

Ancient Monuments Laboratory
Report 61/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,
FIDDLEFORD MILL HOUSE, DORSET

J Davies
T Manning

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Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Fiddleford Mill House 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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Fiddleford Mill House

Dorset

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 | FIDDLEFORD MILL HOUSE | | |
| Region | South West | County | Dorset |
| Location of painting | Solar | | |
| Orientation | NORTH WALL | | |
| Century 14 th | Date | Height (cm) 246 | Width (cm) 96 |
| Subjects included | Annunciation | | |

Description

The building is composed of Greensand stone and Marnhull limestone, in ashlar and coursed rubble, roofed with slates and stone-slates. The Hall and Solar have a T-shaped plan. The Hall was remodelled in the 16th century, and a new range of buildings was added north of the Solar. In the 17th century the Hall was further remodelled with a new facade, and a west range was added at the southwest corner of the Solar, which has been recently demolished.

The early history of the structure, located alongside a river, is unclear. It may have been preceded by a timber-framed structure. However, in c.1355 the manor of Fiddleford came to William Latimer, sheriff of Somerset and Dorset in 1374 and 1380, and it is believed that the late 14th-century Great Hall and Solar (where the painting is located) were built for him. The 14th-century roofs of the Hall and Solar, with cusped arch-braced trusses in oak, are of particular importance. The Hall would have had an open hearth on the floor, and the Solar would have been entered via an external staircase (no longer extant). Of interest is the use of blue clay at the base of the foundations as a form of damp-proofing.

The painting, located on the north wall of the solar on either side of the window, depicts an Annunciation scene, which is rare but not unusual in domestic contexts. The scheme has been dated to the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Contemporary parallels of such imagery in a secular setting can be seen at Longthorpe Tower, Cambs, and the Byward Tower, London. The iconography is also associated with windows (see Babington 1991 for references). Most of the figure of the Archangel Gabriel, on the west side, survives; however, only the feet of the Virgin Mary on the east side can still be discerned.

The structure was substantially altered in the 16th century by Thomas (d.1555) and Ann White, whose initials can be seen on various carved ornaments in the building. The house remained in the White family, until after the Restoration when it was purchased by Sir Thomas Freke, whose descendents, the Pitt-Rivers family, still own the property. The 16th-century wing is leased privately, and the 14th-century part of the building was placed under the guardianship of the Ministry of Works in 1962.

The dimensions given above are the maximum height and width of the Archangel Gabriel painting to the west side of the central window in the north wall. A fragment of painting depicting the drapery and feet of the Virgin Mary is present to the east side of the north window. The maximum size of this fragment is 130 x 41 cms.

Photographic Record

29/6/94 EH 'current' contact photo files;
Solar, north wall, Archangel Gabriel, Feb 1993, J920906, (detail) J920849.

EH photo library, computer keyword search;
February 1993, Detail of wall painting on the north wall of the Solar (The Archangel Gabriel) A921471
(cross-refs; J920849, M922824, F921244), F921242, F921243, F921244 (cross-refs; J920849, M922824,
A921471), J920849 (cross-refs; M922824, A921471, F921244), M922824 (cross-refs; J920849,
A921471, F921244), M922825, M922826, M923062.

Photograph search, DOE files, EH photo library (JD24/03/95)
29-8-61

B1066/24 Interior of the solar , north wall, elevation, prior to uncovering of wall painting.

Bibliography

Babington, C. Internal report on the conservation of the painting, 1991.

Babington, C. 'Wall Painting at Fiddleford Manor', EH Conservation Bulletin, Issue 16, February 1992, 14-15.

F. Kelly, internal typescript of guide (useful, in EH files)

J. Newman and N. Pevsner, Dorset (The Buildings of England), Harmondsworth, 1972, 408. (for building history)

M. Pitt-Rivers, Dorset, Shell Guide, n.d., typescript in EH files.(brief description)

RCHM, Dorset, vol. III, part 2, 271-276 (for building history)

Comparative material (iconography): Oxford, Christ Church Cathedral, Lady Chapel, angels (see Tristram, 14C, 232); and Rotherfield, Sussex, angels (see Tristram 14C, 243). See EH file for further art historical background.

