

# The Landmark Trust

## CALVERLEY OLD HALL

### The Painted Chamber:

Guidance for Use,  
Historical Background  
& Conservation



**Compiled by Caroline Stanford**

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## **BASIC DETAILS – PAINTED CHAMBER**

### **Built**

**Parlour Block structure**                      **1513-39, (timber felling range)**  
**Painted scheme & GF ceiling**            **1547-65 (                      "                      )**

**Consultant**                      **Tobit Curteis, Cambridge.**

**Conservators**                      **Lizzie Woolley & Sam Whittaker and the Opus Conservation team.**

**Conservative making good carried in the chamber out autumn 2023 by Dobson Conservation Ltd.**

**Conservation of wall paintings carried out June-July 2024.**

## **Guidance for using the Painted Chamber**

The wall paintings in the Painted Chamber at Calverley Old Hall date from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. They are of great rarity and of national significance but also of great fragility.

Please help us to look after the historic wall paintings in the Painted Chamber so we can continue to offer it as a bedroom for LandmarkTrust guests.

To maintain environmental controls and protect this fragile space, please follow the directions below:

- **Do not touch the wall paintings or allow anything to lean against them.**
- **Do not take food or drink into the room to prevent accidental damage from spillages.**
- **The use of hairdryers, music players, additional heaters or lighting is not permitted.**
- **There is a 13amp socket in the hallway outside the shower room. Please do not bring extension leads into the Painted Chamber to enable the use of the items listed above.**
- **The use of sprays or aerosols can damage the paintings so please use them in the adjoining shower room.**
- **Do not attempt to move the fixed furniture or fittings.**
- **There is a wooden baseboard in front of each painted wall. Please do not put anything between this board and the wall**
- **Damp linen or clothing must be left in the shower room which has a heated towel rail.**
- **Keep doors closed at all times. The room has mechanical ventilation so fresh air is supplied to the room. The windows are locked and cannot be opened.**
- **The room is available to adult guests only and children must always be accompanied by a responsible person.**
- **The temperature is kept at a constant 16-17 degrees centigrade and cannot be altered.**

The condition of the wall paintings is inspected at every changeover. If accidental damage occurs, please do not make any attempt to clean or repair it yourself. Report it immediately to the Property Manager whose details are in the red Building Information folder.

**Where damage has occurred as a result of negligence, The Landmark Trust reserves the right to seek compensation from the guest.**



**Delicate conservation on the wall paintings underway.**

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## Acknowledgements

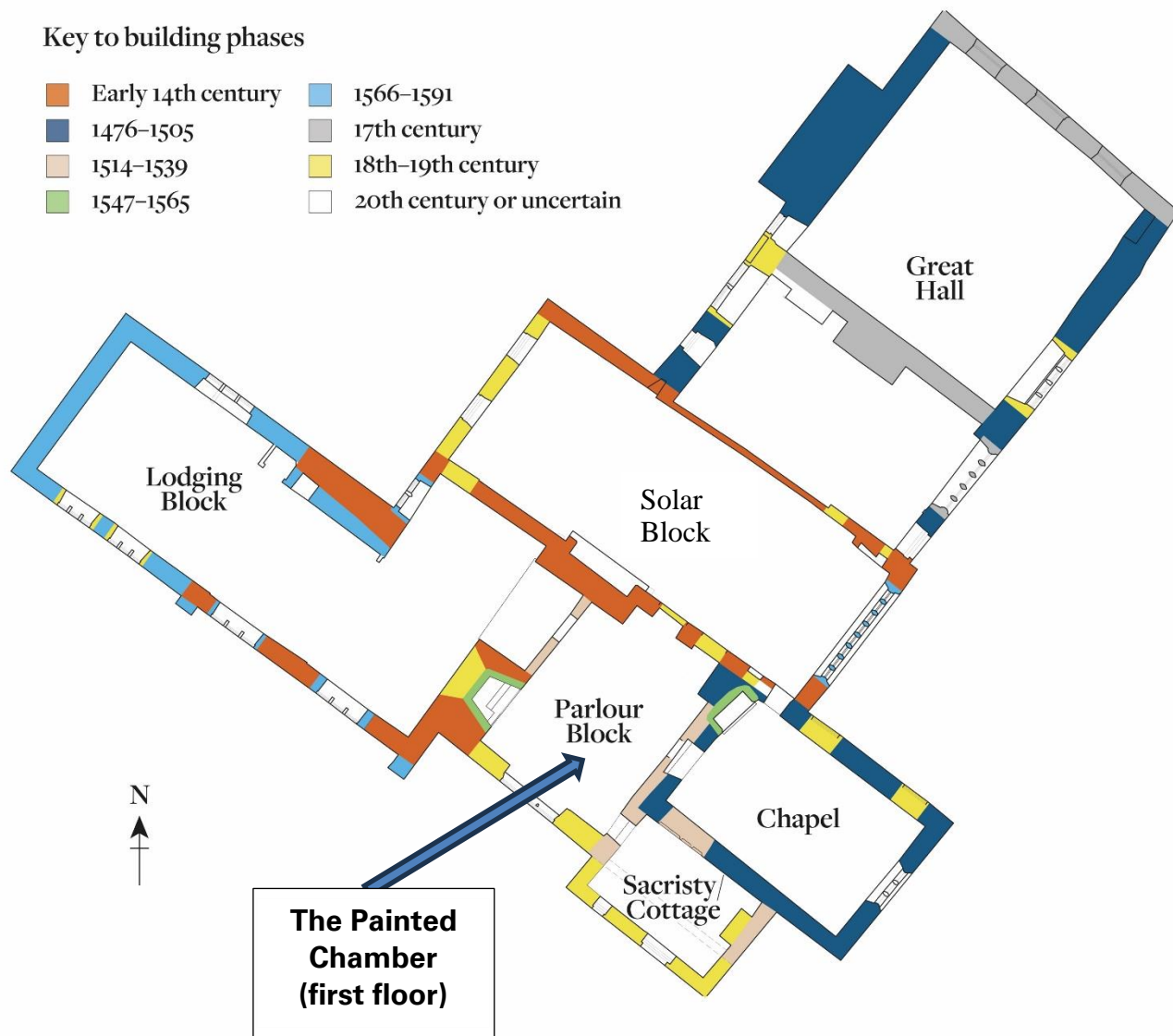
**We are enormously grateful to:**

**The Elizabeth Cayzer Charitable Trust for generously supporting the conservation of these wall paintings.**

**The Supporters of Calverley Old Hall**



**The National Lottery Heritage Fund**



## Summary of the site's history

A man called John le Scot was living in Calverley from the 1160s, the Scott family later taking the name of the place as their own. By 1300, they had built a small timber-framed house, of which embedded traces survive. Around 1320, a timber-framed and stone first-floor hall was built with service rooms below and fine stone fireplaces on both floors. A solar (a private room for the family) ran off at right angles to the west. This first-floor hall was enlarged around 1400, this time entirely in stone. New tie beams were inserted in the roof, with ornamental braces.

