

The Courtauld



Records of Care: informing approaches to the conservation of Britain's wall paintings

A symposium held on the 31st January 2025
The Courtauld Institute of Art, Vernon Square

Introduction

Hosted in partnership with colleagues at The Church of England, Icon, and English Heritage, this symposium marks the culmination of the first major phase of a grant-funded digitisation project to make the National Wall Paintings Survey publicly accessible through a dynamic new online database.

Begun by Professor David Park at The Courtauld in 1980, the Survey has grown into a vast and internationally important resource, comprising records of all known British medieval wall paintings as well as extensive material on post-medieval schemes of painted decoration. Encompassing photographic records, conservation reports, annotated publications and previously unpublished research, the archive documents the UK's most lavish courtly and ecclesiastical murals alongside paintings in more humble contexts. Incorporating material bequeathed from the archives of some of the UK's earliest pioneering conservators, the Survey constitutes an exceptional record of the condition of Britain's wall paintings and forms an essential point of reference, both for scholars of art history and for those charged with the ongoing care of these works.

This interdisciplinary study day is an opportunity for those working across the field of British wall paintings to reflect upon the evolution of approaches to their study and conservation, and to explore collaborative endeavours which might better inform their future care. Comprising three sessions of short papers from a diverse and engaging line-up of scholars and heritage professionals, the day will conclude with an informal panel discussion around the theme of collaboration.

Organised by Emily Howe (Project Lead, National Wall Paintings Survey at The Courtauld) with Tracy Manning (Cathedral & Church Buildings Department, Church of England), Sarah Pinchin (Chair, Icon Stone & Wall Paintings Group) and Sophie Stewart (Collections Conservation, English Heritage).

With thanks to the supporters of the National Wall Paintings Survey Project



Front page image: A new online catalogue of the National Wall Paintings Survey archive, with digitised content, will go live in February (image: The Courtauld)

Programme

Friday 31 January

9.30-10.00 **Registration opens**
Coffee and tea provided

10.00 **Welcome**
Clare Richardson, Head of Conservation, The Courtauld

10.05-11.15 **Session I: Emerging Approaches**
Chaired by Caroline Babington, formerly Palace of Westminster

Emily Howe, National Wall Paintings Survey Project
Towards a national repository for the documentation of wall paintings

Tracy Manning, Cathedral & Church Buildings Department, Church of England
Managing the care of wall paintings in churches: following the rules and finding good advice

Sophie Stewart, English Heritage
From the Ministry of Works to English Heritage: conserving the nation's wall paintings

Mark Perry, Perry Lithgow Partnership
Wall painting conservation in private practice

11.15-11.45 **Break**
Coffee and tea provided

11.45-13.00 **Session II: Improving Approaches**
Chaired by Jane Spooner, The Courtauld

Kate Giles, Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, University of York
Writing on the walls: locating and using historical sources to inform understanding of past conservation practices

Tobit Curteis, Tobit Curteis Associates
Working with others: wall painting conservation in building projects

Elizabeth Woolley, Opus Conservation
Imaging techniques for the conservator's toolbox

Stephen Rickerby, Rickerby & Shekede (paper co-authored with Lisa Shekede)
Focusing conservation aims and requirements

13.00-14.00 **Lunch** *Provided for all attendees*

14.00-15.30 Session III: Interdisciplinary Approaches

Chaired by Alixe Bovey, The Courtauld

Miriam Gill, Art History teacher and researcher in HE Adult Education

Variations and identifications: intersections between conservation and art history

Andrea Kirkham, Andrea Kirkham Conservation

Recording domestic wall paintings

Florence Eccleston, The Courtauld

Navigating the challenges of researching wall paintings

Jane Rutherford, Rutherford Conservation

'The Conservator as Art Historian' and the approach to the wall paintings at Llancafarn

Sophie Godfraind, Historic England

The role of Historic England in the care of wall paintings

15.30-16.00 Break

Coffee and tea provided

16.00-17.00 Session IV: Collaborative Approaches

Chaired by Sarah Pinchin, Icon/Historic Royal Palaces

Discussion session, led by a panel of heritage professionals, conservators and conservation scientists, including

