

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 53/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
PORTCHESTER CASTLE, HAMPSHIRE

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Portchester Castle 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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Portchester Castle Hampshire

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

Property name	PORTCHESTER CASTLE		
Region	South East	County	Hampshire
Location of painting	Keep, second floor		
Orientation	SOUTH SIDE OF SPINE WALL		
Century 18 th	Date	Height (cm) 700	Width (cm) 700
Subjects included			
Cartouche			
Fictive hanging			
Landscape			

Description

[general description extracted from Munby 1990]

Portchester Castle was first built in the late third century, probably as a defended base for the Roman fleet securing the Channel against barbarian attacks. The great circuit of walls attracted Saxon settlers, and gave protection to a late Saxon borough and small manor house. The Normans, recognising the fort's key position on Portsmouth Harbour, built a castle and priory. As a royal castle, Portchester was maintained as a store, with royal visits, periods of habitation and great building activity followed by comparative neglect. Its defensive purpose became obsolete by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the defences at Portsmouth were developed.

From the late 17th century the castle was used as a prisoner-of-war camp for the second Dutch War (1665-7), the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-12), the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-49), and the Seven Years' War (1756-63). Conditions were said to be poor and fairly crowded, the prisoners only gaining access to the outer bailey by 1745.

The largest intake of prisoners was during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815), when the population grew to 7000 by 1810. More barrack blocks were built for the soldiers (and some of their families) and officers lodged in the village. Prisoners in the keep could trade their rations with the villagers for additional items, grew their own vegetables in the outer bailey, and slept on hammocks slung on hooks between the beams of the keep. The conditions were better than they had been in previous years, with both British and French surgeons on site. As most trades could be found amongst the prisoners, their labour was bought to supply the prison's own needs, but also to trade outside: crafts in straw, lace and bone were produced for high prices. After 1814, the prisoners had all left and the castle was converted to a hospital for the injured from Wellington's army, then a prison for deserters, and then a store; finally closing in June 1819. The castle then became a ruin and was acquired by the Office of Works in 1926.

The paintings of the Keep

The painting probably dates from this final period of use as a prison, the Napoleonic Wars, and is thought to have been painted by one of the inmates. The painting, consisting of a large fictive hanging with decorative cartouches (one of which contains a depiction of Portchester Castle itself, possibly based on an engraving) is competently executed and is by no means an amateur effort. Stylistically it easily falls within the late 18th, possibly 19th century. As many crafts and trades were represented by the 7000 prisoners, it is possible that a painter-decorator was among them. It would be interesting for further research, with perhaps a more precise dating, to be undertaken.

Photographic Record

1 August 1979, J339-3-79

Bibliography

Cunliffe and Garratt, Excavations at Portchester Castle, vol.2

Munby, J.T., Portchester Castle, Hampshire, EH guidebook, 1990.

2 General Audit Information

Property name	PORTCHESTER CASTLE	County	Hampshire
Region	South East		
Location	Keep, second floor		
Orientation	SOUTH SIDE OF SPINE WALL		
Century 18th	Date	Height (cm) 700	Width (cm) 700
Auditor(s)	TM, SS	Start date	13/09/95

Overall condition score **3**

Recommendations

This highly significant wall painting requires further research and in-depth examination (access was limited to floor-level during this present inspection). Technical analysis of the pigments and materials employed might also aid in dating the painting more firmly, and help to inform any future conservation treatment.

The painting is in poor condition, and conservation treatment in the near future is highly recommended. Subject to a preliminary condition survey treatment is likely to include fixing of the delaminating ground layers, consolidation of the friable paint layer and surface cleaning. In addition the appearance of the painting could be dramatically improved by the installation of appropriate lighting, and interpretation/display boards which would help to present the paintings as an important feature of the castle. A full photographic survey should be undertaken before and after treatment. [Timescale: such a campaign, considering the scale of the painted surface, would probably require 6-8 weeks for a team of four conservators].