Documents and house together then tell a story of a steady climb in wealth and status as the Calverleys (the heirs all called William or Walter) added to their estates and married into the leading families in the area. Many were knighted or served as magistrates and county sheriff. They never rose higher than that: they were county magnates, not national ones. Some stand out as individuals: Sir Walter, in the 1300s, was an improver, and a pioneer of the iron industry.

In the 1480s, a William married a wealthy Savile heiress and built the current enormous hammer-beamed Great Hall with a great stone fireplace. Its 30-foot span was made possible by projecting hammerbeams, richly carved in the latest fashion. Fragments of the medieval windows can be seen in both north and south walls. The original entrance was at the west end, where there was a cross passage between two doors, behind a screen. The earlier first-floor hall now became a more private chamber, the main solar. The same phase also saw the Chapel built, a very rare survival. It has a private gallery for the family, entered from the solar, a fine altar window (restored in the 1980s) and a miniature hammerbeam roof, very similar in its detailing to the great hall's. A panelled oak ceiling is fitted over the two bays at the altar end. The Chapel was restored in the 1980s, removing the cottage it had become.

More is known about the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Calverleys as they navigated the difficult years of the Reformation. Chief among them was a William (?1507-72), who possibly joined the 1537 uprising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, as he was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London for religious opposition in the 1530s. He then embraced the Protestant regime, was knighted in 1545 and became Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1548-9. He had 17 children with his two wives before his death in 1572. Sir William enhanced his father's Parlour Block, where in 2022 a Painted Chamber was discovered beneath lath and plaster on the first floor. Covered in tightly planned outstanding grotesque-work wall paintings, this is an exceptional survival. In the next generation, the Lodging Block was added (dated to the 1580s).

Tragedy struck the family in April 1605, when Sir William's grandson, Walter Calverley, ran amok, murdering his two small sons, William and Walter. He was executed by pressing to death. A play written about this real-life Jacobean tragedy, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, was long attributed to Shakespeare but is now believed to be by Thomas Middleton. The surviving son, Henry, had an unlucky life, later burdened by a huge fine imposed by Parliament for being a Royalist during the Civil War of the 1640s.

The story of the Calverleys ends on a happier note. Sir Walter Calverley (1629-91) was the last of his family to have much to do with the Old Hall, but chose to live in the new mansion he built nearby at Esholt, having married its heiress Frances Thompson. His son, Sir Walter, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, married Elizabeth Ord Blckett of Wallington in Northumberland, and their son the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet left Yorkshire to take up residence on his mother's estate at Wallington. In 1754 the Calverley estate was sold to Thomas Thornhill of Fixby, and the Old Hall was divided into cottages, including the Chapel and the vast volumes of the Great Hall and Solar Block. Many generations of cloth workers, labourers, masons and others lived on the site. Barns and stables around it gradually disappeared, as gardens and orchards were replaced by streets and houses. But the cottage tenants had no reason to make major alterations, and so the shell of the medieval house remained intact.

### **REPAIR & RENEWAL**

**1980s** In 1977, the north wing was gutted by fire and in 1981, the site was put up for sale in three separate lots. Landmark bought the Old Hall to keep it in single ownership, its full renewal always planned to be carried out in several phases. In 1982-3, a Landmark holiday let was formed from two fire-damaged cottages in the Lodging Block. Tenancies in other cottages were left to play out. The envelopes of the Chapel and Great Hall were also repaired. The Solar Block and Great Hall were cleared and kept wind- and weathertight while their future use was decided.

**2020s** By 2017, major maintenance was required and it was decided to address the whole building. Landmark held an architectural competition, for a scheme to bring the whole building back into use by making a new, larger Landmark in all but the Chapel and Lodging Block (which now became a community space on the ground floor and a one-bedroomed flat on the first floor). The approach was to be contemporary, since the building has changed so much over the centuries and it would have been impossible to choose a single period to 'restore' it back to. The competition was won by Cowper Griffiths Architects of Cambridge. In 2021, with help from the Cultural Recovery Fund, the roof was repaired. The main works followed on from 2022 and were completed in 2024, thanks to a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and generous support from other grants, trusts, gifts in wills and a remarkable 2,005 individual donations.