Jonathan Deeming, Heritage Architect, Purcell

Helen Howard, Scientific Department, National Gallery

Katy Lithgow, Formerly Head of Conservation, National Trust

Peter Martindale, Peter Martindale Conservation

Ruth McNeilage, McNeilage Conservation

Nigel Walter, Archangel Architects

17.00-18.00 Drinks reception for all

Participants

Clare Richardson (FIIC) is a paintings conservator engaged in the study of materials and techniques of paintings in the Renaissance and Early Modern periods, and is Head of Conservation at The Courtauld. She has a particular interest in easel painting conservation practice and is currently engaged with the GoGreen project to research more sustainable practices in conservation. Her recent research has investigated historic lining methods and its implications on collections care planning. Prior to working at The Courtauld, Clare was a senior paintings conservator at the Victoria & Albert Museum (2010-15) and senior manager of paintings, paper and frames conservation at the Royal Museums Greenwich (2015-17).

Caroline Babington took a BA Hons in Art History at the University of East Anglia, followed by Postgraduate Diploma in Wall Painting Conservation from the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1988. She worked for English Heritage for ten years as wall paintings conservator and then Head of Wall Painting Conservation. From 2006 Caroline was employed at Parliament, and in 2011 was appointed as Collections Conservation Manager for the Parliamentary Art Collection, stepping down from this role in 2024 to pursue independent research into the wall paintings at Parliament. Caroline was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 2024.

Emily Howe enjoyed studying medieval art history and a curatorial role at the V&A Museum before returning to The Courtauld to pursue her interest in wall painting conservation (MA 2004). Her inter-disciplinary background informs her work as a conservator, which encompasses all aspects of research from art history to sample-based paint analysis, helping to inform effective and sustainable conservation strategies. Emily has combined teaching microscopy with a freelance career in which she has worked as a consultant for a broad range of parish churches, cathedrals and heritage bodies, publishing widely. Since 2022 she has been leading the project to digitise the National Wall Paintings Survey.

Tracy Manning trained as an art historian and wall painting conservator before joining the English Heritage Conservation Studio in 1994, where she contributed to the Wall Painting Condition Audit. At Historic England she worked with the Building Conservation team on the Practical Building Conservation Series for several years before beginning her current role as Senior Conservation Advisor to the Church of England. In this role she advises on conservation proposals for a wide range of objects, manages the Lottery-funded conservation grants programme, and continues to advocate for heritage skills and improved conservation standards and practices at a national level.

Sophie Stewart studied archaeology, anthropology and history of art at New Hall College, Cambridge before undertaking the Courtauld Institute of Art/Getty Conservation Institute postgraduate diploma in the Conservation of Wall Paintings (1991). She subsequently completed a Getty post-diploma internship at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence (1992) leading to a Certificate of Advanced Practical Training in the Conservation of Wall Paintings. Sophie worked as a wall painting conservator at English Heritage until 1999, since which time she has worked in private practice on a wide variety of projects in partnership with Stephen Paine (as Paine & Stewart Ltd). Alongside this, Sophie has taught regularly at the Courtauld Institute. In 2022 she returned to English Heritage as a wall painting conservator for the Collections Conservation team.

Mark Perry, like his father, David, and the late Richard Lithgow, worked for the Eve Baker Trust prior to them all setting up the Perry Lithgow Partnership in 1983. They operate throughout the UK and Ireland, specialising in paintings on plaster dating from the twelfth to the twentieth

centuries, and have worked on over 230 different sites that are open to the public. Clients include Historic England, the National Trust, the Office of Public Works (Ireland), and the Church Buildings Council, as well as leading conservation architects, cathedrals, local government bodies, parish churches and private individuals. Mark has been an assessor for Icon's PACR accreditation process since 2005.

Jane Spooner began her career as an apprentice at the Wall Paintings Workshop at Canterbury Cathedral. She subsequently freelanced, working for many of the wall paintings conservators who are taking part today. Jane completed the Conservation of Wall Paintings diploma in 2000, and later gained her PhD, also at the Courtauld, supervised by Professors Paul Crossley and David Park, specialising in royal English wall paintings of the fourteenth century. Jane worked as Curator of Historic Buildings at Historic Royal Palaces for nearly 20 years, before returning to the Courtauld as Senior Lecturer and Head of Programme on the Conservation of Wall Paintings MA in 2022.

Kate Giles is a Professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of York, where she specialises in research and teaching Historic Buildings. She is currently Director of the University's Centre for the Study of Christianity & Culture – a research centre which works closely with sacred heritage sites to help them understand, interpret, care and share their significance, through heritage interpretation, funding applications and wider policy work. Her interest in wall paintings has been sparked by long term collaborations with the Stratford-upon-Avon Guild Chapel (Warwickshire) and Pickering parish church (North Yorkshire).

