# Church of St Edmund, Castleton: Derbyshire

## *Post-Reformation Wall Paintings*

## Conservation Report

Rickerby & Shekede

May 2024

# Stephen Rickerby & Lisa Shekede

## Wall Painting Conservators

**12 New Street, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR9 7DA**

**tel +44 (0)1989 565551**

**S. Rickerby mobile: 07798 837714; L. Shekede mobile: 07787 573852**

**e-mails: srickerby@rickerby-shekede.com; lshekede@rickerby-shekede.com**

**website: http://www.rickerby-shekede.com**

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

The uncovering and conservation of the wall painting at St Edmund’s church, Castleton, would not have been possible without generous funding from ChurchCare (Church Buildings Council, Paintings and Wall Paintings Committee), the Society of Antiquaries of London (William & Jane Morris Church Conservation Grant), The Leche Trust, the Churches Conservation Trust and the Friends of St Edmund's Church. We are immensely grateful to Angela Darlington for her unfailing dedication to the conservation project from beginning to end. We are also grateful to Val Grant for her commitment to having the painting conserved. We extend our thanks to Brian Moorhouse and John Loveless for their work in gaining faculty permissions, including for addressing fabric repairs before the wall painting treatment could commence. Thanks are also due to Linda Wilson for her help and presence at the church. We are grateful too to Louise Petheram, Priest-in-charge at St Edmund’s, for her support of the project. Through serendipitous circumstances, we were first contacted about the painting by Castleton residents, Sue and Phil Levene, to whom we are grateful. Last but not least, this report is dedicated to Pat and Murial Callis for their past fund-raising efforts for the church and their keen interest in the painting when it was initially exposed, and who have since passed away.

# Summary

The medieval church of St Edmund's, Castleton, Derbyshire, in common with many other churches in the country, was extensively reordered in the C19. The highly regular appearance of the rendered interior suggested that any historic painting was lost in this process. However, the collapse of some plasterwork in around 2012 revealed a small area of painting at the east end of the nave south wall. After a preliminary examination by **Rickerby and Shekede** in 2019, a medieval date was proposed; other remains of painting were also observed at the west end of the nave. A subsequent survey carried out in 2021 indicated that considerably more of the south wall painting was likely to survive beneath the covering plasterwork. On the west wall, painting belonging to several phases was discovered, but no other evidence of decoration was found elsewhere in the nave. Two main recommendations were made: to uncover and stabilize the painting on the south wall; and to re-cover most painting on the west wall for its protection, leaving only selected 'windows' to demonstrate its presence and significance.

A 3-week treatment phase was carried out from 8–26 April 2024. Uncovering on the south wall unexpectedly revealed post-Reformation painting, dateable to the C17, but none of medieval date. Several phases are present, though it is difficult to be precise about their number. The most extensive painting shows a framed, finely painted black-letter text, which can be identified as part of the Ten Commandments. Based on the words and phrases that can be deciphered, the painting originally extended over much of the south wall between the two windows at this end of the nave. Indications are that much of this may still survive beneath the later plasterwork. The fragment that was partly exposed in around 2012 belongs to a superimposed phase of painting, which shows the remains of an elaborate architectural decoration, perhaps part of another border that framed a later text painting.

The newly revealed painting invites a reappraisal of the church's history of decoration. While it is probably certain that the medieval interior was once richly painted, collected evidence now suggests that the C17 witnessed a substantial if not complete redecoration, during which earlier painting seems to have been mostly eradicated. This major makeover indicates particular circumstances of local wealth and patronage in this period.

*Above: The post-Reformation painting now revealed at the east end of the nave south wall.*

# Conservation context

*Above: The fragment of wall painting before its uncovering and treatment. Collapse of the covering plaster in around 2012 led to its unexpected exposure.*

In around 2012, the collapse of an area of plasterwork at the east end of the south wall in St Edmund's church, Castleton, revealed a small portion of historic wall painting [Everingham 2012]. Despite much of its fabric dating to the medieval period, with features spanning the C12–16, this was an unexpected revelation. Major reordering of the church in the C19 included almost comprehensive replastering of its interior, leaving regularized walls that did not suggest that painting could have survived this intervention.

In January 2019 **Rickerby and Shekede** made a brief visit to examine the exposed painting and a medieval dating was proposed. Other traces of painting were also observed at the west end of the nave. Despite their isolated and fragmentary condition, the discoveries were judged to be both rare and important: only a few other historic wall paintings survive in Derbyshire. They also raised the prospect that more painting could remain concealed in the nave.

The Parish was advised to undertake an investigative survey of the nave walls, firstly to better understand the nature and condition of the already exposed areas of painting, and to assess how much additional concealed painting might be present in these locations; and secondly, to establish whether other painting might be concealed elsewhere in the nave, and, if found, to determine its nature, extent and condition. The main purpose of the survey, which also included moisture and salts investigations, was to determine prevailing risks, opportunities and constraints, and to reach an informed basis for decision-making.

The survey was carried out in July 2021 and was based on making representative uncovering 'windows' though the later plaster layers [Rickerby and Shekede 2021]. The findings indicated that much of the nave had been stripped bare of its earlier plasterwork when it was re-rendered in the C19. In addition to the two areas of already exposed painting, only one other area was discovered, on the south side of the west wall, where several different phases of decoration were located. However, since the uncovering 'windows' were small and made at widely spaced intervals on the interior, it remained a possibility that concealed painting could have been missed.

Based on an assessment of the prevailing conditions, the principal recommendations were to uncover as much as possible of the already revealed painting at the east end of the south wall, accompanied by appropriate stabilization treatments and cleaning. For the painting at the west end of the nave, it was advised that only selected areas be kept exposed, to demonstrate their presence and significance, and to re-cover other areas for their protection.

