



Historic England

The production of wall painting conservation documents



On 1st April 2015 the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England changed its common name from English Heritage to Historic England. We are now re-branding all our documents.

Although this document refers to English Heritage, it is still the Commission's current advice and guidance and will in due course be re-branded as Historic England.

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The production of wall painting conservation documents

Practical Information Leaflet



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Context and purpose

There is an increasing awareness and demand within the conservation field for the production of conservation proposals and reports as essential components of any project. Beyond their primary roles as defined by the client, these documents may also be required for applications for Faculties or Listed Building Consent, for grant applications, tenders for conservation work, as records for longer-term conservation management and maintenance, and as historical archives.

This *Practical Information Leaflet* is intended as a guide for the organisation and production of proposals and reports required for wall painting conservation.

Within this leaflet, English Heritage aims both to simplify and to clarify the contents and structure of wall painting conservation documents. The material presented is deliberately intended to encourage substance over style or gloss, and should aid in the generation of clear and consistent reports which can be effective and useful to conservators, owners, clients, regulatory authorities and funding bodies.

English Heritage has prepared this leaflet as the first of a series of practical guides, aimed at clarifying different aspects of the conservation process and improving standards within the practice of wall painting conservation.

English Heritage strongly encourages the use of accredited conservators who have obtained professional recognition through the Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR) scheme. Within the United Kingdom, this scheme is operated through the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC), the Institute for Paper Conservation (IPC), and the Society of Archivists (SoA), and is overseen by the National Council for Conservation-Restoration (NCCR).

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Using this leaflet

Definitions

Currently, there is still a wide variation in the organisation and content of conservation documents, deriving from both those commissioning, and those producing them. This has in many cases resulted in confusion or delay in the granting of Listed Building Consent, a Faculty or other ecclesiastical procedure, the assessment and awarding of contracts, the development of conservation strategies, or the appropriate provision of funding.

Documents serving many different purposes may be required for any wall painting conservation project, and their contents should reflect the specific overall aims and objectives. While the material presented here can be applied to the preparation of most conservation documents, this leaflet identifies two main types: the *conservation proposal* and the *conservation report*.

Conservation proposal

Often referred to as the *preliminary proposal*, this term refers to any document written in anticipation of a potential conservation project. It may support a grant application, incorporate a condition survey, or give advice in response to a client's request on the determination of current or long-term conservation requirements. Consistency in the structure and presentation is essential, as in many cases this can simplify comparison of material when submitted as part of a competitive tendering exercise.

Conservation report

This document aims to record any direct or passive involvement by a conservator on a given project. It should state the reasons why a project was undertaken, the methods and approaches employed, and should include all the records of the interventions carried out.

The production of a conservation proposal or report requires an initial and careful assessment based on the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this document, and what is expected of it?
- Who are the intended readers, and how will they use it?
- What information is required to make this document clear and useful?
- What format should be used to make it both concise and consistent with similar documents?
- What are the available resources, including time and associated funds?

Structure

An outline structure may be helpful in the development of a systematic approach to the production of all conservation documents.

Initially, a list should be compiled of the key subject areas necessary to present the information.

Within each subject area, the various sub-headings needed should be entered and linked in a clear and logical sequence.

Unnecessary work can be greatly reduced if the prepared outline is then carefully reviewed for areas omitted, lost, or likely to be duplicated.

The main section of this leaflet, *Components of wall painting conservation documents*, has been organised under a series of major headings, which can be seen to form the basic framework or outline for the majority of conservation documents. Each contains brief descriptions of the material one would expect to find under each heading. Additional sub-headings are also shown, with definitions, specific types and levels of information expected, suggested methods of presentation, and specific issues relating to the conservation proposal and conservation report.

This structure is not intended to be definitive, and will need updating in association with developments in the field. It is intended that the information should provide assistance in the development of clear, concise, and well constructed conservation documents.

General guidance

In any conservation project, it is most important that all parties involved communicate with and understand one another throughout. The documents needed are of most use when a dialogue among those involved (clients, conservators, architects, engineers, and other specialists) is initiated in the earliest stages of the project. This will allow for the sharing of information, and will prevent individuals from undertaking work in isolation or ignorance.

