

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 37/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,  
LANERCOST PRIORY, CUMBRIA

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Summary

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

### Cumbria

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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Property name	LANERCOST PRIORY		
Region	North	County	Cumbria
Location of painting	Dacre Hall, first floor.		
Orientation	NORTH, EAST AND WEST WALLS		
Century	16th	Date	
Subjects included		Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Architectural motifs			
Griffin			
Grotesque(s)			

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## Description

### THE PAINTED DECORATION

There is evidence for two schemes of painting within the room referred to as 'Dacre Hall'. Potentially all wall surfaces within this room contain traces of painting. The most visible scheme is primarily found on the north wall (remains of a griffin and architectural decoration) and on the soffit of the north-east window (decorative pattern). Only traces of black, red and white pigments relating to this scheme are discernible on the west and east walls.

The style of the decoration is based on grotesque ornament which shows foliate scrolls incorporating mythical beasts, figures and architectural motifs. Although survivals of this type of decoration are rare it is typical of the late 16th-century.

There is only one trace of the other scheme which is situated on the east wall. This red and yellow paint layer lies directly under the scheme previously described indicating an earlier phase of painting.

NB. This audit report describes the condition and treatment requirements of the painted decoration in Dacre Hall. However, it should be noted that two other schemes exist in:

1 The scriptorium (located on the first floor of the Priory adjacent to Dacre Hall). Here the painting consists of a decorative frieze (17th century?) on the upper edge of all four walls. This scheme has been heavily repainted or restored although its condition is sound.

2 The Vicarage (adjacent to the Priory): This scheme is identical to that in the scriptorium and has also been heavily repainted/restored. It is possible this is a copy.

It should also be noted that remnants of this decorative frieze may also be present on the north wall of Dacre Hall.

### GENERAL HISTORY OF THE SITE

The Priory of St. Mary Magdalene at Lanercost was founded by Robert de Vaux c.1166. The construction of the eastern part of the church and the monastic buildings were complete by 1200 and the entire priory finished by 1220. (Moorman, 1990:7) The priory was twice attacked by the Scots, first in 1296, and then again in 1346. 'The rebuilding which had to be done after the Scottish invasions used up much of their resources and plunged the Canons into heavy debts. To meet these debts, more and more of the estates had to be sold, and by the sixteenth century the income of the house had fallen to below £80 per annum.' (Moorman, 1990:10-12)

The priory was dissolved in 1536 and the property was later given by the Crown to Sir Thomas Dacre, the illegitimate son of Sir Thomas Dacre, owner of Naworth Castle (Moorman, 1990:13). The western range

was altered considerably during conversion to domestic use for Sir Thomas Dacre, and would probably have been used for storage, servants' quarters and offices (Moorman, 1990:23). McCarthy (1994) notes that the western range 'was extensively remodelled in the sixteenth century when a large fireplace was inserted in the first floor (now known as Dacre Hall).' This fireplace is dated to 1586 and it is possible that the scheme of painting based on grotesque ornament dates to this conversion.

The north aisle of the church was enclosed for use as the parish church, a parsonage was built for the Vicar and the rest of the monastic buildings were allowed to fall into ruins. The branch of the Dacre family who owned Lanercost died out in 1716 and the estate passed to the Crown. The parish church was enlarged c. 1740 by the restoration of the Nave, which was closed off from the ruins by a wall inserted in the western arch of the crossing. In 1869 the property (excluding the parish church and associated outbuildings) was purchased by the Earl of Carlisle. (Moorman, 1990:14)

#### **Photographic Record**

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

CB colour slide 10/92

TM colour slide 8/95

#### **Bibliography**

Babington, C., English Heritage internal document, notes from site visit 13/10/93.

McCarthy, M. Lanercost Priory, English Heritage Guide Book, EH 1988, second edition 1992, reprinted 1994.

Moorman, J.R.H. Lanercost Priory, PCC Guide, first published c. 1950, amended 1969, reprinted 1990.

Knowles & Haydock, Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales, 1971, 162.

## 2 General Audit Information

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Property name	LANERCOST PRIORY	County	Cumbria
Region	North		
Location	Dacre Hall, first floor.		
Orientation	NORTH, EAST AND WEST WALLS		
Century 16th	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	02/08/95

**Overall condition score**      **3**

### Recommendations

#### STATE OF CONSERVATION - SUMMARY

All the wall surfaces are covered by extensive surface dirt and limewash layers and there are probably more areas of painting presently obscured. There is a large crack on the north wall and extensive delamination of the render. Although heavily obscured by limewash the paint layer is also probably subject to extensive de-cohesion and flaking. Cracks and losses to the render layer are present throughout. There is also one area of unidentified coating present on the west wall, north end. Of particular concern is that the walls are also exposed to a severe and continuing risk from inadvertent mechanical damage.

#### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The condition of the painted decoration in Dacre Hall is extremely poor and a full programme of examination, treatment and recording is therefore necessary. In addition, such a project should also raise awareness of the importance of these schemes. Conservation should include:

- uncovering and cleaning: this should be undertaken to reveal the full extent and condition of the paintings.
- grouting: the render is badly delaminating from the support in areas and grouting is required.
- stabilisation of the paint layer.
- removal of unsuitable fills and reinsertion of appropriate repairs.
- investigation of the large crack evident in the north wall.
- further investigation of the lower paint layer to establish the structure and stratigraphy of the painted decoration within this room.
- full photographic and graphic recording

[Approximate total timescale: 1 month, 2-3 conservators].

NB. The remaining decoration in the scriptorium and the vicarage appears to be in a stable condition but a full photographic record of these areas is also recommended.

### 3 Audit Information: Technique

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Property name	LANERCOST PRIORY		
Region	North	County	Cumbria
Location	Dacre Hall, first floor.		
Orientation	NORTH, EAST AND WEST WALLS		
Century 16 <sup>th</sup>	Date	Height (cm)	Width (cm)
Auditor(s)	TM/JD	Start date	02/08/95

**Overall Condition Score 3**

#### Stratigraphy

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Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	2
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#### Thickness

#### Comments

The building structure appears sound and well maintained. A large crack in the north wall appears to indicate some past movement but it is not clear whether this is still active.

The architraves to the window are comprised of diagonally dressed ashlar blocks. The main walls are comprised of rough dressed stone blocks.

The original pointing mortar contains very large rounded dark stone aggregate, as well as sand, charcoal, reddish stones and chunks of chalk. The pointing is spread over the surface of the stone, almost like a construction skim.

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Layer type	Render Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness 2 cm

#### Comments

Render layer 1 contains all the same types of aggregate as are found in the original pointing mortar including sand, charcoal, reddish stones and chunks of chalk, although the granulometry is finer. The primary render has been roughly applied - as a levelling layer - leaving the high points of the underlying stonework exposed.

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Layer type	Render Layer 2	Specific condition Score	4
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Thickness 0.5 cm

#### Comments

Render layer 2 lies over the first render, ground, and paint layers. It appears that after the first scheme had been completed it was decided to redecorate the room and that as part of this, the still only roughly plastered walls were re-plastered with a finer render.

Render layer 2 is a thin lime-rich, compact, white layer. It appears to contain very fine aggregate and possibly chalk aggregate.

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Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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#### Thickness

#### Comments

The first ground layer is a quite thickly applied limewash with visible brushstrokes. It is applied directly over render 1 and the exposed points of the stone support.

#### Identified pigments Colours

lime white white

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<b>Layer type</b>	Ground Layer 2	<b>Specific condition Score</b>	3
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**Thickness**

**Comments**

Ground layer 2 lies over render layer 2. Ground layer 2 is a thin, greyish limewash layer, with shallow visible brushstrokes.

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<b>Layer type</b>	Paint Layer 1	<b>Specific condition Score</b>	3
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**Thickness**

**Comments**

A small amount of paint layer 1 is visible on the north wall. Two areas are exposed, which show some yellow and black (pattern?) and a deep red band. The yellow and black have been applied over the limewash ground layer 1. The red has been applied over a rougher surface, this may be render layer 1.

<b>Identified pigments</b>	<b>Colours</b>
---	yellow
---	red
---	black

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<b>Layer type</b>	Paint Layer 2	<b>Specific condition Score</b>	4
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**Thickness**

**Comments**

<b>Identified pigments</b>	<b>Colours</b>
---	black
---	red



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

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<b>Property name</b>	LANERCOST PRIORY		
<b>Region</b>	North	<b>County</b>	Cumbria
<b>Location</b>	Dacre Hall, first floor.		
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH, EAST AND WEST WALLS		
<b>Century</b> 16th	<b>Date</b>	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Width (cm)</b>

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### DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

#### Deterioration phenomena

**Type** delamination (render layer)

**Location** render layer 1

**Comments** Access was limited but some hollow pockets were identified. They may in part be due to the unevenness of the stone support. However they may also be indicative of active delamination.

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**Type** delamination (render layer)

**Location** render layer 2, generally and especially west wall, north end

**Comments** Access was limited but some hollow pockets were identified. A number of loose edges of render 2 were located as well several hollow pockets. Auditors were concerned that the problem of delamination of render 2 from the underlying layers could be widespread and potentially very damaging.

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**Type** cracking

**Location** generally, especially north wall, east side

**Comments** The large crack in the north wall may be related to structural movement. Minor cracking in other areas appears to be related to the delamination of render layers. The large crack in the north wall has caused loss of areas of render, ground and paint and has given rise to further delamination in the area.