# Extent of painting

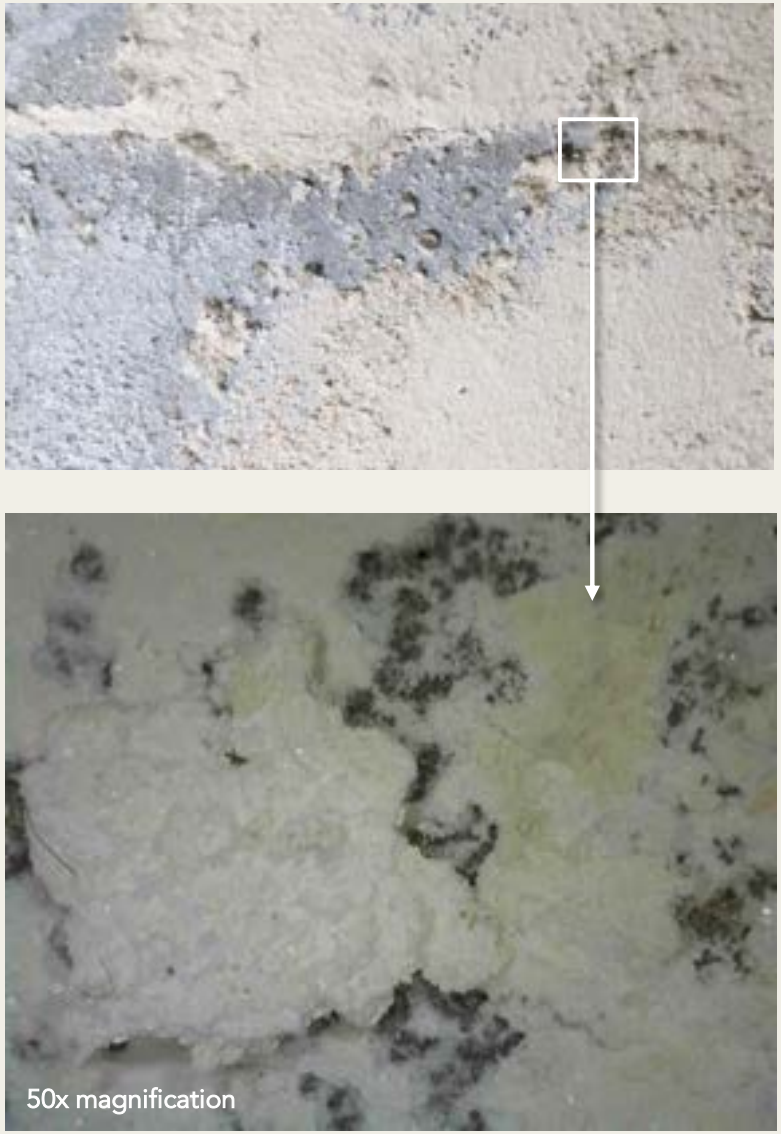
**The survey carried out in 2021 indicated that while more painting certainly remained concealed at the east end of the south wall, its extent would be circumscribed. The collected evidence suggested that it might best survive beneath a relatively small area of irregular plasterwork and patching, which seemed to be associated with a lost wall fixture. It was considered unlikely that painting would still be present beneath the thickly applied and very regular C19 render (which is also characterized by its scored masonry lines). Surprisingly, it turned out that this render had served to protect the earlier painted plaster, raising the prospect that much more painting remains concealed than had been previously thought.**

2021

2024

***Left: The dashed line in the raking light image (far left) was an estimation of the extent of painting that remained concealed, based on the evidence of small uncovering 'windows' made in the vicinity of the fragment in 2021. Expectations were exceeded, as shown by the comparison image of the painting after its uncovering (near left). Moreover, this represents less than half the extent of the original painting (see page 25), with more concealed painting surviving above and to the right of that which is now revealed.***

# Condition before treatment




**The findings of the 2021 investigations provided important insights of the condition of the painting fragment and its principal deterioration risks, helping to determine treatment options.**

**Although damaged and fragmentary, the painting was found to survive in generally excellent condition, with no serious signs of powdering plaster or flaking paint, for example. Nor was there evidence of inherent salt-related deterioration associated with the original plaster materials. However, soluble ions from surrounding non-original plasters and repairs (cement and gypsum-based materials) had caused salt damage. Analysis indicated that these were sources of sulfates. Many sulfate salts – such as calcium sulfate (gypsum) and the sodium sulfates, thenardite and mirabilite – are highly damaging. They cause disruptive sub-surface expansion pressures upon crystallization [Matteini 1990: 140-142].**

**The uncovering of concealed painting is not always considered a preferable conservation option, as this exposes potentially vulnerable plaster and paint materials to risks of environmental deterioration. In this case, however, the risks to the painting were from the overlapping and surrounding later plasters. It was in the interests of the painting's preservation to remove these layers, not only to eliminate a source of damaging salts but also to gain full access to the fragment to repair and stabilise it in its damaged state.**

***Above: The salt activity associated with the plasters and repairs overlapping and surrounding the painting was consistent with expansive and highly disruptive sulfates.***

# Treating the wall painting

The remedial treatment of the painting comprised five main interventions: uncovering, consolidation and micro-grouting, repairs, cleaning, and presentation measures. The primary objective was the stabilization of the damaged and vulnerable painting, and consolidation, micro-grouting and repairs were therefore the predominant interventions. To stabilize the painting, however, its uncovering was a necessary precursor. Cleaning was mainly of superficial dirt and deposits. The presentation measures, although important for improving the legibility of the painting, were confined.

