

# ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

## REPORT

2379

**SERIES/No**

CONSERVATION

**AUTHOR**

David Cook 16.8.77

**TITLE**

Wallplaster from St. Augustine's  
Abbey, Canterbury

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

2379

MATERIAL WALL PLASTER

SITE: CANTERBURY (DATE: )

ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY

SHEET: ONE

AM No	X-Ray No	Photo No	Description and Report	Ref No
740393		<p>Before CAY 22 CAY 23</p> <p>After (of one group) CAY(c) 13 - 19.</p>	<p>This is a collection of some 33 pieces of painted and in some cases gilded wall-plaster, varying in size from about <math>\frac{1}{2}</math> inch square to 5 inches square.</p> <p>All the painting has been whitewashed over. This whitewash consists of two layers of even and almost equal thickness, together making a layer between <math>\frac{1}{4}</math> and <math>\frac{1}{2}</math> mm thick. This had to be removed to reveal the painting. Samples of the whitewash from six different pieces were examined and all shew consistently the same two layers. These samples have been preserved to serve as a control run for comparison with the pigment samples to be taken later. These are to be analysed by powder X-ray diffraction. Inevitably some whitewash will be included in each pigment sample, so a control will be desirable. In some cases where pigment was unavoidably removed with the whitewash the pigment sample was actually taken from the whitewash flake. The two layers are of the same date, presumably two to give a good cover. That they are of the same date is certain because they are intimately bound, and the interfaces are brilliant white; there is no dirt between them.</p> <p>The underlying painting is elaborate, though perhaps somewhat crude in some cases. The decoration is multi-coloured, eight apparently different colours being recognisable. In order of sampling these are (1) black, (2) deep blue (3) dark red (4) orange-pink (5) white (6) pink (7) orange (8) undergilt orange. Analysis will shew the composition of these, and will suggest whether a given colour is for instance a combination of two others. Whether originally intentional or not, some pieces exhibit a subtle effect, achieving yet further colours, a thin translucent coat of a light colour, white or pink has been painted over a darker colour, the effect being to lighten and change the darker colour. Yet again, some pieces shew shading of one colour into another, for instance orange → dark red.</p> <p>2 pieces appear to have a painted representation of curly hair on them, in a grey colour. This has not been sampled because of its small quantity.</p>	<p>SITE NO SA '74 2</p>

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

MATERIAL WALL PLASTER

SITE: CANTERBURY (DATE: )  
 ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY

SHEET: TWO

AM No	X-Ray No	Photo No	Description and Report	Ref No
740393			<p>As to technique, the painting appears to have been done with a freehand brush, the strokes being clearly visible in most cases. The only exceptions to this appear to be the two fleury-de-lys. Whether the two tracings are similar enough for both fleurs to have been done with the same stencil is a matter for conjecture; certainly even a stencil does not produce exactly identical copies. In addition, it is observed that neither fleur-de-lys shows brush-strokes, which suggests that each may have been stippled through a stencil.</p> <p>Several different patterns of painting can be discerned. The number of pieces refers to the plaster as excavated: some pieces have been joined together.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A Black-letter inscription of black on white, the white painted over dark red, the dark red exposed on the adjacent area which has black lines and blue on it. On one piece the inscription is divided from the dark red adjacent area by a black line, on another piece there is no dividing line. 5 pieces.</li> <li>2. White chevrons outlined in black, with a lower border of white edged with black; under the chevrons black (stencilled?) fleury-de-lys on an orange ground. 2 pieces.</li> <li>3. Gilt strips with black, detailing <u>over</u> the gilt - where this has been done, even though some of the black is missing the gilt is better preserved; the detailing is alternate circles and lozenges, and a black line on both sides of the strip. Do these strips relate to the two large joined pieces, both with gilding, which may also have the edge of face on them? Both the pieces with painted grey hair belong to this group. 11 pieces.</li> <li>4. A black and white stylised quatrefoil flower shape, appearing to cover the joins of orange lines, the whole over a dark red field. 3 pieces.</li> <li>5. Cinquefoil flower shape with white centre and blue petals, on a dark red ground. 1 piece.</li> </ol>	<p align="right">SITE NO SA '74 2</p>

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

MATERIAL WALL PLASTER

SITE: CANTERBURY (DATE: )

ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY

SHEET: THREE

AM No	X-Ray No	Photo No	Description and Report	Ref No
740393			<p>6. Black, orange, white a blue strip; outlined black and black lozenges, the latter filled in orange and this orange further detailed with a white lozenge and a central dot. The spaces between the lozenges in some pieces filled with blue, the whole on a dark red ground, which has orange shading on two pieces. 5 pieces.</p> <p>7. Other odd pieces, 6 in all: 2 are very small, one may be part of group 1., one looks like part of an elaborate design but is unidentifiable on its own, one has a black 'comb' on blue with some dark red, and the last possibly does not belong with the rest since it is simply a pattern of dark red lines on the plaster; there is no ground colour, and this may well be imitation masonry, the red representing the lines of mortar.</p> <p align="right"><i>David B. Cook</i></p> <p align="right">DAVID COOK 16 August 1977</p> <p><u>Conservation details</u></p> <p>The whitewash was picked off using hand tools and the paint consolidated with 5% Calaton B soluble nylon in industrial methylated spirits. The backs of the more crumbly pieces of plaster were also impregnated with soluble nylon. A few joins were found. These were bonded with H.M.G. cellulose adhesive and strengthened with Polyfilla where necessary. Several flakes were reattached using polyvinyl acetate emulsion.</p> <p align="right">M.E. Hutchinson for D. Cook 25 January 1978</p>	SITE NO SA '74 2.

