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REPORT ON THE CLEANING AND CONSERVATION
OF THE 17TH CENTURY WALL PAINTING

JUNE 2021



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St. Peter's Church, Hever, Kent

Report on the Cleaning and Conservation of the 17th Century Wall Painting

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Date: 30 June 2021

Report Ref. Hever 3

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St. Peter's Church, Hever, Kent

Report on the Cleaning and Conservation of the 17th Century Wall Painting

1.0 Introduction

At the request of Mandy Yarnold (churchwarden, Hever PCC) an assessment of the post-Reformation wall painting at St Peter's Church, Hever, Kent was carried out on 7th January 2021 and localised areas of damage and instability were identified. The PCC are in the process of redecorating the interior of the Grade I listed building and the presence of a wall painting on the south wall of the nave meant that it was necessary to survey the walls to determine whether other areas of historic wall painting might exist before proceeding with work to the interior paint finishes. The survey revealed that the church was extensively replastered during a major restoration carried out in 1894 and that the remnants of a 17th century Biblical text was the only mural fragment to survive.

It was agreed that plaster repairs and redecoration with limewash could be scheduled subject to the completion of essential stabilisation work to the wall painting first due to its vulnerable condition. Cleaning and conservation of the wall painting was carried out between the 7th and 18th of June and temporary Tyvek protection installed during redecoration works.

2.0 Architectural History & Description¹

The church is described in some detail in Tim Tatton-Brown's 1998 historical and archaeological survey as follows:

"LOCATION: Situated at c. 170 feet above O.D. on a level area with hillside sloping down to Hever 'Castle' a quarter of a mile to the north-east. Just beyond is the river Eden (the whole area was re- landscaped in 1903-7, when the bridge was moved a short distance to the west and the river was diverted into a lake. DESCRIPTION: This church is perhaps now most famous for the very fine brass of Sir Thomas Bullen (ob. 1538), and it has been, and still is, closely connected to the well-known Hever 'Castle' immediately to the north-east.

No evidence, above ground, for the earlier church can be seen, but the south side of the nave is probably the earliest surviving wall. It is the only wall without a plinth, and may date from the 12th or 13th century. On the west, its quoins were replaced when the tower was built, while to the east the join with the chancel was obscured by the building of the Rood stair. The two Perpendicular windows in the south nave wall were inserted at a later date, that on the west having a transom.

¹ <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/HEV.htm> Page 1 of 3 - Rochester Diocese: Historical and Archaeological Survey: St Peter Church, Hever - Architectural & Historical Information 1998

On the north side of the nave is a three-bay arcade with round pillars that must date from the earlier 13th century, showing that a north aisle was required at this time. The outer wall of the aisle was, however, completely rebuilt at a later date. The chancel, which is as wide as the nave, was perhaps rebuilt in the early 14th century, as suggested by the two-light trefoiled window on its south-west side. It has buttresses and a plinth all the way round, and its main masonry is small blockwork of Tunbridge Wells sandstone. At this time, there may already have been a north chapel leading off the north aisle. Does the central east-facing buttress in the east wall suggest this? The Perpendicular east window is perhaps of the later 14th century.

During the 15th century the north aisle was rebuilt with a new outer wall with buttresses on the north side and a plinth. The three two-light windows on the north perhaps suggest a later 15th century date. Over the top of this aisle a small rafter, collar and soulace roof was built, which still survives, and because it only has double wall-plates on the north side, it seems to be displaced to the north. Shortly after (or perhaps just before) the north aisle was rebuilt, the west wall of the nave was demolished, and the large new tower was built. It also has a plinth and is joined to the west end of the nave by two small contemporary buttresses. There is a large new tower arch with beyond a west doorway, and above this a two-light late Perpendicular west window. Above this the tower steps in slightly and there are two stages of simple windows, with the upper ones being late 'lancets' for the bell-chamber. Above a top moulded string course is a fine slender brooch spire (covered in shingles) which is perhaps contemporary with the tower. All the masonry of the tower is roughly coursed local sandstone, with slightly harder, and better cut, side alternate quoins. The lancet window on the south side of the tower at ground level is entirely 19th century Bath-stone. Inside the tower, on the north side, a steep wooden block stair leads up to the belfry.