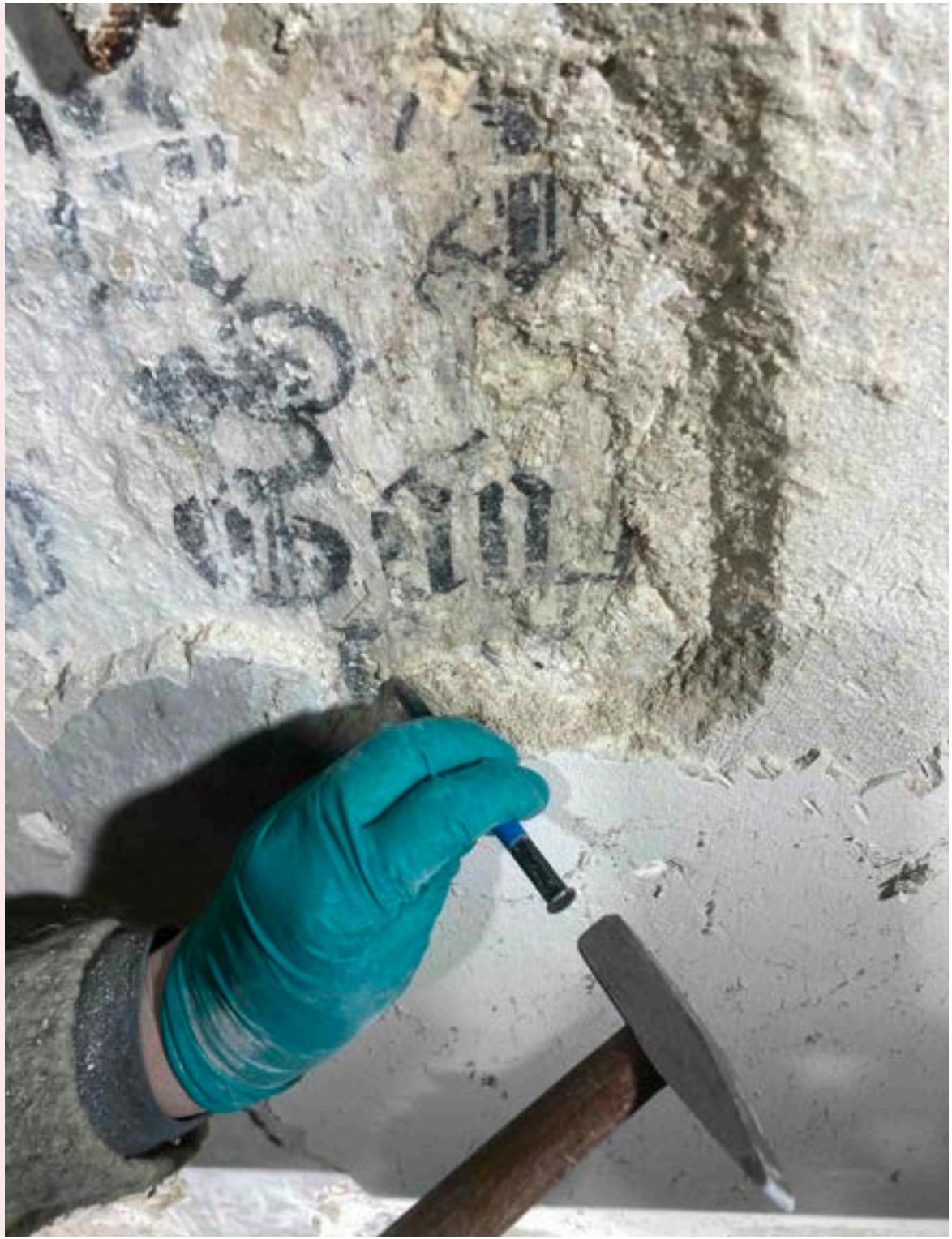
As a general conservation principle, compatibility of materials is a key component of treatment design and implementation, so that original materials and added repair materials behave similarly together. The primary technology of the exposed painting is essentially lime-based, and this directed the selection of the treatment materials. A related consideration is limiting and streamlining of materials, so that a small range of similar compatible materials are used to fulfil the full range of stabilization interventions. This brings the benefit that fewer added materials are introduced to the wall paintings.

*Left: Detail of the painting at the beginning of its uncovering and treatment.*

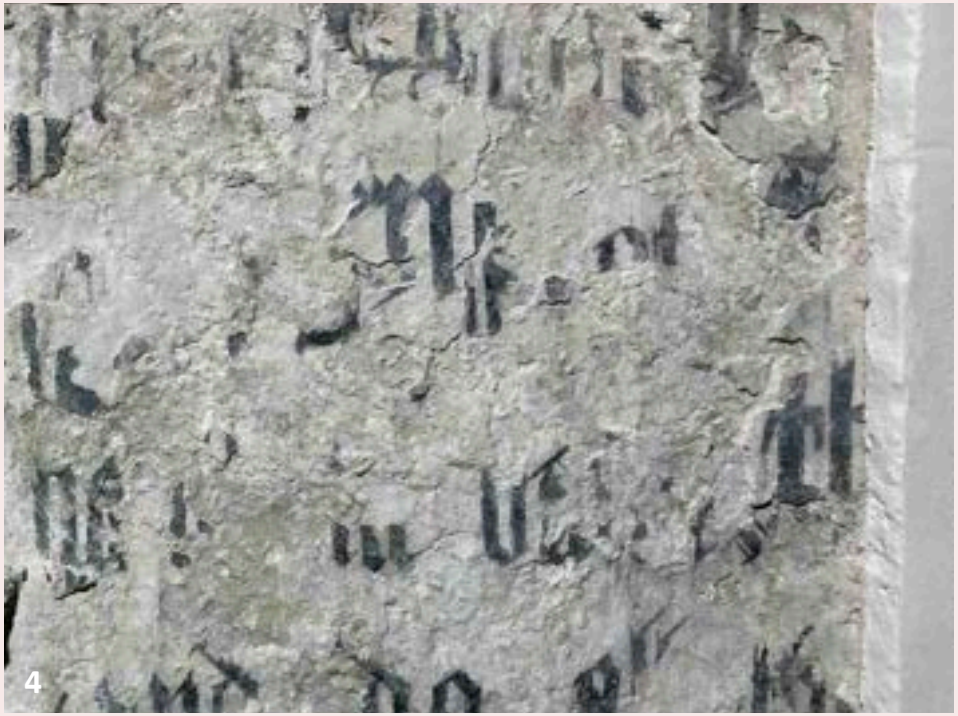
# Uncovering

**Uncovering can be a damaging process, especially if historic (and generally weaker) layers are concealed beneath stronger and well-bonded covering layers. Circumstances at Castleton proved fortuitous, however. Firstly, the historic phases of painting survive in generally good condition and are themselves well-bonded to their substrate materials. Unusually too, the revealed painting is not generally composed of multiple layers, which typically tend to shear at interfaces. For example, the text painting for the most part is executed on a limewash layer that was applied directly over the stone, which encouraged good adherence. Although the 'architectural' fragment is superimposed over the text painting, it is executed on a single, coherent plaster layer. Some of the the later (unpainted) covering layers were already separated and were therefore easily removed without risk. The C19 plasterwork, on the other hand, was firmly bonded to the underlying painting. However, its thickness and aggregate-rich composition allowed it to be gently pulverized by mechanical means, which usually disintegrated the plaster rather than separated it by shearing.**

***Right: Detail of the text painting during its uncovering.***






***Left: Stages in uncovering of the painting from beneath the C19 plaster: (1) initial chiseling of overlying plaster, revealing its application in two layers, the lower one scored to receive the upper layer; (2) gradual uncovering and thinning of overlying materials, layer by layer; (3) thinning of remaining covering material; and (4) after uncovering.***

# Consolidation and micro-grouting

*Above: Nano-lime consolidation.*

**As there is more than one phase of decoration and the fragments survive in a discontinuous state, the uncovered painting had many exposed and vulnerable edges. These were stabilized and protected using a lime-based consolidant and a 'micro-grout'.**