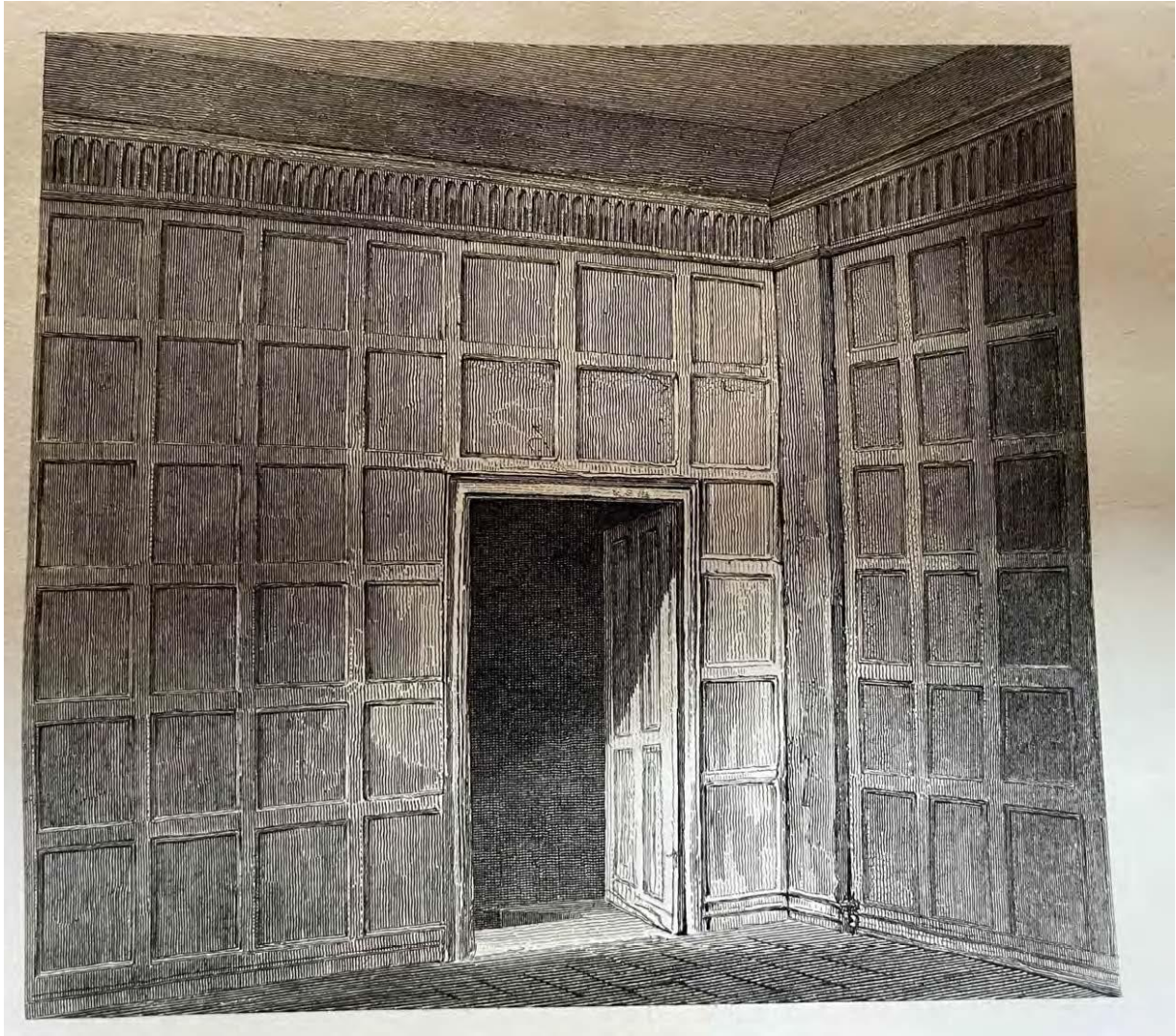
Throughout, the conversion of the gutted spaces has been carried out so that the archaeology of the ancient walls and timbers is still legible. The Great Hall is now used as a dining room and kitchen. The Solar is a sitting room with bedrooms beneath, and the Chapel remains a place for quiet contemplation and information. A newly discovered mid-16<sup>th</sup> century painted chamber, the wall paintings gently conserved, is in use as a bedroom. Outside, the grounds were re-landscaped to improve biodiversity and a community garden was created with input from local residents, including a stone sculpture by Patrick Walls, carved with motifs to represent all aspects of the project. The building is heated by ground source energy, supplied by six deep bore holes. Great care was taken over accessibility, providing a level-access ground floor bedroom and bathroom, a specially designed kitchen and a lift. Calverley Old Hall's future is assured, its buildings all brought back into full use for the first time since the 1980s.



## Historical Context of the Painted Chamber

Timber analysis reveals that it was between 1547 and 1565 that Sir William Calverley decided to refurbish his father's then more simple Parlour Block, introducing a fine new ceiling for the ground floor room and an elaborate painted scheme in the chamber above. William had done well: from being imprisoned in the Tower of London for his faith in the 1530s, he was knighted in the Wars of Rough Wooing in Scotland in 1545 and was appointed Sheriff of Yorkshire for 1548-9. Stylistically, the painted scheme is judged to date from c1560, but could equally be a little earlier, consistent with Sir William's rise in status. For the survival of such a complete scheme, this is already a very early date. Wall paintings were much in fashion in vernacular buildings from around 1450 to 1650, as a cheaper way to bring colour to a room than expensive tapestries or wall hangings, in keeping with a contemporary aesthetic for the fictive depiction of fabrics. Many (perhaps most) buildings of any status had wall paintings, as did churches. However, they are fragile things, easily painted over as the surface failed or needed a new coat, or as fashions changed. The Calverley paintings survived so well because they were covered up in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century with wainscoting (paneling), which ensured their protection. When that too was stripped out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, respectful carpenters made sure that the uprights they applied to hold the lath and plaster walls were fixed top and bottom to floor and ceiling, rather than to the paintings themselves.

In Britain, architectural improvements like enclosed chimney flues to reduce smoke and glazed leaded windows letting in more light contributed to house owners' willingness to invest in painted schemes. By the early-17<sup>th</sup> century, wall paintings had become so common as to be used as ale-house decoration. However, while survivals of wall paintings (most often fragmentary) are relatively common south of the Wash, there are very few in the north of England that survive in a domestic context (there are rather more in churches).



**The room wainscoted, as depicted in Thomas Whitaker's *Loidis and Elmete* (1816). This shows the original doorway into (then) the 1320s solar range (today the Lodging Block), now re-opened. This panelling is the reason the wall paintings remained so well-preserved.**

The discovery of the two biblical cartouches on the parlour walls at Cowside, another Landmark, in the early 2000s was another major discovery for the region. The location of the Calverley paintings in West Yorkshire is therefore a further contribution to their significance.