In 1465, Sir Geoffrey Bullen, who owned the manor of Hever, was able to found a chantry. The north-east chapel, however, seems to have been built sometime after this, perhaps in the very early 16th century. It connects with the chancel by two very depressed four-centred arches (there is another into the north aisle), and on the north it has diagonal buttresses and a contemporary fireplace (reopened in 1987). There is also a small doorway in the north-west corner with a square hood-mould over it. The three-light east window is in a later Perpendicular style. Under the eastern arch between the chapel and chancel is the very worn Purbeck marble tomb-chest of Sir Thomas Bullen, which stands on the old (lower) floor level. The chapel is covered by a slightly strange 'four-canted' purlin roof.

The one other late 15th/16th century addition was the small stair on the south-east side of the nave for the rood-loft. It still has its original wooden door into it (and the staircase and doorway above). Externally there is a slight projection in the nave wall for the inserted stair, and it has a plinth at the base. The very fine flattened barrel-vaulted roof in the nave is probably also of the same date (c. 1500). It has small crown-posts at either end and a collar purlin. A single-light window, with four-centred head, was inserted into the south-east side of the chancel at about the same time.

Only the pulpit, with tester dated 1621, survives from the early post-Reformation fittings, though there are also some early chests in the Bullen chapel, and part of a wall inscription on the south wall of the nave.

The main restoration came in 1894, when the church was completely re-fitted. The match-board chancel ceiling and the font are also of this date. Reglazing of windows, and other additional furnishings (including pictures) have followed on from this. The chancel and north chapel floors were also raised at this time, and the south porch was also built, as was a small heating chamber north-west of the Bullen chapel. BUILDING MATERIALS (Incl. old plaster, paintings, glass, tiles etc.): The main building stone is Tunbridge Wells sandstone, used both for rubble work and dressings. A little Reigate stone can also be seen in the south-east window of the chancel. Restoration in Bath-stone as well as Tunbridge Wells sandstone.

2.1 Listing²

Entry Name: Church of St Peter
Source ID: 1258341
Civil Parish: Hever
C of E Diocese: Rochester

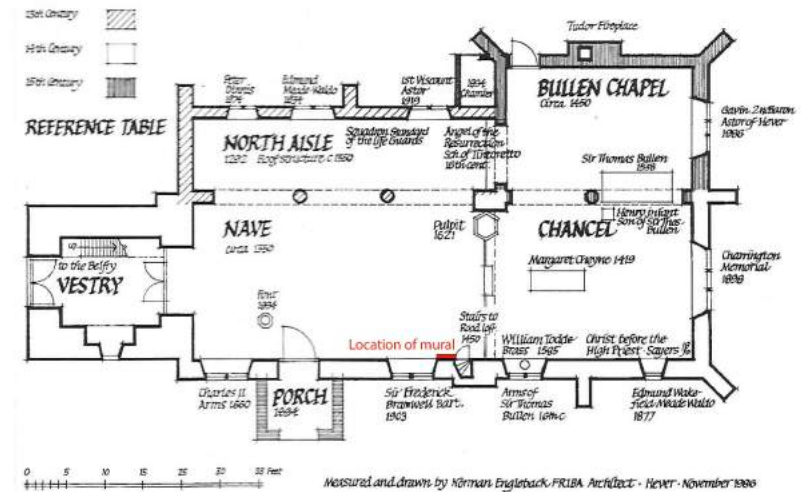
Listing Date: 16 January 1975
English Heritage Legacy ID: 444818
Traditional County: Kent
C of E Parish: Hever

Grade: I
Location: Hever Road, Hever TN8 7NH
Lieutenancy Area: Kent
Archdeaconry: Tonbridge