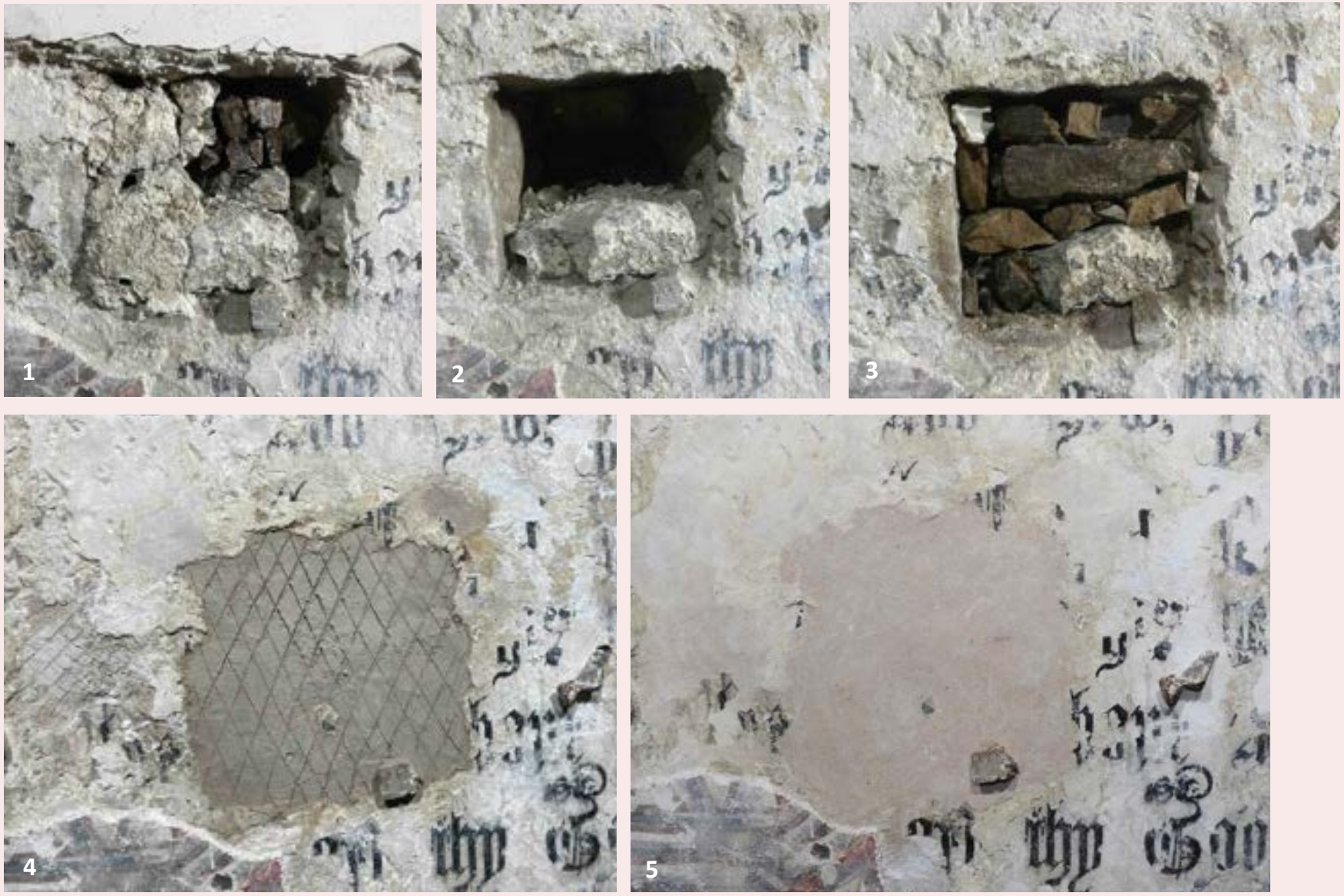
**A nano-lime dispersed in alcohol (CaloSiL® E50) was used as the consolidant. Colloidal dispersions of $Ca(OH)_2$ nanoparticles offer a number of advantages: as a lime-based system, compatibility with the original plaster and limewash materials is maintained; proven efficacy in limiting carbonation of the nano-lime particles by $CO_2$ before they have been deposited in the substrate; appropriate penetration depth, strength, hardness, surface cohesion, capillary absorption, etc.; and little or no change of internal pore structures, so that effective porosity is maintained in the original materials. Nano-limes have been widely studied and verified in terms of their stability, and performance and working properties.**

**Some conditions of plaster disaggregation could not be adequately treated with the nano-lime consolidant, and a 'micro-grout' was developed (to be delivered as droplets from a pipette). This was formulated to consolidate/bridge larger loose particles at exposed plaster edges. The 'micro-grout' comprised 1 part lime, 1 part chalk powder and 1 part pumice (<240 µm), + added water to desired consistency for effective delivery. Use of the 'micro-grout' required prior pre-wetting of substrate materials with alcohol:water (1:1 v/v).**

# Repairs

**Two types of repair were formulated for the painting: a coarse plaster for deep fills and a fine plaster for shallow, upper-level fills. Uncovering revealed a number of deep put-log holes which had been blocked with stones, usually quite randomly and poorly. Unstable and heavy stones were removed and either replaced or reinserted along with smaller stones, to achieve more stable packing. The coarse plaster was then built up in layers over the stone base. This comprised 1 part lime, 4 parts sharp sand (v/v). The fine plaster was used for the many shallow losses and for skimming over the deep fills. This was formulated with a chalk powder component to give it a smoother surface texture, to better match the exposed layers at and just below the surface of the painting (1 part lime, 2 parts play-pit sand, 1 part chalk powder, v/v).**

***Right: building up layers of the coarse plaster over a put-log hole.***




*Above: Stages in making repairs: (1) put-log hole randomly filled with stone pieces and wood, as found after uncovering; (2) during removal of loose filling materials; (3) reinsertion and packing of filling materials and pre-wetting; (4) after application of lower coarse plaster; and (5) after application of upper fine plaster.*