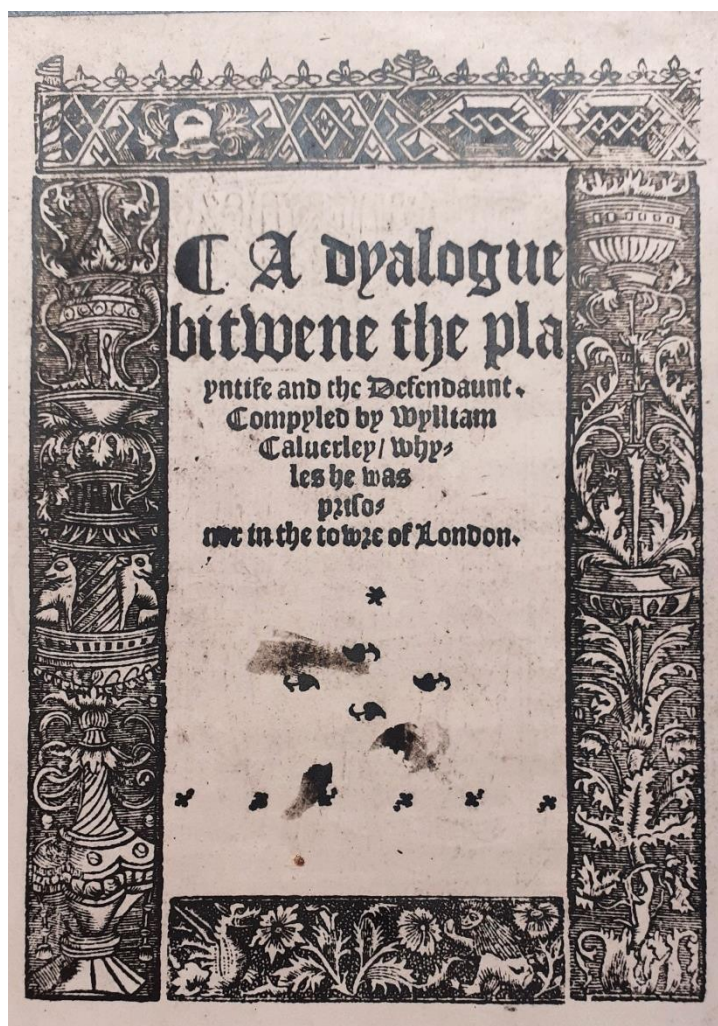
Even more remarkable than the Calverley scheme's physical survival is the design of the paintings, done in the so-called antique or grotesque style, which derives from late-Renaissance Europe. By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Britain had been absorbing such influences from the Italian Renaissance for at least a century, after ancient Roman frescoes were discovered in Emperor Nero's lost palace, the Domus Aurea ('the Golden House'). This vast complex was built by Nero on the Oppian Hill at the heart of ancient Rome in the first century CE. When this infamous emperor died, his palace was sealed up and buried, to lie forgotten until (the story goes) a young man fell down a hole in the hillside in the 1480s. When his friends lowered themselves on ropes with flaming torches to rescue him, they found themselves not in a cave as they expected, but in a vast vaulted space covered in frescoes of delicate fantasy figures, beasts and humans combined and entwined by foliage and flowers. They had stumbled upon the lost palace. One Italian word for a cave is 'grotta' and the paintings became known as 'grotteschi' meaning literally 'of the caves' from which our English word 'grotesque' derives. It was the rediscovery of the ancient world, through its buildings and learning especially, that fueled the Renaissance, and grotesque work soon became popular as decoration in all forms of the decorative and material arts.

The grotesque style arrived in England in the early 16<sup>th</sup>-century initially through foreign craftsmen who were enticed to work here by the monarch and aristocracy who set the fashions. Simultaneously important was the profound influence of the printing press. This was still a relatively new technology, invented by Johannes Guttenburg around 1440.



Emperor Nero's golden palace, the Domus Aurea in Rome, original source of '*grotteschi*', and some examples from 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italy of the fantastical ornamentation it inspired (next page).





Top: delicate grotesque work in a terracotta windowsill at Laughton Place, Sussex (c1530), incorporating the Pelham buckle.

Below: the frontispiece to the pamphlet written by William Calverley in the 1530s from the Tower of London has stacked balusters in the antique style.

The new style became formalized into a visual vocabulary of piled up candelabrum forms that merged into the newly-invented (or -discovered) form of the baluster, along with human or mythological figures and beasts, exotic birds, trophies and floral and leaf ornamentation. It was the starting point for invention and fantasy, often used alongside local forms, grotesquery found next to Gothic tracery or other earlier forms.

One very early example of the pure Antique style in England is the terracotta ornament at Landmark's Laughton Place in Sussex, owned by Sir William Pelham who refurbished his inherited great house around 1530. The controlled delicacy of these Laughton mouldings is typical of the early-16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance in England. We see the influence in print too, as in the frontispiece of Sir William Calverley's *'Dialogue between the Plaintiff and the Defendant'* (spelling modernized) written in the 1530s 'cum privilegio regali' (under the king's authority). Almost certainly this pamphlet came out under the authority of Thomas Cromwell and his Protestant circle, who also favoured this refined and cultured style over the Gothic, given the latter's associations with the newly outlawed Catholic religion. However, the English Reformation brought to a halt the easy exchange with Rome that had been true when the Pope was head of the English church. From then on, this new style could only be experienced for the English through the lens of the books of engravings and prints, and English craftsmen came to develop their own derivative and characterful style, expressed in architecture as a more Mannerist and eclectic approach. By Elizabeth's reign, wall paintings were no longer constrained by an attempt to imitate woven hangings but became more freehand in style, still Antique in style but gamboling across all available space.

This shift in style of execution makes the tightly planned design at Calverley all the more remarkable and we have yet to identify a comparable survival. There are certainly various other examples of 16<sup>th</sup>-century grotesque work that survive,

but none of them share the tight planning of the Calverley scheme, which is planned to take careful account of the underlying timber-framing.

The only known Antique scheme with a verticality that approaches that at Calverley is a room on the first floor (now called the Committee Room) at 20, Dean's Yard in Westminster, which was once the house of the Cellarer to Westminster Abbey. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the house passed to Thomas Wentworth, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Wentworth, and in 1551 to his son. The paintings are thought to relate to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Wentworth's time. While still an extremely rare survival (thought to be the only painted scheme to survive in London), these paintings were unfortunately heavily restored and varnished by the Victorians. Despite their vertical arrangement, the grotesque figures already show the freer hand typical of the Elizabethan period and serve only to highlight further the skill of the unknown artisan who created the design at Calverley, for a member of the local gentry rather than a leading aristocrat at the Court.

We will probably never know whether this artisan was a native from West Yorkshire, or brought from London by Sir William, or perhaps had settled in Yorkshire from northern Europe or beyond.





**The grotesque-work grisaille scheme at 20 Dean's Yard, Westminster, is the only survival found to date that shares the tight verticality of the Calverley scheme, but is arguably less accomplished in laying out.**

**These paintings are believed to date to from the 1550s. They were heavily restored in the 1880s and later, when misunderstandings of the original appearance, nature and date of the paintings led to some falsification in their restoration.**



Acton Court, South Glos, 1535



St Nicholas's Priory, Exeter, 1562+



Golden Cross, Oxford c1595

Examples of the freer-hand antique-work wall paintings more typical of the style in England, taking little account of the underlying structure in their layout.



20, Dean's Yard, Westminster, late-16<sup>th</sup> century.



