

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 39/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,  
ROCHE ABBEY, SOUTH YORKSHIRE

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T Manning

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Roche 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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## **Roche Abbey** South Yorkshire

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 (accrctions, 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	ROCHE ABBEY		
Region	North	County	South Yorkshire
Location of painting	North transept		
Orientation	EAST WALL		
Century 12 <sup>th</sup>	Date	Height (cm) 15	Width (cm) 10
Subjects included			
Masonry pattern			

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## Description

### HISTORY OF THE SITE

Roche Abbey was founded by the abbey of Newminster (Northumberland) by two patrons, Richard de Buili and Richard FitzTurgis in 1147. The first settlement consisted of wooden structures, and the earliest stone buildings date from the 1170s, after the abbey had gained economic stability. The abbot of Roche in 1179-1184, Abbot Hugh de Wadworth, expanded their estates and by 1189, Roche was one of ten Cistercian abbeys listed for indebtedness on account of over-ambitious expansion. The church and most of the claustral buildings were finished by the late 1180s. The rest were completed under the following abbot, Osmund (1184-1213).

Roche was dissolved on 23 June 1538. The site then fell into a succession of private hands, coming eventually to Robert Saunderson, created Viscount Castleton in 1627. The estates were then left to the third earl of Scarborough, and his heirs remain the owners. The property passed into the care of the Office of Works in 1921.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE DECORATION

Minute traces of decoration survive in the north transept, within the southeast corner of the southern chapel. These consist of late 12th- or early 13th-century single black line masonry pattern. This was recorded in the 19th century, and again noted by D. Park in 1981. However, little now survives (D. Park noted traces of red as well but these are no longer visible).

During the present audit, the same decoration was found in the south transept, on the east side of the night door (which would have lead to the dorter). It appeared to be of the same decorative scheme and technique and, due to the scant remains, was not audited separately. This scheme of masonry pattern probably dates from the late 12th or early 13th-century.

### Photographic Record

29/6/94 EH 'current' contact photo files; no images of wall paintings.  
17/11/94 TM/JD audit photographs (colour slide).

DOE negative search;  
Roche Abbey; no relevant DOE negatives found.

### Bibliography

R. White, Photographic Handbook of the Antiquities of Worksop and its Neighbourhood, Worksop, 1860.

E. Eddison, History of Worksop and its Neighbourhood, 1854.

B. Harbottle and P. Salnay, 'Excavations at Newminster Abbey, Northumberland, 1961-1963,' Archaeologia Aeliana, 4, XLII, 1964.

J. R. Aveline, The History of Roche Abbey..., Worksop, 1870.

## 2 General Audit Information

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Property name	ROCHE ABBEY	County	South Yorkshire
Region	North		
Location	North transept		
Orientation	EAST WALL		
Century 12 <sup>th</sup>	Date	Height (cm) 15	Width (cm) 10
Auditor(s)	TM, JD	Start date	17/11/94

**Overall condition score      3**

### Recommendations

The painting that survives at Roche Abbey is extremely fragmentary, giving only an indication of the original decorative scheme.

It is of concern that there appears to have been some loss since the fragments in the north transept were recorded by D. Park in 1981. However, there are several other fragments not hitherto recorded, within the recessed archway of the north door in the south transept, which were found during the present survey.

The existence of these scant remains of painting has been recorded, and the fragments photographed. The custodian should be made aware of their existence, in order to ensure their safety during any future building repairs. Unfortunately, the remains are now more of archaeological interest, but nevertheless should be checked periodically. As long as they are recorded properly, they probably do not warrant any conservation treatment.

### 3 Audit Information: Technique

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Property name	ROCHE ABBEY		
Region	North	County	South Yorkshire
Location	North transept		
Orientation	EAST WALL		
Century 12th	Date	Height (cm) 15	Width (cm) 10
Auditor(s)	TM, JD	Start date	17/11/94

**Overall Condition Score      3**

**Stratigraphy**

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Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	3
Thickness	20 cm		

**Comments**

This is an extremely exposed site which survives as a ruin. The limestone fabric is heavily weathered and there is extensive lichen growth. However, it appears to be well-maintained, with lead caps on much of the stonework, and several tell-tales throughout the site to monitor structural movement.

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Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
Thickness			

**Comments**

There appears to be a limewash ground directly applied over the stone.

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Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	2
Thickness			

**Comments**

Black paint visible.

Identified pigments	Colours
---	black

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

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Property name	ROCHE ABBEY		
Region	North	County	South Yorkshire
Location	North transept		
Orientation	EAST WALL		
Century 12th	Date	Height (cm) 15	Width (cm) 10

### DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

#### Deterioration phenomena

Type damp  
Location Entire  
Comments Exposed structure which survives as a ruin. Directly vulnerable to driving rain and wind.

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Type general erosion  
Location All layers including support  
Comments Exposed structure which survives as a ruin. Directly affected by driving rain and wind. This has caused a general erosion of the painting and support. The paint, where it does survive, adheres better to the pointing than to the support (which appears to be more vulnerable).