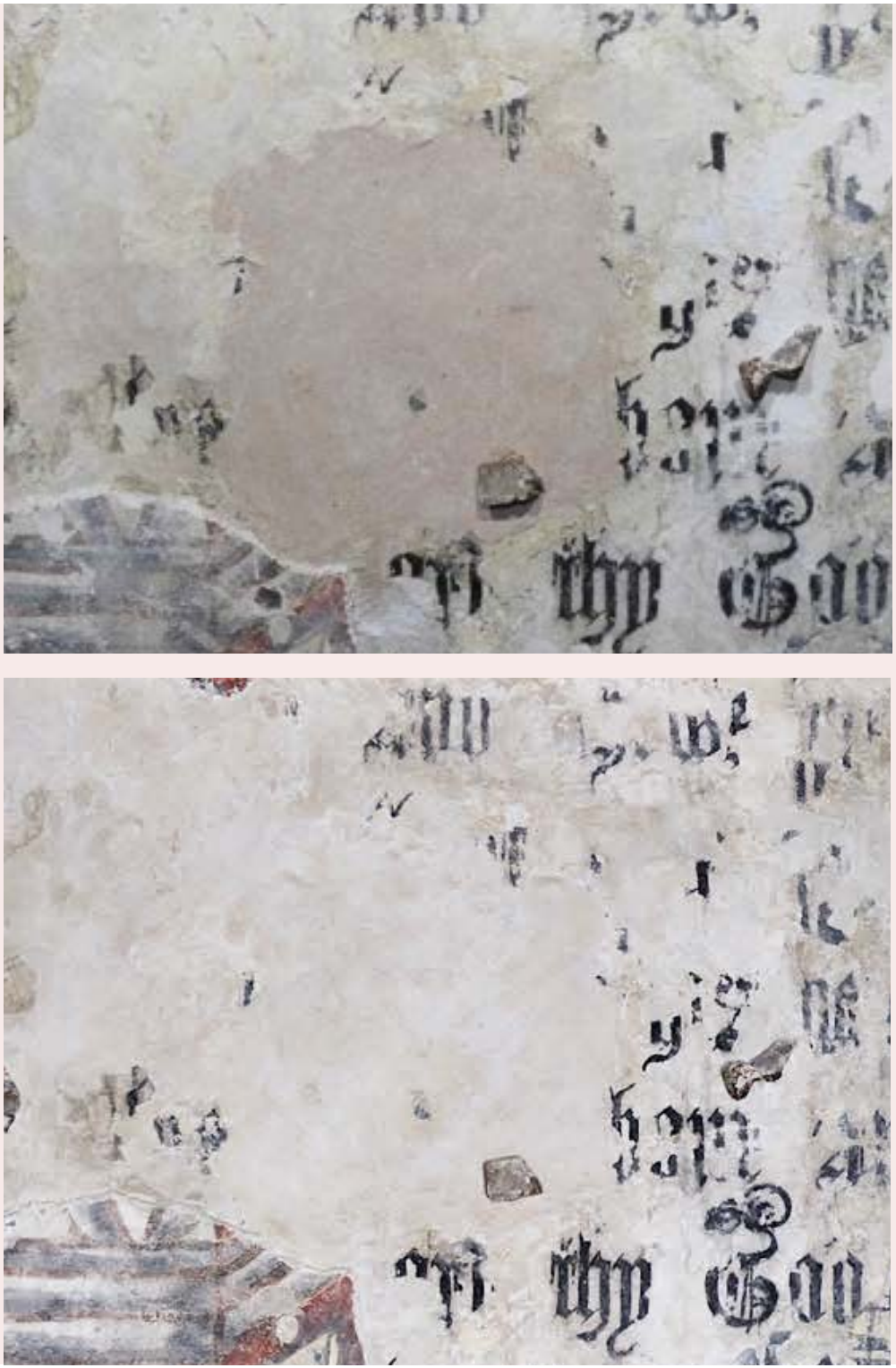
# Cleaning

**Although dirt deposition on the painting was not a major problem, different cleaning procedures were adopted for different problems. Unbonded dust and debris were easily removed with soft brushes and air puffers. Slightly bonded dirt was cleaned with specialist sponges and water. A melamine sponge (Meleco®) with an open-cell, slightly rigid structure consisting of slender webs – which makes it mildly abrasive, yet capable of yielding rather than damaging the paint surface – was used to dislodge dirt and trap it in the open spaces between the strands. A PVF sponge (Saugwunder® suction-block) was used for rinsing and clearance. This is classed as a super-absorbent sponge due to its capillary structure, which is capable of easily absorbing and retaining excess moisture during clearance. Its smooth surface also makes it ideal for use on paintings. An area of intransigent staining on the lower part of the 'architectural' fragment was cleaned using ammonium carbonate (15% solution) applied in sorbent layers, followed by clearance.**

***Left: Cleaning with ammonium bicarbonate through a sorbent layer to reduce intransigent staining. Below: Before (left) and after (right) cleaning.***

# Presentation measures

**The future preservation of the painting depends as much on it being appreciated and understood, as it does on it being physically conserved. An important objective was not only to stabilize the painting effectively, but also to enhance its legibility. However, it was also important that this be done without compromising the authenticity of the aged painting. The emphasis of the 'presentation' measures was therefore on adjusting the appearance of both the new repairs and distracting areas of unpainted plasterwork so that they receded from view, allowing the fragmentary painting to come to the fore and be more legible.**



***Right: new fills (top) were limewashed and toned with watercolours (limited to dilute mixtures of raw umber and black) to make them merge into the background (bottom).***

# Uncovering and re-covering: west wall

The 2021 survey established the west end of the nave as another location where considerable painting still survives. On the north side of the wall, large areas of red colour were already partly revealed, but no distinct design features were evident. On the south side, uncovering trials revealed several superimposed phases of decoration, and it was conjectured that these might range in date from the medieval to the post-Reformation periods.

The condition of the plasterwork on this wall is quite poor, the result of a history of rainwater infiltration damage. Even so, the remaining fragments of painting are important survivals indicating the historic decoration of the interior. Given these circumstances, the decision was made to re-cover most areas of exposed painting for its protection and to leave open selective 'windows', to highlight the presence and significance of the surviving painting.

For the re-covering of the painting, a layer of chalk powder suspended in industrial methylated spirit (IMS) was first applied as an inert protective layer. Over this, limewash was then applied in successive layers.

*Right: The remains of red painting on the north side of the west wall before (left) and after (right) its protective re-covering and selective uncovering.*

# Dating and explanation

**The fragmentary painting on the north side of the west wall offers little information as to its original overall form and function. In the 2021 survey a medieval date was proposed, but this can now by reappraised. Closer examination of the plaster shows that is contains hair, indicating a post-Reformation date. The paintwork is broadly applied and has no detailing, but the upper 'window' shows that the red paint forms a border against an adjacent area of unpainted limewash. This edge is not present on the lower uncovered 'window', however. The red paint perhaps formed a broad irregular border around a central panel which may have contained a text. Alternatively, all the paintwork may have formed the surround for a lost wall monument.**

**A distinctive feature of the painted plaster is that it survives as a relatively thin single layer applied directly over the stonework support: there is no evidence of any earlier surviving medieval plaster layers. This is also the case for the painting at the east end of the south wall. These findings are relatively unusual and instructive. Generally, post-Reformation paintings are found as the uppermost layers of a multi-layered stratigraphy of decorative phases dating to the medieval period. Given the medieval origins of the church fabric, there is little doubt that its interior did once preserve extensive painting from this period: this was normal and expected practice. As already mentioned, on the south side of the west wall, multiple phases of painting were detected in the 2021 survey, and some of these may well be of medieval date. However, the collected and revealed evidence suggests that whatever medieval painting may once have been present was generally stripped away and the walls replastered to make way for a substantive decorative makeover in the post-Reformation period.**

***Right: Details of the upper and lower uncovering 'windows' on the north side of the west wall.***


**The uncovered 'window' on the south side of the west wall survives as a complicated palimpsest of partially surviving layers (*left*), as further illustrated and explained on page 16. At least three distinct phases of painting can be discerned. An upper white plaster layer, which contains hair, preserves faint traces of black-letter text, probably of C17 date. Unfortunately, no words can be deciphered, but possibly the numerals 3 or 5(?) and 6 (?) are present, which could indicate that this was a quoted Biblical text concluded with the chapter and verse numbers. Also painted on this layer, and therefore probably accompanying the text, are indistinct forms in yellow outlined in black, but what they represent is unclear. Carried over the first black-letter text on a thin limewash are some traces of a later (but very similar) black-letter text, which is even less decipherable, however. A loss in the white plaster in the upper left corner reveals an earlier layer of thin plaster on which traces of red and black paint survive. The date of this layer is unclear, as there is so little evidence to go on.**





***Details of the different phases of decoration: (1) the earliest layer, showing traces of red and black paint on a thin plaster applied directly over the stone, date uncertain; (2) detail of the two phases of black-letter text. The lower, faint layer may show the number 6. The upper text is applied on a thin limewash layer; (3) another detail showing the superimposition of the text layers. Here, the upper text only survives as very small traces.***

# Identification and interpretation

The revelation that no medieval painting survives at the east end of the south wall was unexpected, though the discoveries that have been made regarding the decoration of the interior in the post-Reformation period are of considerable interest. The now exposed painting comprises a palimpsest of several layers, two of which are especially prominent. The most extensive painting shows a finely painted black-letter text, which can be identified as part of the Ten Commandments. Based on the words and phrases that can be deciphered, the painting originally extended over much of the south wall between the two windows at this end of the nave (see **page 25**). Indications are that much of this may still survive beneath the later plasterwork. The other prominent painting is the fragment that was partly exposed in around 2012, considerably more of which is now visible, which belongs to a superimposed phase of decoration. Other fragments of painting are present as traces and small islands, and in their disconnected states it is not always clear to which phase these belong. However, it can be stated with some certainty that all the phases are dateable to the C17, probably to a relatively confined period between about the beginning of the century and the Restoration.

Post-Reformation texts have a long history in English churches. The earliest date to the period when Elizabeth I first demanded in a letter to Archbishop Parker in 1561 that churches display the Ten Commandments 'to be read for edification', and the tradition continued well into the C19. In the late C16 and early C17, although not prescribed, The Lord's Prayer and the Creed were also commonly painted in association with the Decalogue, as together these texts formed part of the catechism and were also mentioned by the Reformation injunctions. The 1571 canon required other 'chosen sentences' to adorn church walls 'that by the readynge and warnynge thereof, the people might be moved to godliness.' Little work has been done on the development of post-Reformation painting in English churches, but evidence suggests that as the C17 progressed, the production of 'diverse sentences of Scripture' went beyond simple compliance with the injunctions to become a new focus of visual adornment and patronage, a process that was also encouraged by growing literacy. For example, at Axbridge church, Somerset, accounts of 1636 indicate that the churchwardens commissioned more work in addition to the Lord's Prayer and the Creed: "Item granted to George Drayton … for foure sentences". In the same year Drayton was paid £3 10s for labour that included 'whiting the Church' and setting up a further "8 sentences". The church of St Cosmas and St Damian, Sherrington, Wiltshire, still bears witness to this trend: surviving texts painted in 1630 include the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the fifth Commandment, and biblical quotations from Revelations ("Blessed are the Dead"), Matthew 19 ("Suffer the Little Children"), II Corinthians ("For we must all appeare before the judgement seat of Christ") and Psalm 34, among others [Orlik 2022: 244–292].

The painting of the Ten Commandments at Castleton and its overpainting can be viewed in this context. Each of the painting phases is further explored and interpreted on the following pages.

*Right: Detail of the text from the Ten Commandments partly obscured by a superimposed fragment of later painting.*

# The Ten Commandments

**Biblical accounts of the Ten Commandments are chronicled in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 6, but the precepts found in English churches in the long post-Reformation period are derived from the Book of Common Prayer. The first Book of Common Prayer was compiled in 1549 by Archbishop Cranmer during the reign of Edward VI to replace the Roman Latin rite, and the Decalogue was added to the Second Book of Common Prayer in 1552. Use of the Prayer Book was discontinued during the reign of Mary I (1553–1558), but a slightly revised version was produced under Elizabeth I in 1559. It underwent further revisions in 1604 and 1662.**

**Textual variations in painted examples can sometimes be attributed to the different published versions of the Prayer Book. But taken as a whole, variations in form, style and size are many and varied, which reflect the influence of a broader range of factors. The Commandments could be executed as wall paintings, as at Castleton, or they were painted onto boards that were then fixed in place. They could be displayed as fictive tablets or painted as rectangular panels. Black-letter texts were written as lists or run together as consecutive sentences. Some paintings number the precepts, others do not. Choices of spelling, phrasing and writing style vary and were sometimes anachronistic. A wide variety of frames were used, and additional introductory and concluding texts were commonly included. Sometimes the Commandments were displayed alongside the Creed and the Lord's Prayer or incorporated with the Royal Arms; other times they were unaccompanied. The Elizabethan injunctions stipulated that the precepts be set up "on the east end of every church and chapel where the people may best see and read the same' [Orlik 2022: 256], but if this instruction was initially followed, it was not adhered to for very long, and surviving examples are found in a variety of locations in churches.**