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**Type** flaking

**Location** north wall, griffin head

**Comments** Losses of red paint and ground have occurred. These appear to be due to flaking, however access was limited and they may be attributable to another cause. C. Babington reported in 1993 that the paint layer was 'probably subject to extensive de-cohesion and flaking' (Babington 1993:1)

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**Type** loss of cohesion

**Location** paint layer

**Comments** C. Babington reported in 1993 that the paint layer was 'probably subject to extensive de-cohesion' (Babington 1993:1)

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**Type** loss

**Location** general, all layers, but especially render 2

**Comments** Unfortunately there has been much loss and deterioration of the high quality 'griffin' scheme of painting.

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### **Mechanical damage**

**Type** insertions

**Location** general

**Comments** There are numerous wooden insertions in the walls. These appear to relate to fixings for furniture, possibly for wooden panelling.

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**Type** nail holes

**Location** general

**Comments** There are numerous nails and associated holes in all the walls, dating from various periods. Unfortunately some modern nails have recently been inserted and have caused some damage to various areas of painting - see especially the west wall, north end.

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**Type** substantial losses

**Location** west wall, north end

**Comments** A fireplace has been removed from the north end of the west wall. The chimney breast was also removed with the fireplace, leaving an area of exposed stonework.

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**Type** insertions

**Location** various

**Comments** Cables and wires have been inserted for electrical services etc.

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**Type** scratches

**Location** general, especially north wall, east side, upper area

**Comments** There are several scratches through to render layer 2 on the north wall, east side, upper area. These appear very white and clean, probably indicating that they are fairly recent.

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**Type** scratches

**Location** east wall

**Comments** There are some areas which contain incised geometric patterns.

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## ADDED MATERIALS

### Accretions

**Type** dirt

**Location** general surface

**Comments** The surface dirt is disfiguring and obscures areas of painting. As the painting is difficult to see - particularly where it only survives in fragments - it is very vulnerable to mechanical damage (see for example, the west wall, north end, where modern nails have been hammered through two darkened areas of painting.)

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**Type** cobwebs

**Location** various, especially north-east corner

**Comments** Cobwebs should remain in situ until the wall painting has been conserved, as in its current condition it is very vulnerable.

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**Type** dust

**Location** general

**Comments**

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**Type** unidentified deposit

**Location** general

**Comments** Drip marks are present on many areas of the wall surface. The cause is not known but may be the result of condensation.

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### Coatings/Coverings

**Type** limewash

**Location** general

**Comments** The paintings are heavily obscured by limewash.

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**Type** unidentified

**Location** west wall, north end

**Comments** In 1993 C. Babington reported 'one area of unidentified coating present on the West wall, North end (approximately 0.5m)' (C.B., 1993:1).

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**Type** plaster

**Location** east wall, north end

**Comments** There are a few remnants of plaster moulding visible on the north end of the east wall. These remnants appear to be very similar to the fasciae below the moulded plaster frieze in the adjacent 'Scriptorium'. This may indicate that the north end of Dacre Hall may have been partitioned and decorated in the same manner as the 'Scriptorium'. This would definitively confirm that the frieze post-dates the painted 'griffin' scheme.

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### Repairs

**Type** modern plaster

**Location** numerous, various positions

**Comments** Patching repairs have been carried out using a hard coarse cement-based mortar. This mortar is visually and physically unsuitable for use adjacent to the painting.

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**Type** unidentified

**Location** north wall, east side, crack

**Comments** Patching repairs have been carried out using a hard 'red sandy' cement-based mortar. This mortar is visually and physically unsuitable for use adjacent to the painting.

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**Type** modern plaster

**Location** north wall, especially

**Comments** A grey-brown mortar which has a smeared surface has been used to make patch repairs on the north wall. This mortar appears visually and physically unsuitable for use adjacent to the painting.

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**Type** unidentified

**Location** various

**Comments** All walls have been repaired and patched-up on a number of occasions. Much of the repair mortar used is either very hard (physically unsuitable) or does not present an appropriate visual match for the original render layers.

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## TREATMENT

### Past Treatment

**Type** STRUCTURAL REPAIRS                      **Date** 01/01/01  
**Person** unknown  
**Comments** Numerous repairs to the structure and plaster layers have been undertaken at various dates using a range of materials.

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### Proposed Treatment

**Type** CLEANING                                      **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** Surface cleaning would considerably improve the appearance of the painting and by raising awareness, would hopefully avoid any further mechanical damage.

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**Type** CONSOLIDATION                              **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** The paint layer may be suffering loss of cohesion and may require consolidation.

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**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION                      **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** Repairs are required to support the plaster and paint layers in many areas.

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**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS REMOVAL                      **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** Unsuitable repairs could be removed and replaced with compatible materials.

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**Type** FLAKE FIXING                                      **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** Flake fixing is required.

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**Type** GROUTING    **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** Grouting is urgently required to readhere delaminating render layers to the underlying layers.

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**Type** RECORDING AND DOCUMENTATION                      **Date** 02/08/95  
**Person** TM/JD  
**Comments** Due to the complexity of the painted decoration in the hall a thorough programme of documentation and recording should be undertaken to ascertain the full extent and stratigraphy of the surviving fragments.

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**Type** UNCOVERING

**Date** 02/08/95

**Person** TM/JD

**Comments** Uncovering should be undertaken to reveal the full extent and condition of the paintings.

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