Source: Historic England
County: Kent
District: Sevenoaks
Church Code: 631234

Listing Text

TQ 44 SE HEVER 53/514 Church of St Peter GV I Church. Late C13 (c.1292) north aisle; early C14 chancel, nave and tower with C15 alterations; Bullen Chapel of c.1450 to north of chancel. Roughly coursed rubble with ashlar dressings; gabled plain tile roofs and tall splay-footed shingled spire. Chancel with north chapel and nave with north aisle and west tower. Chancel has diagonal corner buttress and offset buttresses, C15 Perpendicular 3-light east window and, to south, a lancet window with C15 arched head and an early C14 two-light window. Bullen Chapel, with diagonal corner buttresses, has hood mould over C15 three-light east window with cinquefoiled heads and label mould over 4-centred arched doorway with sunk spandrels adjoining lateral north stack with octagonal ashlar shaft. North aisle, with offset buttresses, has hood moulds over two C14 cinquefoil-headed 2-light windows, label mould over square-headed C14 two-light window with trefoiled ogee heads and a trefoil-headed light. South wall of nave has roof-stair projection to east, and hood moulds over C15 segmental-arched and trefoil-headed 2-light window and (to west) a similar transomed window flanking gabled south porch of 1894 set in front of C14 plank door with iron strap hinges and knocker set in 2-centred arch of 2



² <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1258341>

hollow- chamfered orders. C14 two-stage tower has C15 Perpendicular 2-light window above hood mould over 2-centred arched doorway of 2 chamfered orders; upper stage has chamfered lancets above trefoil-headed lancets. Interior: chancel has two C14 carved head corbels beneath roof hidden by mid/late C19 soffit boarding and with two brattished cross beams; mid C15 two-bay arcade to Bullen Chapel with 4-centred arches of two chamfered orders set on octagonal and engaged piers with moulded capitals. Bullen Chapel has similar arch to north aisle, piscina to east, C15 fireplace with sunk spandrels and hollow-moulded architrave, and mid/late C19 soffit boarding to canted roof. Nave has C14 plank door with strap hinges set in rebated pointed arch to rood stairs, C15 arch-braced common-rafter roof with moulded ashlar plates, moulded cross-beam and mid/late C19 collar purlin and late C16 texts on south wall. Late C13 three- bay north arcade with 2-centred arches of 2 chamfered orders set on circular piers with moulded capitals. North aisle has C14 common-rafter roof with soulace pieces and moulded ashlar plates. Fittings: late C19 reredos, choir stalls screen and pews; late C16 altar (formerly manifold chest) with fluted Ionic columns and carved Renaissance decoration; early C17 (dated 1621) pulpit with strapwork panels, guilloche carving to muntins and rails, late C19 top-rail and base and C17 tester; font has C14 octagonal bowl set on mid/late C19 base surrounded by reset C14/15 tiles. Monuments: chancel has fine brass to William Todde, d. 1585, with kneeling figure at desk, fine brass with recumbent effigy flanked by angels to Margaret Cheyne, d. 1419, and early C16 floor tablet with brass cross to Henry, infant son of Sir Thomas Bullen. Bullen Chapel has exceptionally fine brass with recumbent effigies to Sir Thomas Bullen, d. 1538, and wife set on tomb chest with crocketed ogee panels divided by pilasters to sides and with heraldic shield set in quatrefoil to end; slate floor slab to Robert Humphreys d. 1736, two mid C19 wall tablets to Members of Mead- Waldo family, stele with urn to Colonel Rochfort d. 1856, Neo-classical wall monument with Grecian Mourner and urn to Harriet Bloomfield d. 1838, and plain tablet to Janes Johnstone d. 1846. Stained glass: mostly C19 and C20, including east window of 1898; Royal Arms of 1660 in south west window; south chancel window of 1858. (Buildings of England: West Kent and The Weald, p.322).