#### Mechanical damage

Type minor losses  
Location Support  
Comments There are several deep, regular, holes in the support, either from the insertion of some sort of structure, or from core sampling.

## ADDED MATERIALS

### Accretions

**Type** biodeterioration

**Location** Entire surface

**Comments** Green microbiological growth and lichen throughout support. Elsewhere in the north transept, at the base of the walls, there exists more fully-developed algae and moss.

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**Type** dirt

**Location** Entire surface

**Comments** Exposed site, susceptible to dirt deposition.

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**Type** dust

**Location** Entire surface

**Comments** Exposed site, susceptible to dirt and dust deposition.

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**Type** cobwebs

**Location** Entire surface

**Comments** Cobwebs survive mainly in corners.

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### Coatings/Coverings

**Type** limewash

**Location** Surface

**Comments** Traces of a limewash coating survive. It is not clear whether this was uncovered or has merely fallen away from the surface.

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**Type** plaster

**Location** Fragment in corner

**Comments** One small piece of overlying plaster; may indicate the presence of a previous plaster covering.

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### Repairs

**Type** modern lime plaster

**Location** Pointing

**Comments** Small repair to pointing in lime mortar, coarse aggregate, probably made by EH craftsmen during building repairs.

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## **TREATMENT**

### **Past Treatment**

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

**Person** EH?

**Comments** There is one small repair made to the pointing, probably made by EH craftsmen during the course of building repairs.

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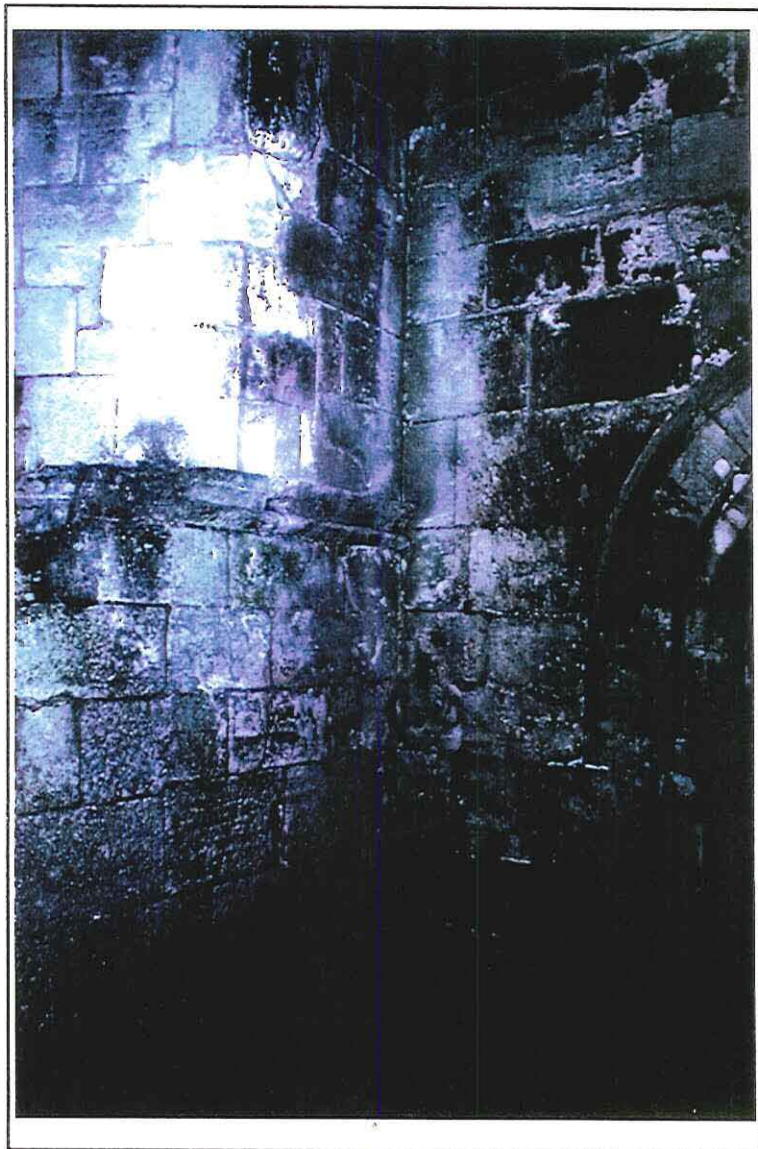
### **Proposed Treatment**

**Type** MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 17/11/94

**Person** TM, JD

**Comments** The existence of these scant remains of painting has been recorded, and the fragments photographed. The custodian should be made aware of their existence, in order to ensure their safety during building repairs. However, the remains are now purely of archaeological interest, and as long as they are recorded properly, do not warrant any conservation treatment.

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North transept, southeast corner, general view



Detail, traces of single black-line masonry pattern