Tobit Curteis trained in the conservation of wall paintings at the Courtauld Institute of Art and leads a practice specialising in conservation environment for historic buildings and collections. Tobit is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and of the International Institute for Conservation, the Advisor on Wall Paintings for the National Trust, and a consultant for Historic England. In the UK he works on many churches and cathedrals including Canterbury, Durham, Exeter, Winchester, York and St Paul's. He is also currently working on conservation projects in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Cyprus.

Elizabeth Woolley (ACR) graduated from The Courtauld's Wall Painting Conservation MA and later completed at PhD on Victorian commercial church wall painting at the same department. She has worked nationally and internationally, and in 2018, along with fellow Courtauld alumni, founded Opus Conservation. Opus Conservation is a dynamic private practice firm offering all aspects of conservation including documentation, technical imaging, material analysis, condition investigations and remedial conservation, undertaking projects at UNESCO world heritage sites and small parish churches, stately homes and private houses.

Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shekede are wall painting conservators and graduates of the Courtauld's Conservation of Wall Painting Department with an extensive portfolio of UK and international work. Projects in the UK include a wide variety of wall paintings and decorative schemes from the medieval to the modern period. Internationally, they have completed or are involved with major projects in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. They also undertake country-wide and regional wall painting surveys. Their remit includes treatment development and implementation, condition assessment and diagnosis, environmental monitoring, and analysis of original plaster and paint materials.

Alixe Bovey (FSA, FRHistS) is a medievalist with particular interests in the illuminated manuscripts and pictorial storytelling of the later Middle Ages. She is Professor of Art History at The Courtauld Institute of Art and a member of the Canterbury Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee and the Cathedral Fabric Commission for England.

Miriam Gill studied for a doctorate on late medieval wall painting in England with David Park in the Department of Conservation of Wall Painting at The Courtauld in the 1990s. She writes on wall paintings, often with her colleague, Dr Ellie Pridgeon. She teaches Art History, mostly in the context of Adult Education, for the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Leicester and Warwick and with Pro Artium for the Museum at Northampton

Andrea Kirkham has worked in wall painting conservation since 1984 and is the Director of Andrea Kirkham Conservation Ltd. From 2002 to 2010 she undertook self-funded, part-time doctoral research on *Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Secular Wall Paintings in Suffolk* (University of East Anglia, 2010). Since 2023 she has been engaged in researching and writing a book commissioned by Historic England, with the working title *Decorative Wall Painting in Domestic Houses, 1560-1660: Colour, Design and Society* (Liverpool University Press), for which she has received an author grant from the Paul Mellon Centre as well as a research grant from the Vernacular Architecture Group towards graphic reconstructions of selected schemes.

Florence Eccleston is a fourth-year PhD student at The Courtauld Institute of Art, working on what fourteenth- to fifteenth-century 'morality' wall paintings in England can contribute to the social and emotional history of sin. During her thesis, she worked as a postgraduate assistant for the National Wall Paintings Survey project, cataloguing the archive. She has also worked with the Buildings Curation team at Hampton Court Palace and worked on public engagement with wall paintings at Canterbury Cathedral. She is particularly interested in what wall paintings, as rare and often public-facing images, can tell us about how behavioural expectations were understood and communicated.

Jane Rutherford (ACR FIIC) began her training in Florence, initially at L'Università Internazionale dell'Arte, and then in the private studio of Professor Paolo Gori, senior conservator at the Uffizi, specialising in easel paintings. She was subsequently awarded bursaries to continue her training in Munich and Vienna, with the State and Federal Offices for Historic Monuments. An independent practitioner since 1980, Jane runs her own company and has specialised in the conservation of wall paintings, architectural polychromy and easel paintings in the UK, Austria and Germany. In 2007-08 she was appointed examiner of bachelor and diploma students with the Conservation & Restoration Faculty of Hildesheim University of Applied Arts & Sciences (Germany).

Sophie Godfraind is an alumna of the Courtauld Institute of Art's postgraduate course in wall painting conservation. After working as a freelance conservator and at the British Museum, she joined English Heritage's Building Conservation and Research Team in 2003, and helped produce the Practical Building Conservation series. She co-edited the *Metals* and *Glass & Glazing* volumes, and contributed to *Mortars, Renders & Plasters*, and *Earth, Brick & Terracotta*. Icon-accredited, Sophie is now Historic England's lead for technical queries concerning wall paintings and architectural paintwork, and primary contact for casework involving architectural metalwork, glass, and decorative plasterwork.