2 General Audit Information

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Property name | FIDDLEFORD MILL HOUSE | County | Dorset |
| Region | South West | | |
| Location | Solar | | |
| Orientation | NORTH WALL | | |
| Century 14th | Date | Height (cm) 246 | Width (cm) 96 |
| Auditor(s) | TM/JD | Start date | 06/09/94 |

Overall condition score **2**

Recommendations

Generally, the painting appears to be stable. The red pigment which was consolidated in 1991 still appears slightly friable, but should remain stable in a relatively controlled environment. As was noted in 1991, it is possible that these areas may require further treatment in the future.

In addition, the Virgin Mary fragment to the east side of the window has not previously been comprehensively conserved. Slight delamination of the render layer from the support was noted on 6/9/94 and minor conservation of this could be undertaken.

In the lower west corner of the wall and window reveal, the plaster has been damaged, with the consequent loss of small amounts of unpainted render. This area should be sympathetically repaired to prevent further loss. The damage may have been exacerbated by a free-standing sign which leans on the area. This sign should be mounted and fixed in a suitable position.

Recommendations for lighting the painting have not yet been implemented, and perhaps could be considered further. In addition, the presence of bats was noted in 1991, and they appear to still be present within the room. As in 1991, the painting does not seem to be directly affected. However, there are droppings on the floor and ledge directly adjacent to the painting, and if the problem develops, it may be considered a risk.

It would be hoped that a presentation board could be installed to improve the interpretation of the painting to the public.

(Time scale: 2 people, 1 week, within the next 5 years.)

3 Audit Information: Technique

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Property name | FIDDLEFORD MILL HOUSE | | |
| Region | South West | County | Dorset |
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| Auditor(s) | TM/JD | Start date | 06/09/94 |

Overall Condition Score 2

Stratigraphy

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|
| Layer type | Support Layer | Specific condition Score | 1 |
| Thickness | 70 cm | | |

Comments

The support consists of Greensand and Marnhull limestone. The supporting wall was originally an external wall with a central window. The window was blocked during the sixteenth century when the building was extended northwards. The wall is now, therefore, internal and contiguous with the fabric of the adjacent building. Quoins have diagonal tooling, the rubble structure is rough-dressed.

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

Comments

Lime/sand render, maximum size of aggregate is <4mm. A small loss (1.5 cm diameter), found on the floor below the edge of the window reveal, has been retained and stored at the Conservation Studio.

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|--------------------------|---|
| Layer type | Render Layer 2 | Specific condition Score | 2 |
| Thickness | 0.2 cm | | |

Comments

Striations of brushstrokes are visible. Preparatory techniques: Two types of incisions in the ground in preparation for painting are visible. Feathers of the left wing (as seen) have double line incisions, feathers of the right wing (as seen) have short single lines in a repeating pattern indicating the feather quills.

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|
| Layer type | Paint Layer 1 | Specific condition Score | 3 |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|

Thickness**Comments**

The earliest paint layer is very thin and friable in many areas, and the red pigment is particularly vulnerable. The presence of an organic medium was suggested by C.Babington (1991). Red lead, vermilion, red earth, yellow earth and black were also identified.

Identified pigments Colours

| | |
|--------------|--------|
| red lead | red |
| vermilion | red |
| --- | black |
| red earth | red |
| yellow earth | yellow |

Analysis undertaken

Method SCANNING ELECTRON MICROSCOPY (S.E.M.)

Person C. Babington **Date** 01/01/91

Comments Samples were examined under the SEM.

Analysis undertaken

Method POLARIZING LIGHT MICROSCOPY

Person C. Babington **Date** 01/01/91

Comments Pigments were identified using standard polarizing light techniques.

Analysis undertaken

Method ENERGY DISPERSIVE X-RAY MICROANALYSIS (E.D.X.A.)

Person C. Babington **Date** 01/01/91

Comments Pigments were identified with the aid of EDX analysis.