Text

Once the sequence and contents are determined, most conservation documents present substantial textual information. For this to be of use to everyone involved in the project, clarity is essential. The implementation of a numbering system can allow for clear and direct references to individual sections of the document, reducing the risks of ambiguity or misunderstanding.

All conservation documents must be typewritten and paginated. Technical terms should be clearly explained. In certain cases, a glossary of terms (such as definitions of specific techniques or foreign terms) can be useful.

Illustrations, plans, charts and tables

Every image used should be clearly identified and described with a caption showing the date of the photograph or other artwork, and the image credit. The caption should also state clearly any points of detail that the image is meant to show.

It is important that all illustrations are numbered in a continuous undifferentiated sequence, as this can allow them to be referenced as needed within the main document. In large and complex documents, it can be helpful to include a list of all images at the beginning.

Documentation

The term **documentation** encompasses all those aspects of the project which involve some form of annotated recording. This can include historic images or records, photography, the condition survey record, and the record of any conservation interventions, and may be useful in a number of different areas within a document. Inclusion of this material in conservation documents is essential for the future management and conservation of the wall paintings.

Photographic records

Photographic illustrations are useful for most components of a conservation document. In addition, specific aspects of any conservation project will require some form of visual, often photographic, recording. Like the illustrations described above, captions and credits for all photographs should be provided. If additional photographic records are produced, they should be listed, including access or storage information.

The issues associated with conservation photography – such as film format, set-up, lighting, use of colour bars or greyscales – fall outside the scope of this leaflet; however, it is important that there is agreement amongst the parties involved regarding the inclusion of photographic records, and their presentation within any conservation document.

Components of wall painting conservation documents

Introduction

This should include important introductory matters such as an outline of the reasons for the project, the significance of the site, and the relevant people involved.

Summary

This should provide an abstract of the major details presented; it should include the relevant dates of involvement. The summary should appear on the first page of the document, and be worded in such a way that it draws attention to the key pieces of information within.

Conservation proposal

Within this, a summary of the intended conservation measures should be included, with an indication of their relative priority.

Conservation report

This should identify all interventions, both passive and direct, made during the project, and should state whether these have addressed all previously agreed works, or if they form part of a staged or phased programme. If any further recommendations have been made, these should also be listed within the report.

Brief

This should set the context in which the project has been undertaken, clearly identifying the aims and objectives as set out and agreed with the client(s). Information could include:

- client and funding details, and the circumstances which gave rise to this project
- dates of contact, visits to site and date of final document submission
- the number of copies and a list of recipients
- list of any associated documents or material used for the preparation of the document, or meant to be read as an attachment or appendix
- any associated reference numbers (such as those used for project correspondence)

Management

Often omitted from conservation documents, a breakdown of the people involved can be invaluable in clarifying the organisation and management of any project. This list should include the following people with their specific role and contact details:

- the author(s) of the document
- the building owner or the individual or group responsible for its care
- the architect, surveyor and/or engineer
- the project manager
- the conservation team and their individual roles (eg senior conservator, site manager, conservation assistants, and documentation specialist)
- any specialist consultants proposed or employed for the project

Description and history

This section should contain both a general description and as much relevant historical information as can be assembled concerning the site, the wall paintings and previous conservation treatment, the aim being to compile a clear picture of the historic events affecting the site and the wall paintings. If sufficiently comprehensive material has already been published, it may be prudent to present a brief summary of the key pertinent material, with a clear citation of the reference sources.

Site and/or building

Every document should be prefaced by a brief description of the site, including the location, type of building, its date of construction, all phases of change or alteration, and its architectural importance (including Listed Building status). As a minimum, the document should contain a building and site plan, with the locations of the wall paintings clearly marked. Early contact with the architect responsible for the project can often provide access to existing graphic documents, as well as information on the building's history. There should also be a summary of the historical use of the building, including periods of disuse or neglect, catastrophic events, etc. This sort of information is often most clearly presented in tables or charts, which can allow for the highlighting or linking of key events. All documentary sources should be clearly referenced.

Wall paintings

A description and history of the wall paintings should be included in order to clarify their extent and significance. The subject matter, if known, should be discussed, and comparative material can often be useful in placing the wall paintings within a wider national or even international context.