1. HEVER Church of St Peter 5280 TQ 44 SE 53/514 10.9.54. B 2. Nave, chancel, North aisle and chapel, West tower, with tall, shingled spire. Roughly coursed rubble, freestone dressings. Plastered interior. Norman South nave wall, C13 arcade, of 3 bays. North aisle windows mostly late Perpendicular. Wide 2-bay chancel, also Perpendicular. Modern wrought-iron screen. C17 pulpit. Fragments of wall-painting with lettering. Several brasses including a large one to Sir Thomas Bullen, d.1538, the father of Anne Boleyn, resting on a decayed tomb chest. Modern wood South porch. Listing NGR: TQ4733844421

3.0 The Wall Painting

On the south wall of the nave adjacent to the stairs which originally led to the rood are the remains of a Biblical text probably of late 16th or early 17th century date. The text, painted a *secco*³ comprises black lettering painted onto a plain white limewash ground, the coarse brushstrokes clearly visible in the lime ground. The painting is itself painted over a number of earlier schemes. Beneath the text are at least two layers of limewash over the lime plaster support which covers the rubble wall construction.

³ (a *secco* – dry in Italian) meaning a system of painting onto a dry limewash or lime plaster surface with pigments that have been mixed with an additional binding medium such as gum, glue, casein, etc. as opposed to a *fresco* where the painting is executed onto a fresh lime plaster and become bound by the lime as the plaster dries out.

Before the church was restored in 1894 the pulpit stood on the south side of the nave. The fine hexagonal Jacobean pulpit, now located on the north side of the nave, bears the inscription "Fear God, Honer the Kg. Anthony Brooker Henry Lottenden Churchwardens 1621". John Eastman's guide to the church written in 1905 states:

*"When the pulpit was removed there was discovered some 16th century writing, containing the words
...shall not live...
...these abominations...
...by death...
...prepare..."*

This was probably the work of Nicholas Heath rector 1531, possibly his own translation of a passage from Holy Writ"

These words are to be found in a passage from Ezekiel 18:13. The dating is unclear as only fragments of the text are visible, but the wording does not appear to match early Bibles printed in English around the middle of the 16th century. The five lines of the text which survive (missing text shown in brackets) appear to be nearer to the text of the King James Bible of 1611:

[Hath given] forth upon [usury, and
hath ta]ken increase: [shall he then live?
he sh]all not live: he [hath done all
t]hese abominations; [he shall surely die
by death; his blood shall be upon him]