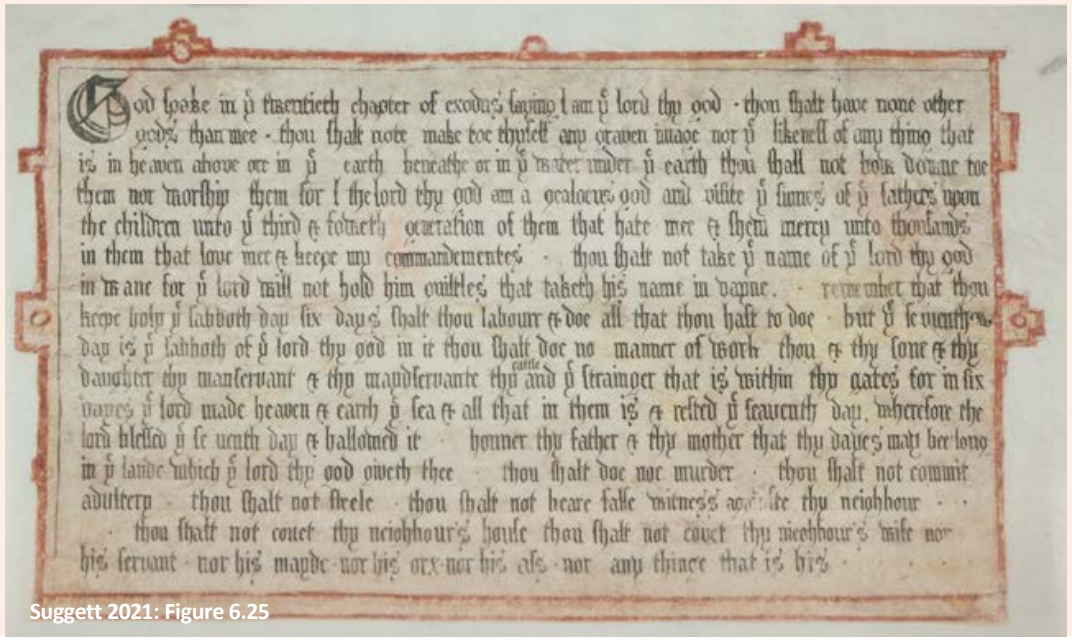
*Right: Different examples of The Ten Commandments in English churches shown as paired tablets: a C17 wall painting at the east end of the St Richard's church, Burton Park, West Sussex (top); a C16 Commandment board at St Mary's church, Preston, Suffolk, with triptych wings which show additional scriptural texts (and has as its companion an Elizabethan Royal Arms) (middle); and a C17 commandment board at Cartmel Priory (Cumbria) which includes a depiction of Moses (bottom).*

https://sussexexclusive.com/ancient-drawings-at-burton-church/

http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/preston.html

https://www.lakesguides.co.uk/html/lgaz/lk02192.htm

http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/preston.html



Suggett 2021: Figure 6.25

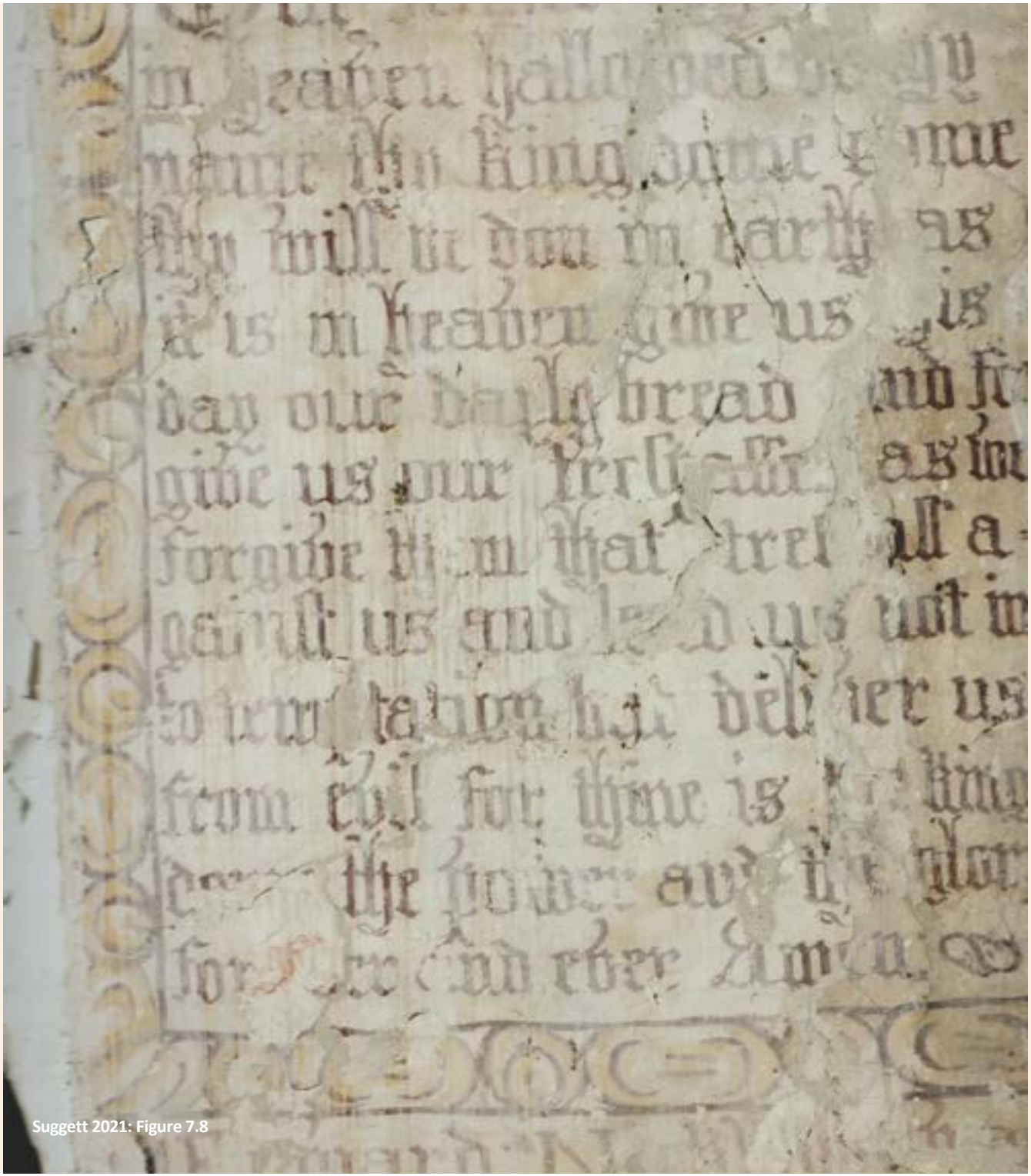
**Issues of space availability probably partly influenced these varied outcomes, but particularities of patronage and expenditure were probably more important, and it is clear from churchwardens' accounts that 'investor' competition led to a considerable turnover and diversity of painted sacred texts. This is evidenced at Castleton, where multiple post-Reformation layers are found in close association.**