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|
| Layer type | Paint Layer 2 | Specific condition Score | 2 |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|

Thickness**Comments**

Late medieval overpainting on limewash ground. 'The application of a fine lime skim over St Gabriel as a ground for the repainting suggests the painting was already fairly badly damaged. The repainting now survives only on the left and right edges of St Gabriel, with some of the later pigment lying directly on the original painting, thus creating a palimpsest. The repainting, which was fairly crude, was executed in broad brush-strokes in a limited range of colours - black and a purplish-red (ochre) and white (probably lime white). This combination of pigments suggests the pigments were bound with lime'. [Babington, 1991].

Identified pigments Colours

| | |
|-----|--------|
| --- | purple |
| --- | black |

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

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Property name | FIDDLEFORD MILL HOUSE | | |
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| Location | Solar | | |
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DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

Deterioration phenomena

Type losses (render layer)
Location various
Comments The losses noted occurred prior to 1991. The render layer now appears stable.

Type cracking
Location head of Archangel Gabriel
Comments Cracks occurred prior to 1991. They have been repaired. The painting now appears structurally stable.

Type loss of cohesion (paint layer)
Location red paint
Comments The poor condition of the early red painted areas was noted in 1991. The paint was consolidated at that time using Paraloid B72 1% in IMS. The paint layer appears vulnerable and further consolidation may be required in future.

Type delamination (render layer)
Location Virgin Mary fragment, east of window, low level
Comments Minor delamination of the render layer is causing cracking of the plaster.

Mechanical damage

Type substantial losses
Location to west of painting, around door insertion
Comments Door inserted during the sixteenth century.

Type minor losses
Location corner of wall and window reveal at low level
Comments Damage may be exacerbated by a free-standing sign in this position which may be moved by visitors, inadvertently catching the edges of the plaster. The sign should be mounted in a suitable position.

ADDED MATERIALS

Accretions

Type dirt

Location general

Comments Light soiling only and therefore not disfiguring. The wooden floor is clean, and the building is obviously well-maintained.

Type cobwebs

Location general

Comments Very few cobwebs present.

Type bat excreta

Location surrounding floor areas

Comments Bat excreta on the floor indicates that bats are probably roosting within the room.

Coatings/Coverings

Type limewash

Location few small fragments

Comments The majority of later limewash layers have been removed during previous conservation campaigns. Very few small fragments remain on blank areas of design and later repairs.

Type limewash

Location later medieval overpainting executed over a limewash ground

Comments This layer has been fully described under paint layer 2.

Repairs

Type lime:sand

Location edge, crack and minor repairs

Comments Appear to date to 1991 conservation treatment.

Type cement

Location mortar and pointing repairs

Comments Cement repairs seem to be associated with previous building repairs. A note in the studio internal file on the site records that high pressure grouting with cement was also undertaken as part of building repairs. The site is low-lying and adjacent to a river. The potential problems presented by the cement have previously been commented on by C. Babington.

Type unidentified

Location centre of the Virgin Mary fragment

Comments An unusual 'putty' type repair, appears almost like the oil/chalk putty used in windows.

TREATMENT

Past Treatment

Type CONSOLIDATION **Date** 01/01/91
Person C. Babington
Comments Friable red paint was consolidated using a Paraloid B72 1% spray in Industrial Methylated Spirits. Babington (1991) reports 'Choice of consolidant was limited to the organic range since [in] the original technique of the painting organic media was also almost certainly employed, and the vermilion and lead-based pigments would not be chemically compatible with an inorganic consolidant.' (Babington 1991)

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 01/01/91
Person C. Babington
Comments A fine lime mortar (4.5:1 silver sand: lime) was used for repairs. The plaster below the painting was re-limewashed and toned to match the plaster colour of the background of St. Gabriel. Babington (1991)

Type FILLS/REPAIRS REMOVAL **Date** 01/01/91
Person C. Babington
Comments The unsuitable cement repair running vertically above the doorway was removed and replaced with fine lime mortar repairs.

Type GROUTING **Date** 01/01/91
Person C. Babington
Comments Dilute lime milk was injected behind loose areas of plaster skim to secure them to the support.