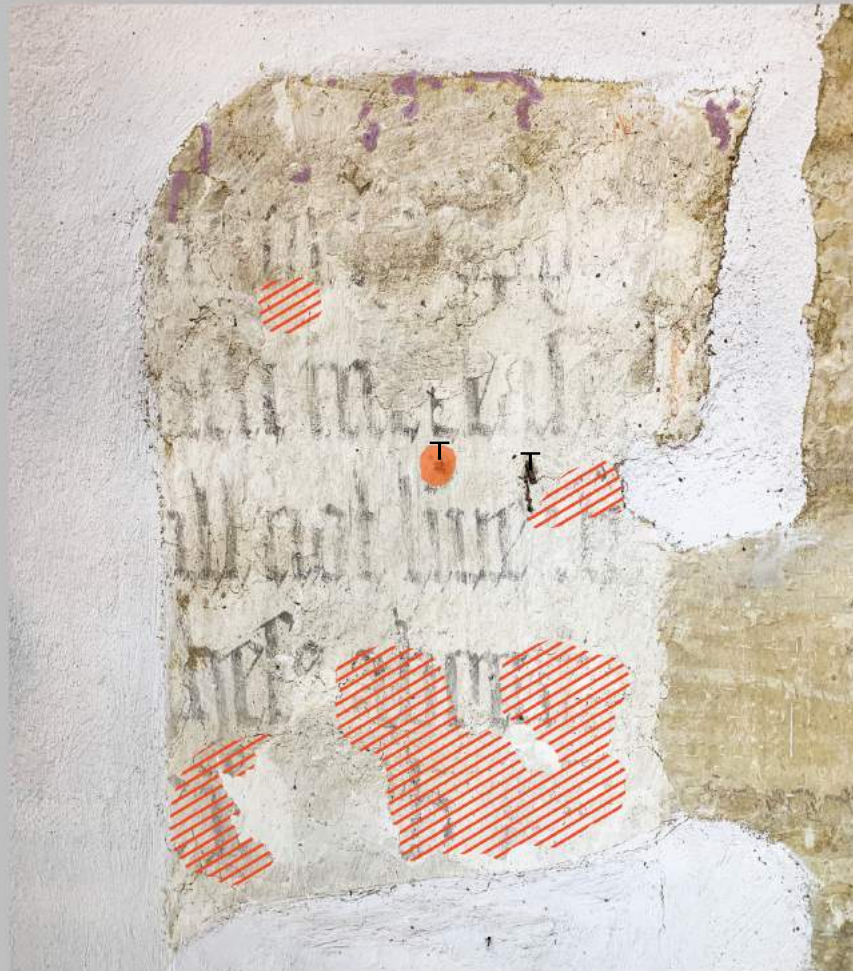




4.0 Condition

The surviving fragment of wall painting appeared to be in a relatively stable condition in most areas but there were a few areas of concern, most notably within the lower third, particularly on the lower left where it was evident that there had been some recent loss both of the limewash layer and the text – see *Condition Record on page 7*. The text was covered by accumulated dust and dirt and there were localised areas of plaster on the surface of the lettering. This is probably residual lime plaster from the 19th century restoration and extensive replastering of the interior. The black paint layer appeared to be only weakly bound and was rather powdery in places. The causes of the localised flaking and recent losses were not immediately apparent – i.e. there was no simple identifiable cause such as water infiltration – but were rather more likely to be the result of long-term issues. There is no evidence of any previous restoration work to the mural and it may be that the limewash layers have been in a weakened condition since the time that they were discovered behind the Jacobean pulpit in 1894.

The building envelope appeared to provide adequate protection against the external climate and environmental conditions are thought to be relatively stable. There is no active system for environmental control so it is likely that whilst the medieval wall structures provide a buffer to some degree conditions within the church will be affected by environmental conditions externally. There were no signs of direct water infiltration in the area of the murals. The church is unheated for most of the time and when heating is introduced it is only for short periods, during services for example.



CONDITION SURVEY				
St Peter's Church, Hever, Kent North wall mural - 8 June 2021 Survey carried out by Tom Organ & Rita Radovanovich T 01795 538750 M 07770 722201 E thomasorgan@me.com				
Foreign material on surface Drip marks (water) Micro-biological growth Iron fixings - nails, etc Area of detached limewash	 	Flaking paint Powdering paint Hollow but stable plaster Areas of plaster requiring grouting Loss of original plaster layer	 Recent paint losses Old lime plaster repairs Old cementitious plaster repairs Cracks requiring plaster repairs Surface accretions (plaster smears)	
Arte CONSERVATION				

5.0 Conservation Treatment

The wall painting appeared to be fairly stable in most areas, but there were notable areas of concern with localised delamination of the limewash layers and recent losses. The Parish are in the process of redecorating the interior of the church with limewash and it was therefore recommended that stabilisation and conservation work be completed before the work commenced.

The conservation of the wall paintings was carried out using well-established conservation techniques. The materials and techniques used were as follows, in no particular order:

- 5.1 Assessment Prior to treatment we took the opportunity to carry out a more detailed assessment of the nature, extent and causes of deterioration. This was combined with a photographic and graphic condition survey of the work of art, which provided baseline information on the condition of the painting prior to the conservation work.
- 5.2 Surface cleaning Superficial cleaning of the painted surfaces was carried out in order to remove the accumulation of dust, dirt, salty debris and cobwebs using very fine haired soft brushes to carefully and gently lift dirt, etc. towards a Museum Vac® adjustable vacuum cleaner. Some additional cleaning was achieved during the process of stabilising the paint and the subsequent clearing of residues with deionised water. After stabilisation of weak areas further cleaning was achieved using a dilute ammonium bicarbonate⁴ solution (5% in deionised water) to remove ingrained dirt.
- 5.3 Paint Consolidation Powdering paint was consolidated using a low percentage of Lascaux MFC (5% in deionised water) applied with a brush, through an intervention layer of L2⁵ tissue.
- 5.4 Flake Fixing Areas of flaking paint were fixed using a solution of Lascaux MFC (10% in deionised water) injected behind the flakes. In areas where the limewash layers are lifting it may be possible or more appropriate to re-adhere these using injections of dilute lime slurry between the layers.