**Detail of the grisaille frieze that runs round the wall plate at Calverley, of Tudor roses and pomegranates and blank shields. It was perhaps added in the primary phase of the Parlour Block, before the main painted scheme on the walls.**



**The repeat pattern of the Calverley wall paintings: red guilloche bands separating wide and narrower grisaille panels.**



**The repeat pattern of the Calverley scheme. Alternating panels of wide and narrow grisaille work are separated by narrow bands of red 'fretwork'. On the wider panels are two rows of roundels, the top row containing human or animal heads, the lower one Tudor roses.**

## Iconography & Possible Sources

When grotesque work initially became popular in Italy, its point was in part that it was fantastical and had no meaning. However, in Britain it did have meaning, signaling gentry status and knowledge of the new learning conveying subtle messages in the choice of particular mythological references. People were skilled at interpreting such messages, we need to try to look with their eyes.

The Calverley scheme has two parts. A painted cornice runs around the wall plate at the top of the walls, of alternating pomegranates, Tudor roses and blank shields, executed in grisaille (that is to say monochrome, done in shades of a single colour, here black on white). The frieze is done in a different hand from the main scheme; it may belong to the block's earlier phase of 1513-47. Locals suggested that the rose might be the white rose of the Yorkists but this would be anachronistic for the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century when such feuds were long buried. Much more likely, it represents the Tudor rose, combining the red rose of the Lancastrians/Tudors with the white rose of Yorkshire, appropriate for the times. The pomegranate was once the symbol of Katherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first queen and a devout Catholic, which could make it a secret coded message of Catholic faith, but this does not fit with this generation of Calverleys and the pomegranate was a common decorative motif at the time, symbolizing fertility, abundance and longevity. The blank shields have yielded no signs of heraldic device, including under UV light. (It is interesting that there is no inclusion of the Calverleys' horned owl in the room.)

The first thing to notice about the main scheme is how carefully it follows the studs in the timber framing. It runs in grisaille panels of alternating thicknesses of roughly 55cm and 20cm. The dimensions are interesting in that neither approximate to whole numbers of inches. These panels are separated by narrow vertical strips about 10cm wide in red, onto which is painted an interlocking floral or guilloche design in white.



**The central panel on the northeast wall, with 'jester' roundel – or is the figure crowned, or wearing a knight's mail coif?**

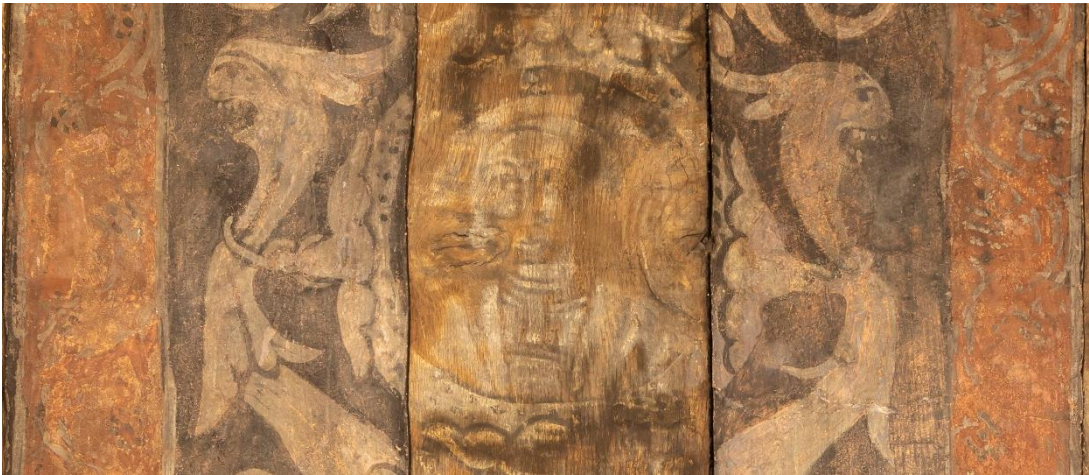
The composition repeats around the room so that, for example, the eye can follow the roundels at the same height all around the room. The sequence takes account of the underlying structure: while the grisaille panels runs across timber and plaster alike, the red guilloche band is never found on the wooden studs. The design of this red guilloche 'braid' holds stylized six petal flowers evenly spaced along undulating S-shaped tracery. This bears comparison with the 'vine of life' often found running along ecclesiastical joinery, perhaps here an example of a familiar Gothic motif incorporated into the new style. The use of red bands separating monochrome panels is found in antique-style damask of the period; it is possible that the Calverley scheme is in imitation of this.

The wider grisaille panel includes, at high level, roundels with spotted frames (representing ermine, perhaps?) that hold, on the northeast wall facing the window, human portraits, and animal heads elsewhere (dogs, deer?) Only three of five of these human portraits survive, two having been lost to the disturbance associated with the door inserted during the cottage era to link the room to the Solar Block. From left to right, a woman in Tudor dress can be made out (running onto the corner roof strut), then a man in a Tudor cap and gown. It is very possible that these represent portraits of the couple who commissioned the paintings, Sir William the sheriff and one of his two wives, quite formal portraits.

Costume historians suggest that the clothes worn by the couple belong to earlier than the 1560s. The square, low cut neckline worn with a high-necked shirt by the male figure was fashionable from the 1520s to 1540s. The woman appears to be wearing an early style of French hood, which were in fashion in England from the late 1520s; by the 1560s hoods had become smaller and neater.<sup>1</sup> There are also similarities between the styles of the figures in the painted roundels and those on carved wooden panels at Haddon Hall, which are dated with some confidence to 1545.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Ninya Mikhaila of The Tudor Tailor for this information.



**The Calverley portrait roundels, from the northeast wall. The top two are plausibly portraits of Sir William Calverley and one of his two wives.**



Examples of mid Tudor dress similar to the Calverley roundels



Portrait of Lucas van Leyden,  
Dutch painter and engraver. 1521.



Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of  
Canterbury. Portrait c. 1545.



Wooden panels, Haddon Hall, c.1545

Next, in the central roundel, is a mysterious figure who appears to be wearing a horned cap. This could be a jester, or a folk figure, perhaps a *memento mori* calling attention to life's absurdity. Or it could be a bearded man in a chain mail cowl topped by a crown. If, as seems possible, a table for business papers was centred in front of the window, this figure would have been in immediate gaze.

To these portrait roundels, elongated, toothed birds are chained round their necks, perhaps a representation of harpies, the half-human, half-bird creatures in ancient mythology. They face away from the roundel. Harpies were believed to be a personification of storm winds, or sometimes death and the underworld, and feature in Homer's poems. Here, they are chained, and so tamed. Perhaps these chained 'harpies' represented the taming of the human temperament to Reason. Photographed in UV light, the faces of the 'harpies' are revealed as carefully shaded and include round cheek spots. Above them are similar heads, but with long curling tongues, this time facing each other.

Below this grouping of roundel and 'harpies' is another repeating figure, this time a composite of the human and architectural: a clownish face wearing a pointed helmet or hat flanked by wings, with a carved baluster for a body. Above his head hovers a kind of cupola or bell. On either side of this figure are another pair of bird's heads, linked to the baluster by their curling tongues. It is possible that this figure is a much-transmuted representation of Mercury, god of messengers, who wore a winged helmet. The baluster-torsos stand on a third sequence of roundels at low level, this time holding a Tudor rose. The sequence as a whole is both carefully planned horizontally for the available space, and vertically integrated as an entire run. The panels run straight into the floor, with no suggestion of a skirting band.



**The winged figure and Tudor rose roundels.**

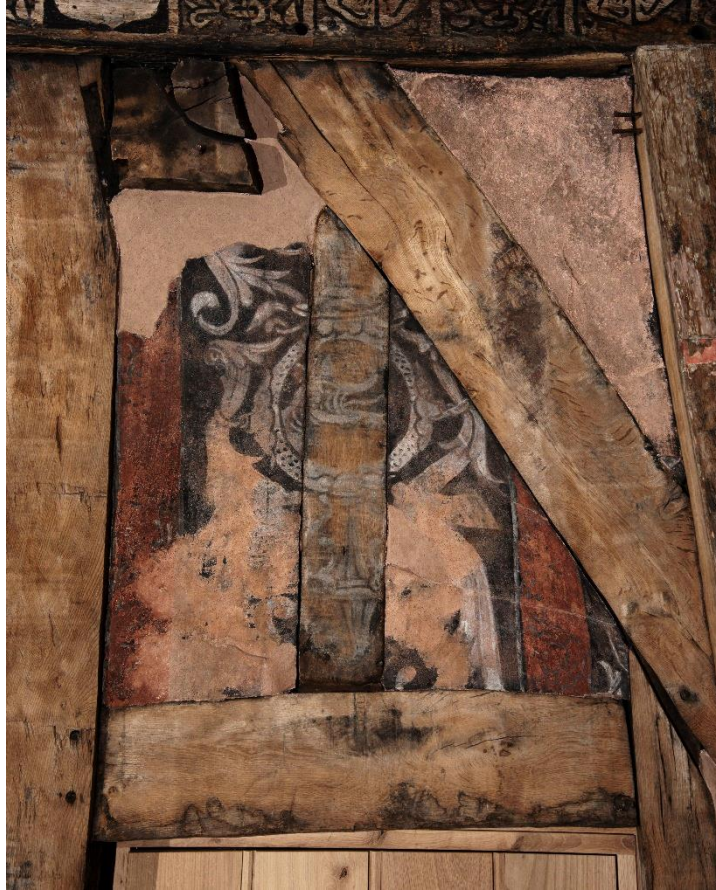


**Left: the full run of the narrower, 'architectural' grisaille panel. Note the pair of doves.**

**Right: details after cleaning, showing the subtlety of the shading and highlighting, including under UV light (lower harpy).**

The narrower grisaille panels are more soberly architectural in subject, a vertical stack of fantasy urns, vases or balusters elaborated with foliage. Around waist height and level with the Tudor rose roundels, are pairs of doves sitting on an urn.

This complicated setting out of panels of alternating width is remarkably successful. It runs all around the room (except for the external southwest wall, rebuilt at a later date) without losing step, until slight compression is noticeable in the southeast corner. Credit is therefore also due to the Tudor carpenters who constructed the Parlour Block in the 1520s with such even framing. The decorative wall design appears to have been accomplished freehand, with no evidence of setting out marks, snap lines (from wet strings for alignment), lead pencil markings (first used in the 1560s) or the use of stencils.



**The dog roundel above the primary doorway.**

Above the door that led (then) into the 1320s solar range and today into the late-16<sup>th</sup> century Lodging Block, there is a formal group all its own. This roundel holds an open-mouthed dog (?) flanked by the usual 'harpies'. The roundel is possibly topped with a knight's helmet. This was originally the only entrance into the room and probably formed the starting point for the setting out of the room.

Also interesting is what is not included in the scheme, primarily the lack of any religious references. Other wall paintings surviving from the 1550s when Catholic Mary Tudor sat on the throne, often incorporate the monogram 'IHS' which stood for the Latin phrase *Iesus Hominum Salvator*, or 'Jesus, Savior of Mankind'. Given the fervent loyalty of the Calverleys of the generation after Sir William to the by then proscribed Catholic religion, it might not have been surprising to find religious symbolism. That there is none, and that 'pagan' classicism can instead be inferred from the iconography, reinforces the impression that Sir William was entirely loyal to the new Protestant regime after his youthful waywardness in this respect. It is also curious that the horned owl of the Calverley's coat of arms is not included in the scheme.

The obvious question now arises whether any likely sources can be identified for the Calverley paintings. This was one of the topics under discussion at the expert study day we convened on the paintings in November 2023, when Anthony Wells-Cole, the acknowledged expert on printed sources of the period, was among the participants. While grotesque was, almost by definition, an exercise in the artist's imagination, Anthony's expertise yielded one print in particular as a plausible influence, published in 1534 by the German engraver, Nikolaus Wilborn (overleaf) in the British Museum. Here, a winged, beaked creature with trailing tail of foliage rather than feathers flanks a roundel with a human portrait. The Calverley artist has added their own interpretation, in chained collars and 'ermine' rather than laurel wreaths to form the roundels, but the similarity of the composition is clear.



**A possible source for the Calverley paintings:  
a print by Nikolaus Wilborn, a German  
engraver, c.1534. British Museum.**



## Fabric & Materials Used in the Chamber

The first stud from the left in this southeast wall holds a particularly well-preserved strip of the architectural form of grisaille panel, that gives an impression of the brightness of the scheme when first executed. This strip was found beneath wallpaper, which perhaps explains the excellence of its survival.



**The southeast wall (detail). To note:**

- Dowel holes along the top, possibly once supporting a bed canopy.
- The cramped setting out in the left hand corner.
- An exceptionally well-preserved strip , bottom left (untreated).
- The hard edge to the painted decoration on the fifth stud from left, indicating a lost door architrave. Early plaster was missing here, and the fourth stud was partially replaced during the repair works, being found to be badly split.