In complicated buildings, or in cases where there are multiple rooms or historic painting schemes, the paintings should be divided into their relevant groups (by date, location or subject), and their locations made clear. Use of photographs, existing drawn elevations and plans, or sketch plans (however simple), will greatly assist the pin-pointing and referencing of particular areas of paintings; any textual reference system should be defined and used consistently throughout the document.

Conservation history

In order to establish an informed assessment of a wall painting's condition, it is important to identify all previous interventions. While this material is essential to the preparation of conservation proposals, it is equally important that a summary is incorporated into the conservation report.

Past conservation may not have been recorded; however, the conservator should attempt to establish the types of treatment likely to have been carried out and the materials used. Typically this information should include:

- dates of previous interventions and their aims
- the conservators or other persons involved
- the materials employed and the areas treated
- any references to historic documentation

The use of tables can greatly simplify the compilation and presentation of this information, and tables can be used also to highlight related building works, as well as to set out the implications for future conservation.

Technical examination

An understanding of original materials and techniques, their deterioration and the addition of non-original substances are all necessary prerequisites of conservation work. In many instances, specific technical examinations or analysis may require the involvement of highly specialised procedures undertaken by the relevant specialist.

Original materials and techniques

All available information on the original painting techniques should be presented, or fully referenced, eg evidence of preparatory techniques, the type of pigments and/or media employed, the method of application, or the presence of attachments (metal or stucco fixtures within the painting). This may often be based solely on visual observation and experience. In certain special cases, it may be necessary to investigate further in order to establish definitively the original technique of a painting. This work would need to be undertaken by a specialist trained in carrying out the relevant analysis and able to produce a report to a high standard.

Presentation of evidence regarding original techniques and materials could include documentary material, comparative schemes, or illustrations of direct visible evidence. Where analysis has been undertaken, it is vital to present:

- the strategy for sampling and its aims
- the individual sample areas
- the analytical equipment and methods used (and its operator(s))
- a clear list of findings

Conservation proposal

This should identify whether or not further investigations are deemed necessary, especially if the proposed conservation treatment could adversely affect the original materials of the painting.

Conservation report

This should present any findings made during the project, including any technical investigations undertaken by specialist consultants (included within the document as an appendix). It is essential that the authorship of any interpretation of the analysis be clearly stated.

Added and altered materials

Any non-original materials observed on wall paintings, such as 'preservative' coatings or salt efflorescence should be identified – if and where possible – and their distribution recorded. In addition, there may have been alterations to the original materials, for example the conversion of lead-based pigments. The affected areas should be identified and recorded, and analysis may be necessary, as in the case of the original materials, to ascertain the specific materials involved.

Condition recording

Essential as both a permanent record, and a means of assessing conservation requirements, the presentation of the condition of the wall paintings – and the building which contains them – forms the fundamental component of most conservation proposals and reports. It is important that records of current condition are objective, and consistent, using clearly defined parameters.

Condition survey records

In addition to textual descriptions, condition documentation provides the clearest representation of the types, and distribution, of the various deterioration phenomena. Condition records can be presented in various ways, using both graphic and photographic methods. Examples include:

- graphic overlays on photographs
- annotated drawings, produced manually or using computer graphics programs and applied onto line drawings or digitised images

Determination of the scale used for the documentation, and the level of detail required should reflect the agreed project brief, and the specific nature of the site. The preparation of baseline images or drawings at the appropriate scale for the project can be extremely useful for all site-related recording, from pre-treatment condition to the areas treated during conservation (see below).

Condition recording can range from the identification of general patterns of deterioration, to the detailed recording of specific instances of damage or decay. Regardless of the scale or extent of the recording, it is essential that the information is presented in a consistent and clear manner, and the chosen approach is defined and justified.

The building

For developing a comprehensive overview of the site and the building fabric, consultation with other specialist disciplines is necessary, for example, with architects, surveyors, or engineers. A review by the wall painting conservator should be made of the information gathered from these sources about the structural envelope and its impact on the wall paintings. This could include aspects such as drainage, structural movement, or the physical layout of the building.