⁴ Ammonium bicarbonate has been used in wall painting conservation for many years as a reagent for the cleaning of stubborn surface deposits.

⁵ Acid free L2 lens tissue (formerly Eltoline tissue) available from Conservation Resources, UK

- 5.5 Temporary facing It was necessary to apply a temporary stabilisation layer to areas of the painting found to be at immediate risk of loss. These were faced up using an application of acid-free L2 tissue⁶ adhered with a reversible Tylose MH300⁷ adhesive. After fixing the detaching limewash layers the temporary facing tissue was safely removed to allow further cleaning and conservation work to be completed.
- 5.6 Grouting Localised areas of hollow, delaminated plaster were stabilised where necessary using injections of PLM-A⁸ a lime-based grout.
- 5.7 Plaster Consolidation No plaster consolidation was required.
- 5.8 Plaster Repair Small plaster repairs were carried out to secure loose edges and losses using a lime : sand mortar chosen to match the colour and texture of the existing plaster. Plaster repairs provide a simple way of monitoring for future movement – if the repair cracks or opens up movement is occurring. Localised plaster repairs and limewashing of these repairs helps both to stabilise the original materials and aid legibility.
- 5.9 Retouching Localised integration of the losses within the paint and limewash layer was carried out using neutral watercolour washes to facilitate future monitoring and condition assessment. Limited to light toning of losses, repairs, etc. the application of a watercolour wash is effective in reducing the visually distracting effect of losses without carrying out actual reconstruction of the painting. The recent losses were visible as small whitish spots and by integrating these with the general background colour any new losses will be easily visible, thereby allowing a simple method of monitoring for signs of on-going deterioration in future.
- 5.10 Future Monitoring: It is not currently envisaged that regular post-conservation monitoring and/or maintenance visits will be required to be carried out by the conservator in the long-term.

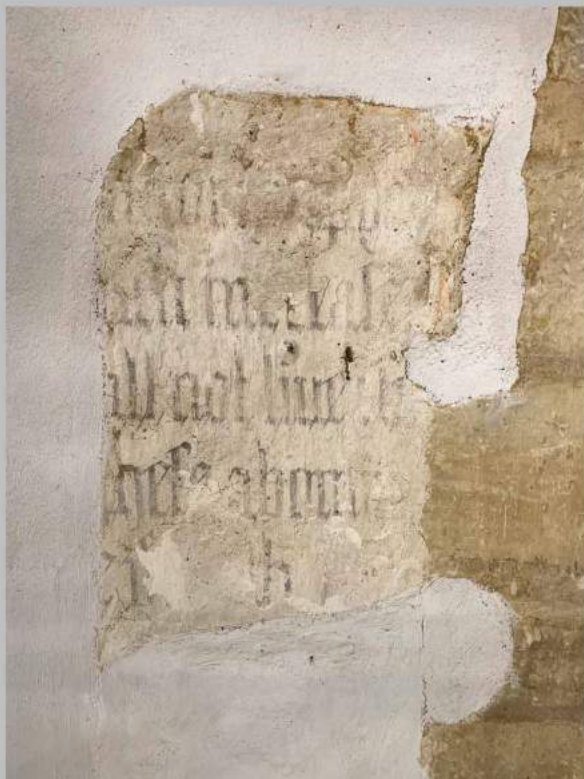
Tom Organ ACR

30 June 2021

⁶ Acid free L2 lens tissue (formerly Eltoline tissue) available from Conservation Resources, UK

⁷ Tylose is a cellulose-based water soluble adhesive Methyl hydroxyl ethyl cellulose chemically neutral and reversible with very good resistance to biological and chemical decomposition - available from Kremer, Germany

⁸ PLM-A injection mortar is a mixture of neutral lime and selected inert additives, free of soluble salts, used for the grouting and stabilisation of wall paintings



