tudor decoration.

Proposed Treatment

Type MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 24/04/95

Person JD

Comments The decoration should be fully recorded and documented. The condition of the ceiling should be monitored periodically.



Prior's Lodgings, ceiling



Detail, painted decoration on ceiling timbers