## Substrate

On the internal face of the walls of the chamber, the panels between the studwork have been plastered with an unhaired, gypsum-bound, plaster incorporating crushed brick or pre-fired clay. This accounts for its pinkish colour. Very few uses of gypsum in this way at the period are known. Gypsum is calcium sulphate dihydrate ( $\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) and a narrow seam of it runs south from Newcastle to Nottingham, skirting Leeds just to the east. The Saracen's Head in Southwell, Nottingham, has a fine set of 16<sup>th</sup>-century wall paintings in a geometric strapwork design, also done on gypsum plaster. Fast-setting gypsum, not needing animal hair as a binder as lime plaster does, was perhaps a favoured ground for certain painter-stainers in the period. At Calverley, a single layer up to 2cm thick was typically applied, although around the chimney breast up to three layers were also found.





**The Geraldine ceiling at West Horsley in Sussex, 1547/8. The Calverley Painted Chamber may have had a ceiling of similar form, judging by the fragments of plaster found around the wider site (above).**

## **Pigments**

The pigments used in the paint were vernacular: carbon black, gypsum white and red iron oxide. The binder was animal glue, made by the prolonged boiling of animal bones, typically horses or rabbits. There is no evidence of a sealant.

## **The Floor**

The discovery of the original mid-16<sup>th</sup> century oak floor in near perfect condition beneath the pine cottage floorboards was almost as exciting as finding the wall paintings. The floor has a very slight bow towards its central spine, which perhaps explains why it was later covered up. It is in astonishingly good condition. This is the floor structure that has been given a felling date range of 1547-1565. In the northeast corner, indents in the wood in one corner suggest that it later doubled as a workshop for a loom. A few square patches in the centre of the room relate to repairs carried out by Landmark.

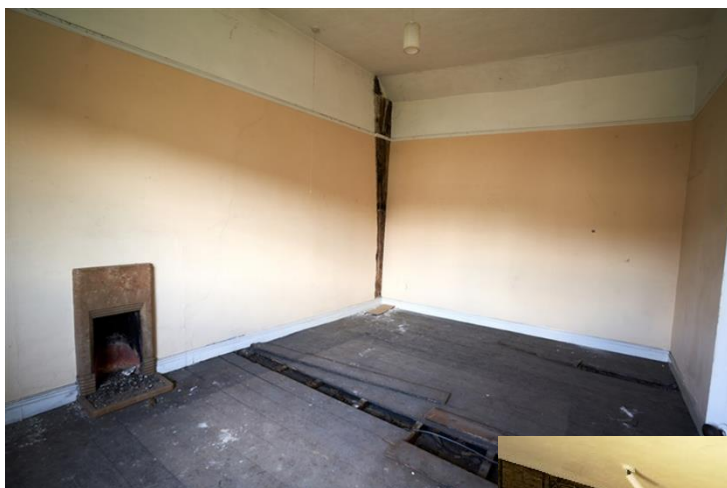
## **The Ceiling**

The original structure of the ceiling is unknown. There may have been an earlier, plainer ceiling when the Parlour Block was first built 1514-1539. The mortice holes covered with canvas may have been for a cross beam. When the painted scheme was done, and possibly from the start, a coved ceiling was introduced; the wall plate of the northeast wall is set higher than the flanking wall plates to allow for this, although the wall plate in the external wall is set lower than all other walls, perhaps re-set when this wall was rebuilt. We inherited a shallow coved ceiling in the cottage, covered in plain plaster. This may once have been a steeper cove and our archaeologist Jonathan Clark has postulated that it was a fine-ribbed plasterwork ceiling with plain panels. Peg holes were found on one side only of the common rafters of the chamber when the roof was off, from which such a ceiling could have been hung. The Geraldine Room at West Horsley (dated to 1547/8) is a plausible contemporary reference for a plaster ribbed ceiling with a steeper, two-ended cove.

Many fragments of ribbed plaster were found ex-situ on site at Calverley. While it is impossible to say with certainty whether these fragments came from the Painted Chamber, no other room retained evidence for a plaster ceiling being inserted and subsequently removed.

### The Fireplace

Like the wall paintings, the massive stone fireplace was also found behind the later lath and plaster and the tiny mid-20<sup>th</sup> century tiled fireplace that had eventually superseded it. The timber framing (and therefore decorative scheme) sails over masonry blocks set above this fireplace itself. It is possible that the stone hearth and masonry once held an elaborate plasterwork or carved wooden chimney piece and overmantel. If so, it was most likely in the grotesque style too.



**The Painted Chamber in 2017, with the small 20<sup>th</sup>-century fireplace, and the same view today.**



## Structure

The fabric of the Painted Chamber is also of interest. The northeast wall (backing onto the Solar Block) is constructed of grooved wooden studs some 20cm wide, into which are slotted sandstone tiles c30cm wide. This can be examined in today's passage between the Painted Chamber and the Solar Block (as built, this space would have been a void between the two walls). As a local variation of the more usual lath and plaster panels, such use of stone tiles for walls is not unknown in Yorkshire but is a relatively rare survival. The northwest (fireplace) and southeast (backing onto the Chapel) walls are more unusual in their use of *slate* tiles, providing an even more even ground for plastering.

Some of the timbers, especially at high level, show signs of re-use, or having been adapted from earlier forms of use for the painted scheme. In a couple of places, empty mortices in the wall plate of the chamber had patches of linen canvas or paper tacked over so that the painted scheme could run over them. Other holes and splits were covered with paper. High-level dowel holes in the southeast wall that is adjacent to the Chapel seem contemporary with the scheme and may suggest fixings for a canopy, perhaps for bed. A hard edge to the grisaille panel on the fifth stud from the left suggests a lost door architrave, and it would be entirely likely that this inner sanctum might have a doorway that led directly onto the Chapel gallery. However, this theory is complicated by the fact that the floor level in the Painted Chamber sits some 500mm above that of the gallery. Some disturbance in the masonry is apparent on the gallery side, but it is impossible now to infer whether there were ever any steps. The doorway, if such it was, may equally have led to a closet.



**Remnants of a canvas patch used to disguise a mortice hole in the wall plate, tacked in place by the Calverley artist.**



**Sandstone panels have been slotted into grooves in the studs. With a thin skim of gypsum plaster, this forms the ground for wall paintings.**

## Repair and conservation of the Painted Chamber

The Painted Chamber is the only room on the site that remained relatively undisturbed by either the cottage years or the 1980s works. With underpinning from a sophisticated building management system to control temperature and humidity levels, we have been able to take an approach that is more or less 'conserve as found', resulting in a restored space that is as close to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century original as could be achieved.