Wall paintings

Recording the condition of a wall painting provides the basic framework within which future conservation decisions can be made. Normally referred to as a condition survey, this material may be the primary objective of a conservation project, used to formulate conservation proposals, or undertaken to provide detailed records within a larger conservation report.

The condition survey must be an objective record, and should provide all the necessary information to enable areas of risk or concern to be identified. Presentation of the condition survey can comprise any combination of text, graphics, and photographs. This information must be detailed enough for clarity: one of the simplest ways to achieve this is using some form of graphic presentation (see General guidance).

The various types of deterioration phenomena observed, eg visible salts, flaking paint, or delaminated plaster, must be fully described. Technical terms used must be explained. Where descriptions seem inadequate, a 'visual glossary' can be useful: this consists of same-scale photographs of characteristic areas representing each of the observed deterioration phenomena. The 'visual glossary' may be presented within the text of the document, or as part of its documentation.

Assessment

Environmental assessment

The general environmental conditions must be assessed. Current and historic services should be identified, including drainage, heating and ventilation, and any previous environmental monitoring should be included or referenced.

Conservation proposal

The extent of any preliminary examination or assessment must be clearly stated within the proposal. If the assessment was based on a single site visit, the conditions during examination must be described, and any visible phenomena recorded (such as infiltration or condensation, areas of salt efflorescence, or staining). The proposal should make reference to any existing environmental reports, and a clearly defined strategy for any proposed investigations, including its impact on the programme of works.

Conservation report

This should include a general description of the environmental conditions during the period of the project, and any effects they may have had on the conservation. All environmental investigations undertaken, such as liquid moisture surveys or monitoring, must be presented including all available data, and recommendations for any further action.

Deterioration and damage

This section should allow the author an opportunity to assess critically and interpret the material collected and presented within the document, and in particular the condition survey, and to offer a determination of the various factors responsible for the current condition, and the causes of any active deterioration. This may form part of the basis for the conservation proposals, or may act to record findings during the conservation project that affected treatment decisions and forward conservation recommendations.

The assessment should include the identification of particular patterns of decay, the extent to which various areas may be in need of treatment, and the severity of any problems. Within this assessment, attention should be drawn to those aspects posing the most risk to the wall paintings. As part of this assessment, it is most important to determine whether or not deterioration is ongoing. In areas of active decay, the potential deterioration processes and their sources should be discussed and prioritised in relation to their impact on the preservation of the paintings. This can then inform decisions on the use of passive intervention to the environs of the wall paintings, and on what possible conservation interventions may need to be undertaken.

All presented material should include the basis on which opinions are made of the risk, severity of decay, rate of deterioration and the influencing factors. It is essential within this section that the author makes explicitly clear the basis on which his/her interpretation and professional opinions are presented, with all necessary references.

As part of the assessment of deterioration factors, specialist investigations such as detailed environmental surveys may be required, and while basic levels of information should be presented as part of any document, detailed reports should be undertaken by the relevant specialists.

Aesthetic considerations

For certain projects it is necessary to address issues relating to the intended aesthetic effect of the wall paintings and their surroundings, and the way in which these have changed or been affected by past or proposed conservation. It is vital that this takes into consideration the art historical significance and importance of the wall paintings, the way in which they are perceived today, the reasonable desires of the client, and most importantly, the needs of a materially deteriorating element of the building fabric.

Site presentation

Recommendations for alterations to the building or surrounding environment, such as the use of lighting, the decoration of surrounding walls, or the installation of interpretative material, may form part of a proposal, or may be developed over the course of a conservation project and presented as considerations for further works. It is essential that the conservator develop these in association with all interested parties, especially with the other building professionals involved in the project. Any such measures must be fully explained and justified, including a clear indication of any risks they may impose on the paintings or building fabric, and any long-term maintenance considerations.

Wall painting presentation

Visual presentation strategies for the surviving wall paintings must also be defined, and any interventions or changes justified as part of a proposal, or fully recorded as part of a conservation project. A clear statement of the overall approach should be made, and used to define the individual considerations, such as the treatment of old repairs, the reintegration of losses, and the reconstruction of missing areas. These interventions should be recorded in the same manner as any conservation treatment undertaken to the paintings.

Practical measures

Practical measures can be defined as the actions taken to address the conservation requirements of the project. These actions can be broadly divided into the following types, although they may address more than one:

- **Preventive** aimed at addressing potential causes of deterioration
eg developing site maintenance and management strategies, restricting access
- **Passive** aimed at preventing or mitigating the activation of deterioration agents
eg alterations to environmental conditions or building services
- **Remedial** implementing direct interventions to the wall paintings to remedy specific problems
- **Aesthetic** aimed at improving the visual appearance of the wall paintings and their surroundings
eg cleaning, re-integration, replacement of missing elements, decoration of adjacent surfaces

It is essential as part of any conservation document to distinguish between those actions which have been undertaken – such as those needed to prepare conservation proposals or those undertaken as part of the main project – and those actions that are being proposed or recommended for the future.

Site-related works

To provide a useful context, it is helpful to identify and summarise any works to the site which may impact on the condition or conservation of the wall paintings. Examples of such works include:

- repair of the building fabric, such as grouting, repointing, rendering, or redecoration both internally and externally
- building alterations
- works to rainwater disposal and drainage systems
- works to services, such as heating, electricity, or levels of ventilation

It is important to distinguish within the document those works that have been carried out, those proposed, and those recommended or identified during the project.

Testing and trials

Testing or trials of conservation materials and application methods may be undertaken as part of determining appropriate conservation proposals, or may form part of the conservation project, and should be fully presented with information including:

- selection criteria
- testing methods and materials
- areas tested, with before-and-after documentation

Trials to demonstrate the use of a particular technique, or its effect on different areas of the painting should be fully illustrated and explained, as well as the means by which the final choice was made.

Direct interventions

This section must provide details of on-site interventions by the conservator, clearly specifying whether they have been fully undertaken, or as part of proposals and/or recommendations. Conservation interventions should be described, justified, and itemised. Details of the methods and materials must be given, and in the case of reports any changes to previously agreed or presented proposals. All associated equipment should be identified, and a detailed list provided (at the end of the document), with information regarding their type, source, and any health and safety issues.

Conservation proposal

The proposed programme of conservation should be outlined according to a clearly defined sequence of works, broken down into phases if necessary. If separate phases are needed, these should be individually outlined with a time frame for each.

Should there be a number of potential approaches, these options should be ranked according to the professional judgement of the conservator on the basis of clearly defined criteria.

Conservation report

Specific information on the quantities, percentages, and the distribution of treatment should be included. Photographic or diagrammatic illustrations can assist in presenting the sequence of treatment, and demonstrate the way in which it was undertaken. The relative success of the intervention should be presented, and also an indication of the long-term effects on the wall painting.

Recording the intervention

Documentation of all interventions carried out during the conservation project must be included in the conservation report. Documentation methods can be similar to those of condition recording, where each intervention is clearly defined, and its distribution recorded graphically. Complicated processes can also be recorded using photographs to demonstrate each stage, and 'before', 'during', and 'after' images are extremely useful to present the impact of the treatment. These photographs must be taken under similar conditions (lighting, distance and magnification) to allow for meaningful comparison.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conservation proposal

This should provide a conclusion that outlines the position taken towards the project, including the particular approaches proposed and the identification of priorities including appropriate timetables. If the proposal has included alternative options, the implications of these should also be discussed.

Conservation report

This final section of the report should draw together the different strands of the project, together with an explanation of the conclusions or decisions reached. These need to reflect or address issues raised in the introductory sections of the document, illustrating whether or not fundamental questions have been answered, and identifying any additional investigations required. Depending on the extent of the completed conservation programme, there may be further points, or maintenance advice, which will need to be addressed in future, as well as recommendations for further works outside the initial remit. These recommendations should be listed in order of priority, and outlined with an appropriate time scale.

Acknowledgements

This Practical Information Leaflet has been prepared by English Heritage following extensive consultation with practising wall painting conservators, and with institutional bodies including the Council for the Care of Churches, the National Trust, and United Kingdom Institute for Conservation. We are grateful for all those who took the time to review the drafts and submit their comments. Moreover, we would like to encourage continued feedback to ensure that the practicality of these working guides is reflected in future revisions.

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