3 Audit Information: Technique

Property name	PORTCHESTER CASTLE		
Region	South East	County	Hampshire
Location	Keep, second floor		
Orientation	SOUTH SIDE OF SPINE WALL		
Century 18 th	Date	Height (cm) 700	Width (cm) 700
Auditor(s)	TM, SS	Start date	13/09/95

Overall Condition Score 3

Stratigraphy

Layer type	Support Layer	Specific condition Score	2
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Thickness

Comments

The support in this part of the keep dates from the late 14th-century additions made by Richard II. The floor levels have been altered and the painting is now situated c.3 metres above the present floor level. The painted area is made up of ashlar (according to the guidebook, limestone from Beer and the Isle of Wight was used for the 14th century additions), while the area below the painting (once the floor below) is stone rubble. Pointing not visible. The structure appears to be stable, however, in the past it has clearly had serious problems with subsidence (large deep crack running vertically at east end of room).

Layer type	Ground Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

There are several layers of white limewash present, probably representing several interior decorations over a long period of time. The painting was probably simply executed over the existing wall covering which is now exhibiting extensive flaking.

Layer type	Paint Layer 1	Specific condition Score	3
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Thickness

Comments

Reddish-orange ground layer, finer than ground layer 1, no striations visible. Patchy survival.

Identified pigments Colours

---	blue
---	green
---	red
---	white
---	brown
---	yellow

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

Property name	PORTCHESTER CASTLE		
Region	South East	County	Hampshire
Location	Keep, second floor		
Orientation	SOUTH SIDE OF SPINE WALL		
Century 18th	Date	Height (cm) 700	Width (cm) 700

DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type Delamination (ground layer)

Location Throughout

Comments There are several layers of limewash which make up the 'ground'; these are flaking and separating from the support, and from each other.

Type loss of cohesion

Location Paint layer

Comments Paint layer appears loose and friable.

Type staining

Location Especially upper areas

Comments Drip-marks/staining from above, possibly caused by past infiltration.

Type loss

Location General

Comments There has been general loss of the paint layer, making it difficult to discern the composition.

Type losses (paint layer)

Location Paint layer, especially east side

Comments There appears to have been further loss to the paint layer since photographs were taken in 1979. This may be related to the trap door above the painting on the east side. Pulling objects up through this door would probably cause abrasion in this area.

Mechanical damage

Type scratches

Location Throughout, especially upper areas

Comments These may be related to the presence of pigeons within the room: as they flutter towards the timbers overhead, their claws can scratch the painted surface.

Type scratches

Location Especially east side

Comments These are long semi-circular scratches radiating out from the trap door on the east side. Pulling objects up through this door may have caused abrasion by swinging across the surface.

Type graffiti

Location Lower (accessible) parts of the painting

Comments

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type bird excreta

Location Throughout

Comments Pigeons roosting within the room

Type dirt

Location Throughout

Comments The painted surface is extremely disfigured by dirt and dust.

Type dust

Location Throughout

Comments The painted surface is extremely disfigured by dirt and dust.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type STRUCTURAL REPAIRS **Date** 01/01/01

Person Unknown

Comments There is evidence of past structural movement on the east side of the wall. This has been repaired at some stage.

Past Treatment

Type MONITORING CONDITION **Date** 31/05/79

Person K. Barakan

Comments K. Barakan, of the Conservation Studio, English Heritage, inspected the painting on the 31st of May 1979, at the request of J.G. Coad. Her recommendations were as follows: 'Considering that the site was without a roof for many years, it is surprising that such an amount of painting has been preserved in spite of the poor technique. The whole painting is thickly covered with a layer of dust. The paint is flaking and signs of running water are all over the whole surface. On the other walls at this level there was evidence of some paintings which, on closer examination, appeared to be only fragments. The restoration work requires: (1) Photographic documentation before restoration, (2) Removal of dust and stains, (3) Securing the flaking parts of the painting, (4) Fixing the whole painting using the medium as an adhesive, (5) Photographs after conservation'

Proposed Treatment

Type CLEANING **Date** 13/09/95

Person TM, SS

Comments The painting is stained by past infiltration and bird excreta. Some cleaning may be necessary.

Type CONSOLIDATION **Date** 13/09/95

Person TM, SS

Comments The paint layer appears to be quite friable and will probably require consolidation.

Type DUSTING **Date** 13/09/95

Person TM, SS

Comments The painting is heavily obscured by dust and dirt. A light dusting is highly recommended after stabilisation of the paint layer.

Type FLAKE FIXING **Date** 13/09/95

Person TM, SS

Comments The ground layer(s) are lifting from the support, and separating from each other in several areas. Flake-fixing is required in order to re-adhere them to the support.

Type PRESENTATION/REINTEGRATION **Date** 13/09/95

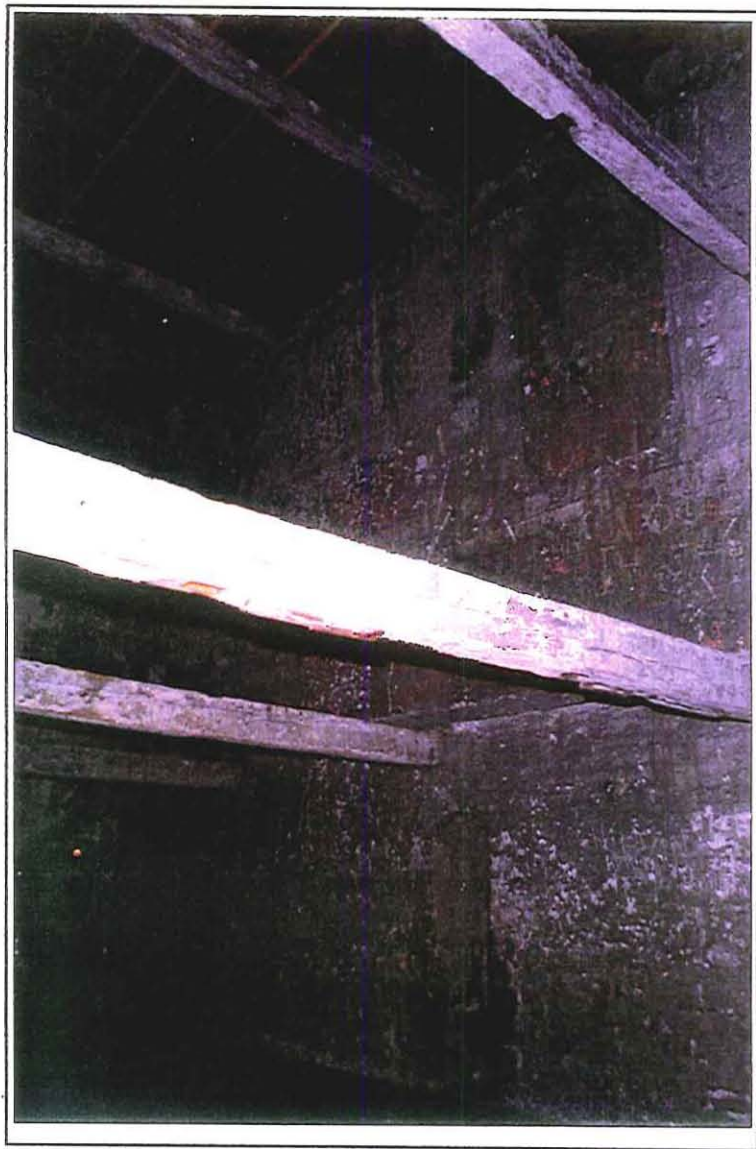
Person TM, SS

Comments Interpretation/display boards are recommended in order to highlight the importance of the paintings. Better lighting would also benefit their appearance.

Type TECHNICAL ANALYSIS **Date** 13/09/95

Person TM, SS

Comments The conservation campaign should be preceded by a programme of analysis.



Keep, second floor, south room, general view to northwest



Detail, south side of spine wall, painted cartouches