In autumn 2023, specialist conservators Lizzie Woolley and Sam Whittaker of Opus Conservation arrived on site to carry out a thorough inspection and survey of the paintings. In consultation with Tobeit Curtis, they drew up a method statement for the eventual treatment. Under their supervision, the contractors removed the timber supports (sensitively installed by earlier workmen and not fixed to the paintings themselves) and made good various areas of lost fabric with gypsum plaster, areas which have been deliberately left apparent.

An experts study day on the Painted Chamber was held on site and at Esholt Hall in November 2023, inviting fifteen specialist conservators and historians to site, to bring the Calverley scheme fully to their attention and seek their input before its conservation. There was general consensus in dating the paintings stylistically to around 1560, consistent with the timber dating of the ground floor ceiling to 1547-1565, and to which the painted scheme relates. It was noted that the planning of the design to respect the underlying timber-framing was very unusual. All agreed that this is an exceptional discovery in astonishingly good condition.

The full conservation package was then tendered and Opus were successful in being retained for the main phase conservation. This was undertaken in early summer 2024, after the contractors had left site; three to four conservators at a time worked on the room for nine weeks, staying in the residential flat in shifts.





**The Opus team on site in summer 2024.**

Opus's treatment fell into four stages:



**A week or so was spent very gently cleaning dust from the surfaces with special vacuum cleaners. Even this had a noticeable effect.**



*Fig.17 Thick dust on the wooden stud.*



*Fig.18 Animal in roundel legible after dust brushed off*

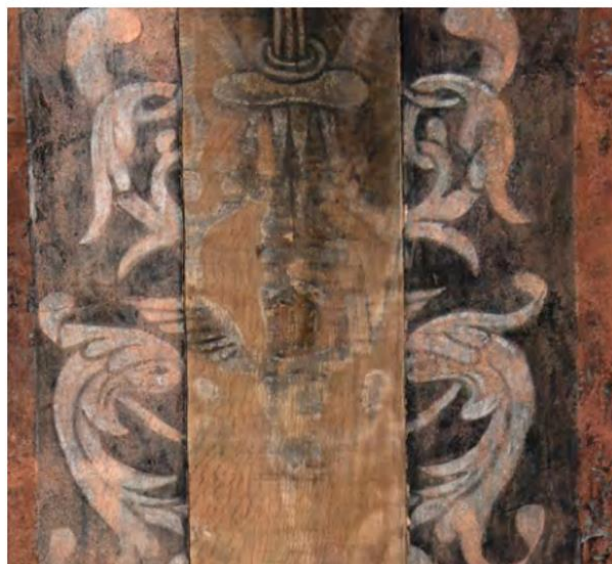
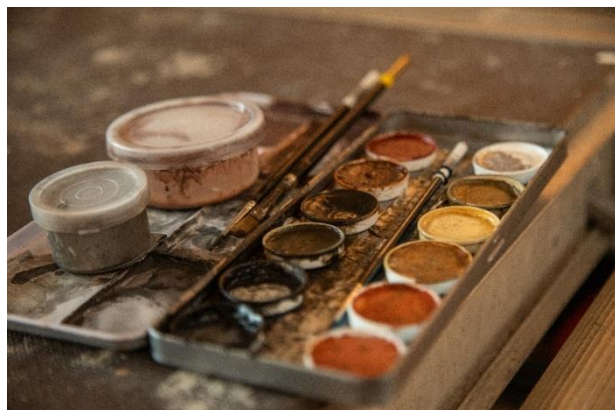


**Next, cotton buds dipped in a cleaning agent were gently rolled over the surfaces to remove surface dirt (as the 16<sup>th</sup>-century paints used were water-soluble, water was not an appropriate cleaner here).**

**Third, a consolidant was applied through small poultices of special conservation tissue. This soaked through into the painted surface and both consolidated the paint surface as well as reabsorbing more dirt back into the tissue, which was then carefully peeled away. In places, the overall cleaning process had the effect of revealing areas of the gypsum substrate where the pigment had dissipated and that the dirt of centuries had masked. These bright areas of plaster now tended to distract from the legibility of the painted scheme as a whole.**



**After further consultation with the Landmark team on the philosophy of repair, the decision was taken to tone in the paintings very subtly on these small areas where the loss of pigment was distracting the eye. An example of a 'before and after' of this treatment is shown below. Record photos were taken at all stages and have been deposited with the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service (WYAAS).**



*Fig.32 After cleaning and consolidation, before toning*

*Fig.33 After toning.*

Note: if you are lucky enough to find historic wall paintings during works to your own house, do not try any of this at home! Historic wall paintings are always a rare and significant find and any treatment should always be carried out by specialist conservators.

## Environmental Control measures

To enable the room to be used and enjoyed, its environmental conditions are tightly controlled, as is the furnishing. Daylight levels must be very carefully regulated and heat gain from outside minimised to prevent damage to the paintings, and so a specially-designed louvred oak window shutter was installed to prevent direct sunlight falling on the walls. The finished effect is somewhat like a traditional mullioned window in appearance. To further reduce heat gain, the glass used in the double glazing units has a solar glass which reduces solar thermal gain by 73%. The internal pane of glass is laminated with a UV film which will remove 98% of UV light, helping prevent the paint pigments from fading. To help control the environment, the windows to the room cannot be opened, which prevents sudden drafts of cold, hot, damp or dry air and allows the humidity to be kept at a constant level. The en-suite shower room is fitted with a continuous extract fan which reduces the chances of humid air reaching the painted chamber. The doors to all other rooms are fitted with door closers to ensure that the airflow through the chamber can be controlled separately.

The doorframes are constructed independently of the walls, to prevent vibration. There is minimal furniture and a wooden rail runs along the floor around the outside of the room to prevent furniture being inadvertently pushed against the wall. The spotlights, fixed with minimum disruption to the ceiling are kept at a light level that illuminates the paintings without causing harm. No appliance use, or food and drink, is permitted in the room.

The temperature is kept at no higher than 17 degrees centigrade. There is a temperature and humidity sensor in the room, which constantly monitors the conditions and sends the data to a building management computer. This adjusts the temperature of the radiator and draws conditioned air into the room from the rest of the building through a fan above the entrance door from the solar and a grille in the ceiling. The building management system records any

fluctuations in the environmental conditions and this data, together with weekly inspections of the wall paintings, allow the conservators to monitor the wall paintings over time and make any adjustments to the protection measures to further stabilise the environment if required. Conditions can also be monitored remotely through wifi by Landmark's staff.

Opus Conservation report on their treatment of the wall paintings