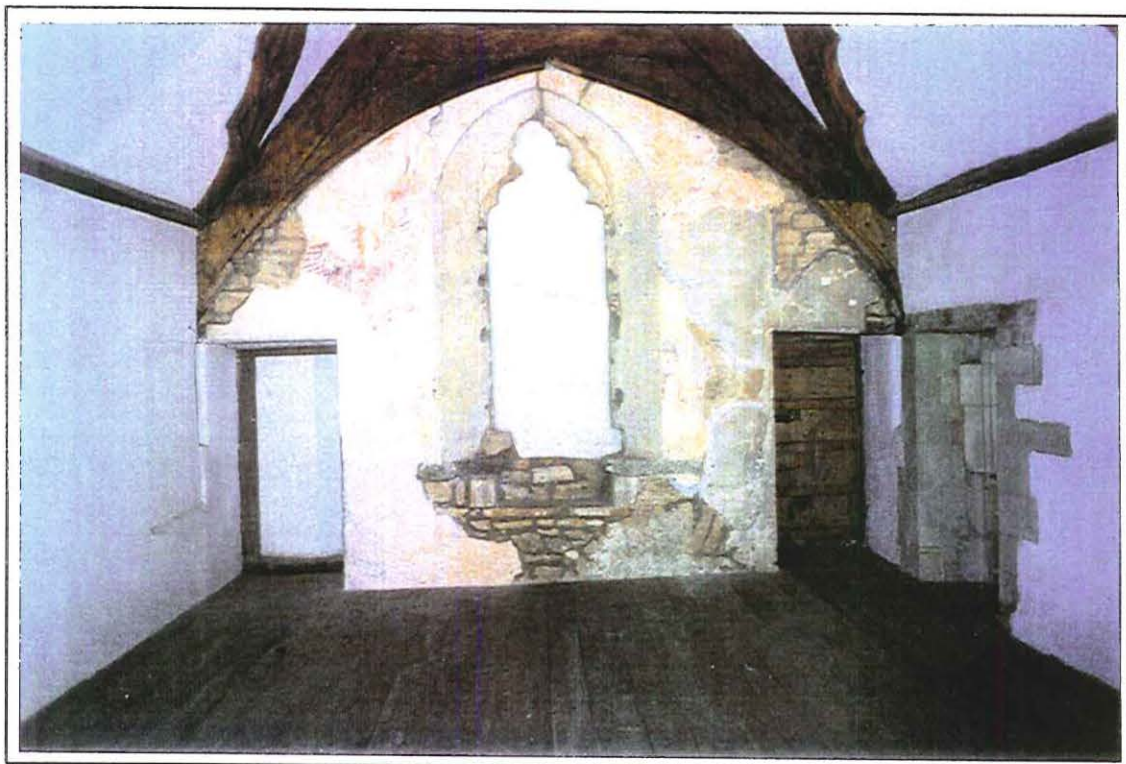
Type UNCOVERING **Date** 01/01/91
Person C. Babington
Comments Babington (1991) reports 'uncovering was...a fairly slow process as the original plaster surface was extremely friable, and the pigment powdering. The most effective method was to cut away the superimposed limewash with a small scalpel or spatula while working under magnification. For the most part the underlying pigment was too powdery and water sensitive to allow use of an uncovering hammer, or softening of overlying layers. Uncovering was further complicated by the crude repainting [late medieval] on a fragile skim of plaster on St Gabriel's left side'.

Proposed Treatment

Type CONSOLIDATION **Date** 06/09/94
Person JD/TM
Comments The red paint still appears friable, as it did in 1991 after treatment. However, if the environment remains stable, this should not pose a problem. Further consolidation of the red paint may be required in future.

Type FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 06/09/94
Person JD/TM
Comments Edge repairs to the corner of the wall and window reveal at low level are required. Edge repairs to the Virgin Mary fragment at low level are needed.

Type GROUTING **Date** 06/09/94
Person JD/TM
Comments A small amount of grouting to the Virgin Mary fragment may be necessary.



Solar, general view of north wall



Detail, archangel Gabriel, west side of north wall