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ST LAURENCE CHURCH, EAST HARPTREE, SOMERSET

SURVEY OF THE PAINT AND PLASTER
AT THE WEST END OF THE NORTH AISLE

FEBRUARY 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The PCC of St Laurence Church intend to create a display area for some historic stones discovered during ‘Project Newton’ (repair and Conservation of the building in 2022). Somerset DAC recommended that the Church confirm the absence of decorative paint before proceeding. The architect, Tom Griffin commissioned McNeillage Conservation to examine these walls to assess the stratigraphy and characteristics of the paint and plaster on these walls.

This brief report concerns the results of this examination.

2. HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION

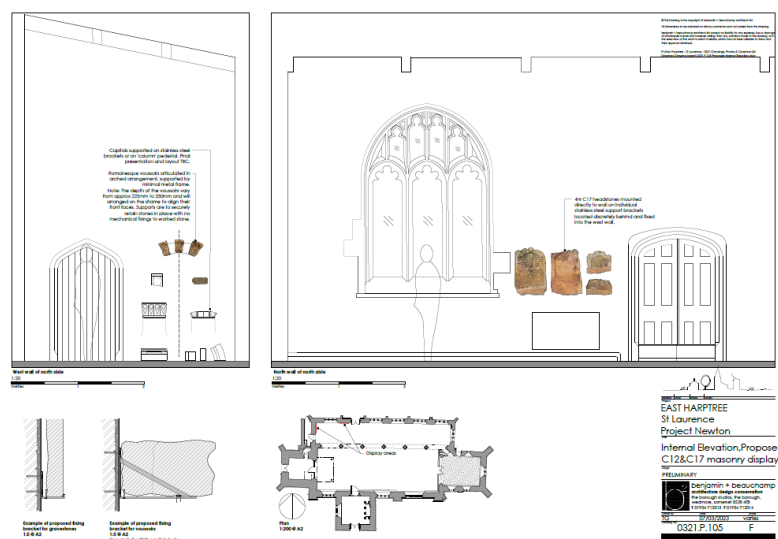
The original church dates from the late 12th century. The chancel retains some of the 13th century building and the west tower was built in the C15th century. The nave and north aisle are both thought to date from the 15th century (*The Buildings of England. Somerset: North and Bristol. Foyle and Pevsner 1994*).

The church was restored in 1882 – 83 under G E Street. Street died in 1881 but his plans for the church had been produced in 1870 (*East Harptree: the archaeology of the standing Fabric*. Jerry Sampson, Caroe and Partners 2005).

The tower and south porch are constructed of coursed sandstone and limestone rubble and squared and coursed rubble stone were used for the nave and chancel. The nave roof is covered with concrete tiles and the chancel is covered with slate.

2. SURVEY

Plan provided by B2 architects showing areas where fixings are to be made in the plaster.



In 2019 paint samples taken from the south walls of the nave revealed that only twentieth century paints that contained zinc white existed on the surface.

The plaster in the nave had a smooth finish with a buff colour. It is thought that this was intentionally left unpainted. A similar smooth unpainted plaster was used on the east wall of the chancel below the wall painting. Records from the 1880's record most of the medieval plaster being removed and replaced with lime plaster (*J. Sampson.2005*)

The recent uncovering trials undertaken on the north and west wall revealed that the north wall in the north aisle had clearly been replastered in the 20th century with a soft grey plaster. In many areas the wall sounded hollow when tapped, indicating that this plaster had lost adhesion. In one area where there was a small depression the removal of the most recent emulsion layer revealed that the grey paint was powdering behind the surface.

The stratigraphy of the plaster and paint layers on this surface are: -

Plaster layers

1. *Buff coloured plaster (seen through an area of loss)*
2. *Grey modern plaster*

Paint layers

1. *Twentieth century dull green layer (also found in the nave).*
2. *Pinkish emulsion layer (in some areas)*
3. *Two layers of white emulsion*

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The results of the investigation have shown that the north wall of the north aisle was replastered in the twentieth century. Without removing this plaster, it is not clear exactly what is beneath. However, judging from the 19th century recording of the work undertaken in the 1880's it seems extremely unlikely that there would be anything that predates that work. It also seems fairly evident from old photographs and analysis of layers found that the walls of the nave and north aisle were left unpainted in 1880.



Plate 1

Early photograph showing the nave with the original scheme in the chancel.

Plate 2

Photograph showing the paint layers revealed in the nave in 2019. The paint layers are the same as those found in the north aisle. A dirt layer was found beneath the earliest 20th century paint layer indicating that the 19th century plaster had been left unpainted.

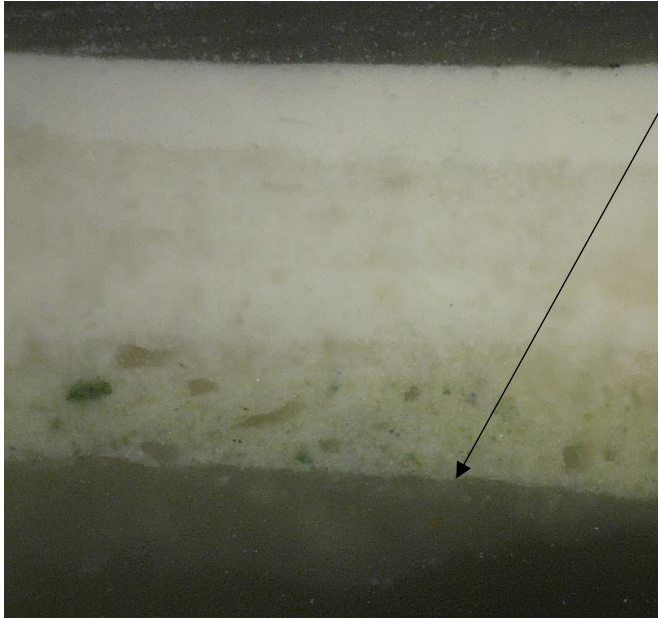


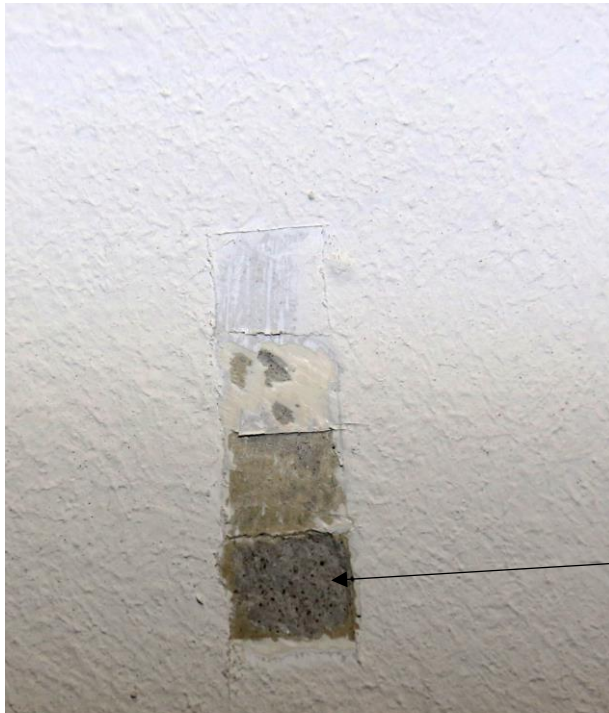
Plate 3

View showing the area on the north wall where the wall was examined.



Plate 4

Detail of the paint uncovering trials.



Grey plaster

Plate 5

Detail showing a lacuna in the grey plaster that is crumbling, exposing an earlier buff coloured plaster beneath.



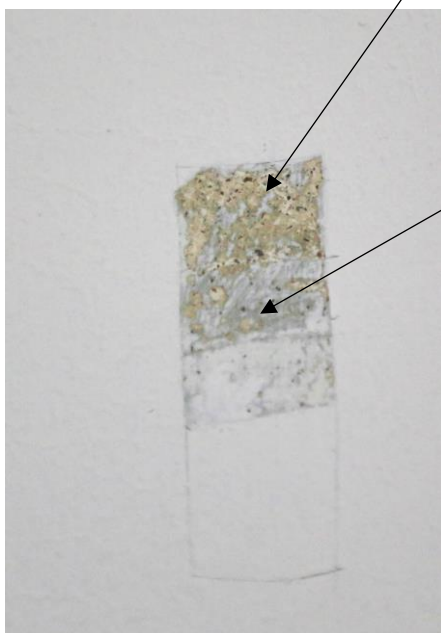
Plate 6.

View showing area of west wall that was examined.



Plate 7

Detail showing the results of the uncovering trials on the west wall. This wall was not replastered with the grey plaster in the 20th century. The plaster beneath the grey paint is the same as that found in the nave.



Green layer beneath the white emulsion.

Plate 8

Area at east end of north wall where the later grey plaster has been exposed by historic water ingress.



Plate 9.

19th century smooth finish plaster exposed on the south wall of the nave.