Plates 1-3 - 17th century Biblical Text *(from left to right)*

The condition of the mural prior to treatment

Recent losses to the lower left side

A heavy accumulation of dust and dirt on the upper parts
and an old nail

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Plates 4-6 - 17th century Biblical Text (*from left to right*)

Detail showing the recent limewash loss on the lower left side

Areas of 19th century plaster smeared on the text

The heavy accumulation of dust, dirt and cobwebs

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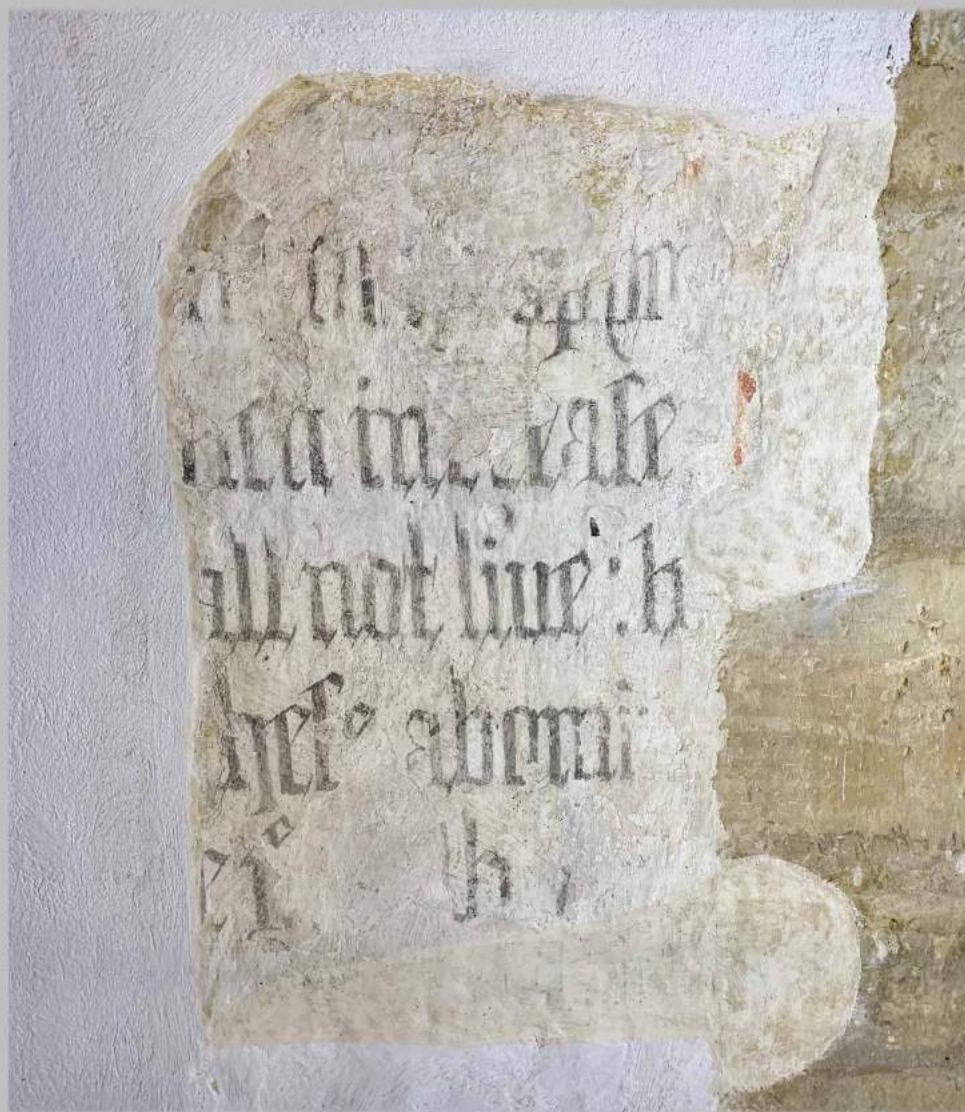


Plate 7 - 17th century Biblical Text from Ezekiel 18:13

The mural fragment after cleaning and conservattin



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