Sarah Pinchin is a Commissioned Treatment Coordinator and Wall Painting Conservator at Historic Royal Palaces. She has project-managed conservation on wall and ceiling paintings in the Chapel Royal and Little Banqueting House at Hampton Court Palace, the Cupola Room at Kensington Palace, and Queen Charlotte's Cottage at Kew. She was also project conservator on the Rubens Ceiling Paintings at the Banqueting House, Whitehall. Sarah was previously an Architectural Conservator for English Heritage, coordinating stone research and advising on wall painting conservation. She has been Chair of the Icon Stone and Wall Painting Group since 2022.

Jonathan Deeming (RIBA, SCA, AABC) is a conservation accredited architect and Regional Partner for the North at architectural practice Purcell, where he has worked since 2006. His

interests in the management, care and development of heritage sites are piqued by the variety of projects encountered at a range of scales in his appointments to Canterbury and Lichfield Cathedrals, where he is Cathedral Architect. Often these appointments involve working collaboratively with a range of skilled craftspeople and conservators – something he considers a real perk of the job! Jonathan is a Commissioner for the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England and Treasurer for the Cathedral Architects Association. He has previously acted as an assessor for the RIBA's Conservation Accreditation Scheme and as the Conservation Member of the jury panel for the RIBA Regional Awards.

Helen Howard, senior scientist at the National Gallery, undertakes research into the original materials and techniques of paintings, investigating how materials may have deteriorated over time and whether this affects the current condition and appearance of the painting. She completed her PhD, 'Pigments of English Medieval Wall Painting', at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. This followed a Postgraduate Diploma in the Conservation of Wall Paintings, from the Courtauld Institute/Getty Conservation Institute, and an MA in Fine Art from Oxford University. Her main research interests include historical/early painting technology including easel/wall painting and polychrome sculpture, pigment alterations and original vanishes.

Katy Lithgow (Dip Cons, MA (Cantab), ACR, FIIC). An accredited conservator specialising in preventive conservation, wall painting conservation, and conservation management of collections and historic interiors, Katy worked for the National Trust for 27 years, serving as Head Conservator from 2005 to 2019. She was also a Trustee of the National Heritage Science Forum, and Chair of Icon's PACR Accreditation Committee, winning the Plowden Medal in 2020. Now a freelance consultant providing advice, talks and publications, Katy's regular roles include chairing Historic England's Historic Estate Conservation Committee (since 2021), serving as a member of Southwark Cathedral's Fabric Advisory Committee, and lecturing for the City & Guilds.

Peter Martindale is director of Peter Martindale Conservation, which is included in the Conservation Register maintained by Icon. The company undertakes in-situ condition surveys and implements practical conservation measures in regard to wall paintings, decorative polychromy, plaster and stone. He is an accredited member of Icon and serves as an assessor in regard to PACR. He has served on both Icon's Board of Trustees and the Stone and Wall Paintings Committee. Peter is a Fellow of the International Institute of Conservation, a member of ICOM UK, and serves on the Heritage and Science Committee of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Ruth McNeilage (ACR) is a partner in McNeilage Conservation, specialising in the conservation of wall paintings and polychromy. Many of their projects have involved uncovering wall painting schemes and polychrome woodwork. As a long-term member of the Icon wall painting committee, Ruth has organised conferences and tours of wall painting sites, and regularly gives talks associated with her work. McNeilage Conservation have recently completed work on the medieval 'Christ in Majesty' sculpture at Worcester Cathedral, undertaking examination, analysis and conservation of the high-quality sculpture and its exquisitely rich polychrome schemes in collaboration with specialists from other disciplines. They are currently working with Exeter University on a digital reconstruction of the polychromy.

Nigel Walter is a Specialist Conservation Architect and founder of Cambridge-based architecture and conservation practice, Archangel. He is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a member of the Church Buildings Council, and a trustee of the National Churches Trust. Nigel is inspecting architect for some 70 historic churches, mostly listed, many grade I. He holds a PhD in historic building conservation at the University of York, and his academic research focuses on living heritage. He is Secretary General of TheoPhilos, the ICOMOS International Committee on Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration.