

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 65/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,  
MUCHELNEY ABBEY, SOMERSET

C Babington  
P Welford

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Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report 65/97

WALL PAINTING CONDITION AUDIT,  
MUCHELNEY ABBEY, SOMERSET

C Babington  
P Welford

Summary

This condition audit of wall paintings at Muchelney 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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## Muchelney Abbey Somerset

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** First floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour, north wall, area between windows
- 2** First floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour north wall, centre



# 1 Wall Painting Record

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<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY			
<b>Region</b>	South West	<b>County</b>	Somerset	
<b>Location of painting</b>	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour			
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS			
<b>Century</b> 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Date</b>	1520	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Width (cm)</b>
<b>Subjects included</b>				
Chevron pattern				
Fictive hanging				

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## Description

### DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

Muchelney Abbey is the second oldest religious foundation in Somerset after Glastonbury. The abbot's house (c.1508) is built of blue lias, a local stone and Ham stone, from the Ham Hill quarries near Montacute. After the Dissolution the house remained in occupation as a farmhouse. The site was excavated in 1873 and acquired by the nation in 1927.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTINGS

The decoration includes:

#### NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS:

Fictive hanging with alternating broad decorative bands of black on white and red on black pomegranite motifs, spearted by narrow red on white chevron bands. Dimensions: 14x175cm(wxh) approx.

#### NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE:

Fragmentary remains of three pomegranates and continuation of fictive banding with pomegranites. Dimensions: 210x33cms(hxw) approx.

## Photographic Record

16/6/93 other?

## Bibliography

Archaeological Journal, 107 (1950), p.120.

P. Eames, Furniture in England, France, and the Netherlands from the 12th to the 15th Century, London 1977, 213-214.

Lord Montague of Beaulieu, English Heritage, London 1987.

N. Pevsner, South and West Somerset (The Buildings of England), Hammondsorth, 1950, 248-250.

## 2 General Audit Information

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<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY	<b>County</b>	Somerset
<b>Region</b>	South West		
<b>Location</b>	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS		
<b>Century</b> 16th	<b>Date</b> 1520	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Width (cm)</b>
<b>Auditor(s)</b>	CB/PW/DP	<b>Start date</b> 16/06/93	

**Overall condition score** 3

### Recommendations

These significant decorative remains are now in need of remedial treatment. This should include:

#### NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS:

Consolidation of the paint layer, flake fixing, replacement of repairs and surface cleaning. Analysis of the pigments would also be preferred. [Time-scale for treatment: 2-3 weeks within 5 years].

#### NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE:

Plaster repairs are required within the central detached area. [Timescale: 2 days within 5 years].

### 3 Audit Information: Technique

<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY		
<b>Region</b>	South West	<b>County</b>	Somerset
<b>Location</b>	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS		
<b>Century</b> 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Date</b> 1520	<b>Height (cm)</b>	<b>Width (cm)</b>
<b>Auditor(s)</b>	CB/PW/DP	<b>Start date</b> 16/06/93	

**Overall Condition Score 3**

#### Stratigraphy

<b>Layer type</b>	Support Layer	<b>Specific condition Score</b>	1
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**Thickness** 60 cm

**Comments**

Rough coursed stone support, made up of Golden Ham (a sandstone) and blue lias. The wall is 60cm thick and flush pointed.

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

**Comments**

Lime/sand render, <0.5cm-1cm thick, fine-medium aggregate with an undulating surface, striated, trowel-marks.

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

**Comments**

A lime white ground appears to be present.

**Identified pigments Colours**

lime white white

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

**Comments**

NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Paint layer includes two types of red (one more orange, perhaps lead, and one dark, perhaps earth) a white, yellow and black.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE: Smudged and abraded paint layer, up to 98% loss. Two types of red (earth and lead?) visible. Trace of yellow (earth?) at upper left.

**Identified pigments Colours**

--- black  
 --- orange  
 --- white  
 --- yellow  
 --- red

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

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Property name	MUCHELNEY ABBEY			
Region	South West	County	Somerset	
Location	first floor, middle room, north-east range off Abbots parlour			
Orientation	NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS			
Century 16th	Date	1520	Height (cm)	Width (cm)

### DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

#### Deterioration phenomena

**Type** loss of cohesion (paint layer)  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** The paint layer is powdering.

---

**Type** flaking  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** Macro-flaking.

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**Type** pigment alteration  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** Possible conversion of red and/or white lead to the black alteration product, plattnerite.

---

**Type** losses (render layer)  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Small losses throughout.

---

**Type** cracking  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Cracking of render layer throughout.

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**Type** delamination (render layer)  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Large cracked and delaminating bulge at centre.

---

**Type** staining  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Water damage streaks and smudging.

#### Mechanical damage

**Type** cracking/fracturing  
**Location** north wall, area between windows

**Comments** Render appears sound, but hair-line cracks are present throughout. These do not appear recent or dangerous.

---

**Type** nail holes

**Location** north wall, area between windows

**Comments** Small nail (?) holes throughout.

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**Type** chisel marks

**Location** north wall, area between windows

**Comments** Chisel marks from uncovering in places.

---

**Type** abrasion

**Location** general

**Comments** Paint layer in all areas is abraded and has a generally 'smudged' appearance.

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**Type** substantial losses

**Location** general

**Comments** NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Substantial paint loss. Losses to edges.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE: up to 98% of surface; virtually no lime ground survives and the paint layer is smudged and abraded.

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**Type** scratches

**Location** north wall, east side

**Comments** General.

---

## ADDED MATERIALS

### Accretions

**Type** dirt  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** General.

---

### Coatings/Coverings

**Type** unidentified  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** Traces of waxy material around edging repairs, but does not appear on painting.

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**Type** limewash  
**Location** General  
**Comments** Traces of overlying limewash throughout, more than one layer. Pencil outlining of bands.

---

**Type** perspex covering  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** Secured by 8 brass bolts around edges. Can be removed for examination purposes. See correspondence Keevil 1968 (cf. Cleeve sacristy piscina). Appears to be causing no harm, but should be monitored.

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**Type** emulsion  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Band of white emulsion along right edge.

---

**Type** unidentified  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Patchy grey-white overpaint.

---

**Type** wax  
**Location** north wall, east side  
**Comments** Streak of wax (candle?) at centre.

---

### Repairs

**Type** gypsum  
**Location** north wall, area between windows  
**Comments** Plaster of Paris edges, and small losses throughout. Overpainted in grey, or to imitate original scheme. Functioning, but very poor quality and appearance. Overpainted, poor texture and uneven application.

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## TREATMENT

### Past Treatment

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

**Person** Unknown

**Comments** NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Plaster of Paris repairs, non-professional, 1950's/60's.

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**Type** UNCOVERING **Date**

**Person** Unknown

**Comments** Rough uncovering of limewash overpaint, non-professional, 1950's/60's?

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### Proposed Treatment

**Type** CLEANING **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB, PW

**Comments** NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Surface cleaning required within 5 years.

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**Type** CONSOLIDATION **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB, PW

**Comments** NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Consolidation of friable paint required within 5 years.

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**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB, PW

**Comments** NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Replacement of repairs required within 5 years.

NORTH WALL, EAST SIDE: Plaster repairs required within central detached area. Timescale: 2 days within 5 years.

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**Type** FLAKE FIXING **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB, PW

**Comments** NORTH WALL, AREA BETWEEN WINDOWS: Flake fixing required within the next five years.

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# 1 Wall Painting Record

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<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY		
<b>Region</b>	South West	<b>County</b>	Somerset
<b>Location of painting</b>	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, CENTRE		
<b>Century</b> 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Date</b>	1520	<b>Height (cm)</b> 260 <b>Width (cm)</b> 245
<b>Subjects included</b>			
Fictive hanging			
Foliate decoration			
Grotesque(s)			

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## Description

Fragmentary remains of fictive hanging with foliate forms in white on red background, with black skirting (20cms width), and at top of wall frieze (25cms width) with red Renaissance foliate decoration, and below this a broader frieze (40cms width) containing Renaissance grotesque ornament in black and white.

## Photographic Record

EH photo library, computer keyword search;  
March 1990, Abbot's House, upper floor of former cloister, B900927, K900086. Also, Studio 16/06/93.

## Bibliography

Archaeological Journal, 107 (1950), p.120.

P. Eames, Furniture in England, France, and the Netherlands from the 12th to the 15th Century, London 1977, 213-214.

Lord Montague of Beaulieu, English Heritage, London 1987.

N. Pevsner, South and West Somerset (The Buildings of England), Hammondsorth, 1950, 248-250.

## 2 General Audit Information

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<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY	<b>County</b>	Somerset
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<b>Location</b>	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, CENTRE		
<b>Century</b> 16th	<b>Date</b> 1520	<b>Height (cm)</b> 260	<b>Width (cm)</b> 245
<b>Auditor(s)</b>	CB/PW/DP	<b>Start date</b> 16/06/93	

**Overall condition score** 3

### Recommendations

These significant decorative remains are now in need of remedial treatment. This should include consolidation of the paint layer, plaster repairs, grouting and surface cleaning. Analysis of the pigments would also be preferred. [Timescale of treatment: 2 weeks within 5 years].

### 3 Audit Information: Technique

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<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY		
<b>Region</b>	South West	<b>County</b>	Somerset
<b>Location</b>	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour		
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, CENTRE		
<b>Century</b> 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Date</b> 1520	<b>Height (cm)</b> 260	<b>Width (cm)</b> 245
<b>Auditor(s)</b>	CB/PW/DP	<b>Start date</b>	16/06/93

**Overall Condition Score** 3

#### Stratigraphy

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<b>Layer type</b>	Support Layer	<b>Specific condition Score</b>	1
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**Thickness** 60 cm

#### **Comments**

Rough coursed stone support, made up of Golden Ham (a sandstone) and blue lias. The wall is 60cm thick and flush pointed.

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

#### **Comments**

Lime/sand render, <0.5cm-1cm thick, fine-medium aggregate with an undulating finish, trowel-marks.

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

#### **Comments**

A white limewash ground appears to be present.

#### **Identified pigments** Colours

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

#### **Comments**

Pigments visible are white, red, black (earths/lead/lime?).

#### **Identified pigments** Colours

---	white
---	red
---	black

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

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<b>Property name</b>	MUCHELNEY ABBEY			
<b>Region</b>	South West	<b>County</b>	Somerset	
<b>Location</b>	first floor, far north-eastern room, north-east range off Abbots parlour			
<b>Orientation</b>	NORTH WALL, CENTRE			
<b>Century</b> 16th	<b>Date</b>	1520	<b>Height (cm)</b> 260	<b>Width (cm)</b> 245

### DETERIORATION AND DAMAGE

#### Deterioration phenomena

**Type** pigment alteration

**Location** red and white pigments

**Comments** Possible alteration of red/white lead to the blackish alteration product, plattnerite.

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#### Mechanical damage

**Type** abrasion

**Location** general

**Comments** Paint layer badly abraded and scratched.

---

**Type** scratches

**Location** general

**Comments** Paint layer badly abraded and scratched.

---

**Type** substantial losses

**Location** 80% of paint layer

**Comments** Smudging and loss over 80% of the surface.

---

**Type** cracking/fracturing

**Location** general

**Comments** Substantial cracking/fracturing of render layer, minor losses.

---

## ADDED MATERIALS

### Accretions

**Type** cobwebs

**Location** general

**Comments**

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### Coatings/Coverings

**Type** limewash

**Location** general

**Comments** More than one layer present on the surface.

---

### Repairs

**Type** modern lime plaster

**Location** centre right edge, and at base

**Comments** Functioning but poor appearance.

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## TREATMENT

### Past Treatment

**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION      **Date** 01/01/01

**Person** Unknown

**Comments** No formal treatment, modern repairs. Date unknown, possibly 1950's/60's as for adjacent room.

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**Type** UNCOVERING      **Date** 01/01/01

**Person** Unknown

**Comments** No formal treatment, uncovering of limewash overpaint. Date unknown, possibly 1950's/60's as for adjacent room.

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### Proposed Treatment

**Type** CLEANING      **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB/PW/DP

**Comments** Surface cleaning required.

---

**Type** CONSOLIDATION      **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB/PW/DP

**Comments** Consolidation of the friable paint layer required.

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**Type** FILLS/REPAIRS INSERTION      **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB/PW/DP

**Comments** Fills/repairs required.

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**Type** GROUTING      **Date** 16/06/93

**Person** CB/PW/DP

**Comments** Grouting required.

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