**Key features of Castleton's Ten Commandments indicate a C17 date. Generally, the spelling and writing style accord with this period rather than the C16: for example, "labour" is used rather than "laboure, and "do" rather than "doe"; "man servant" is unhyphenated, whereas it is more commonly hyphenated in the C16. The style of the frame, although difficult to parallel exactly, is in keeping with a C17 date. Similar examples are found in other wall paintings. The frontispieces of Bibles and Prayer Books printed in the C17 also provide comparable examples.**

**Many treatises and expositions on the Ten Commandments were published in the first half of the C17. It was in this period that emphasis was placed on interpreting the implications of each precept, not just as a means of understanding and conveying God's will, but also to set out clear directions for religious and civil law and order [Willis 2020]. Thus, for example, the lengthy Second Commandment ("Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image …" which contains both a curse ("for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me") and a blessing ("and shewe mercy unto thousands in them that love me and keep my commandments.") evoked lengthy explanation in contemporary expositions on the Decalogue (eg, John Dod's *A plaine and familiar exposition of the Ten commandments*, published in 1604). This time of heightened religious debate was when the Ten Commandments at Castleton were painted.**

*Left: Two wall paintings of the Ten Commandments, one of C16 date at All Saints church, Cockthorpe, Norfolk (top), the other at St Issui's church, Partrisow, Breconshire (bottom), which is attributed to the church painter, Thomas Jones, who was active in the first half of the C17.*

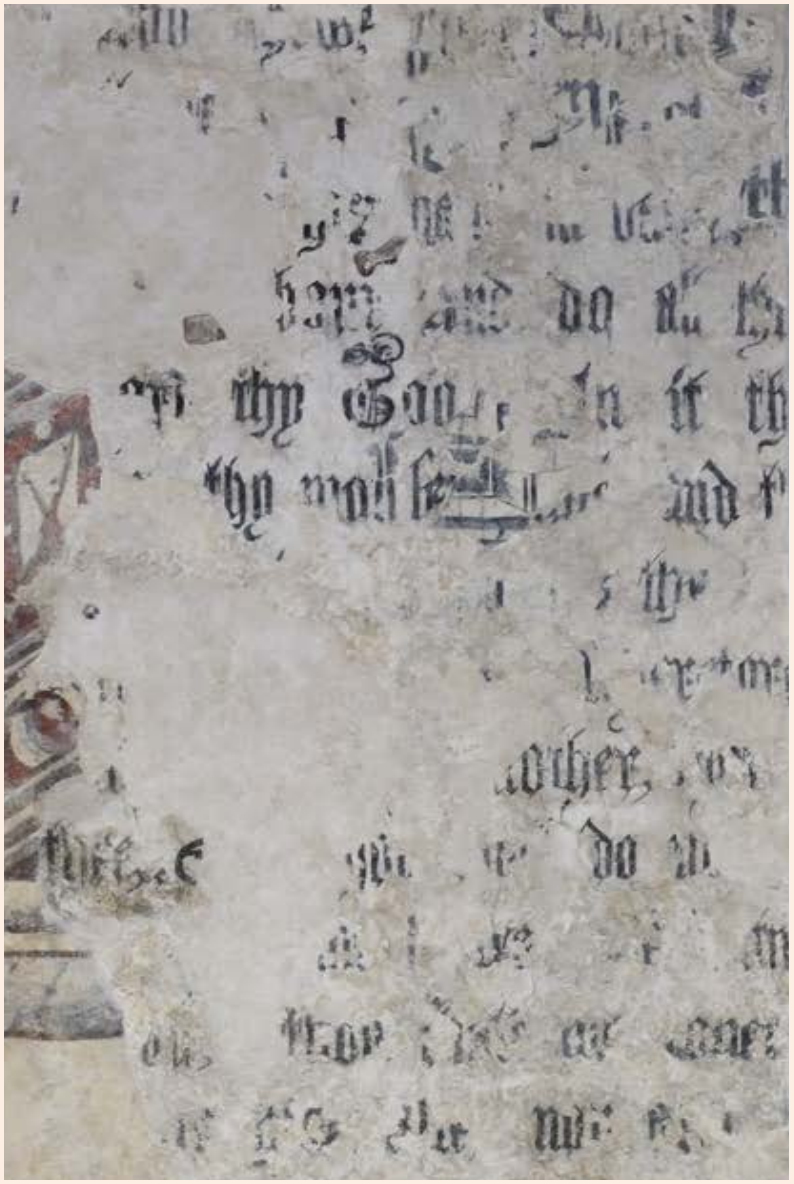
*Left: details of the ornamented frame that borders the Ten Commandments. Its width is about 30 cm. A 'twisted rope' design forms the outer edge, while the inner edge is defined by parallel black and red lines. Between these is a 'jewelled' design, a rounded motif which was painted in two alternating colours. Red remains visible but the other colour appears to have faded. Very faint indications of colour appear still to be present on close examination. Each 'jewel' motif was separated by two circles, also painted in the same alternating colours.*



Suggett 2021: Figure 7.8

*Right: St Brewis's church, Eglwys Brewis, the Lord's Prayer in black-letter text dated 1654 on the chancel arch. The 'jewelled' border has some similarities with the border of the Castleton painting.*

*Right: The Commandments are numbered and written out as consecutive sentences. In the exposed area of painting, two distinctive full-stops are visible, one after the final words of Commandment 4 ("… taketh his name in vain.") (top); and one after the final words of Commandment 5 ("… which the Lord thy God giveth thee.") (bottom). After this last full-stop, part of the number 6 is visible, indicating the start of the next precept.*

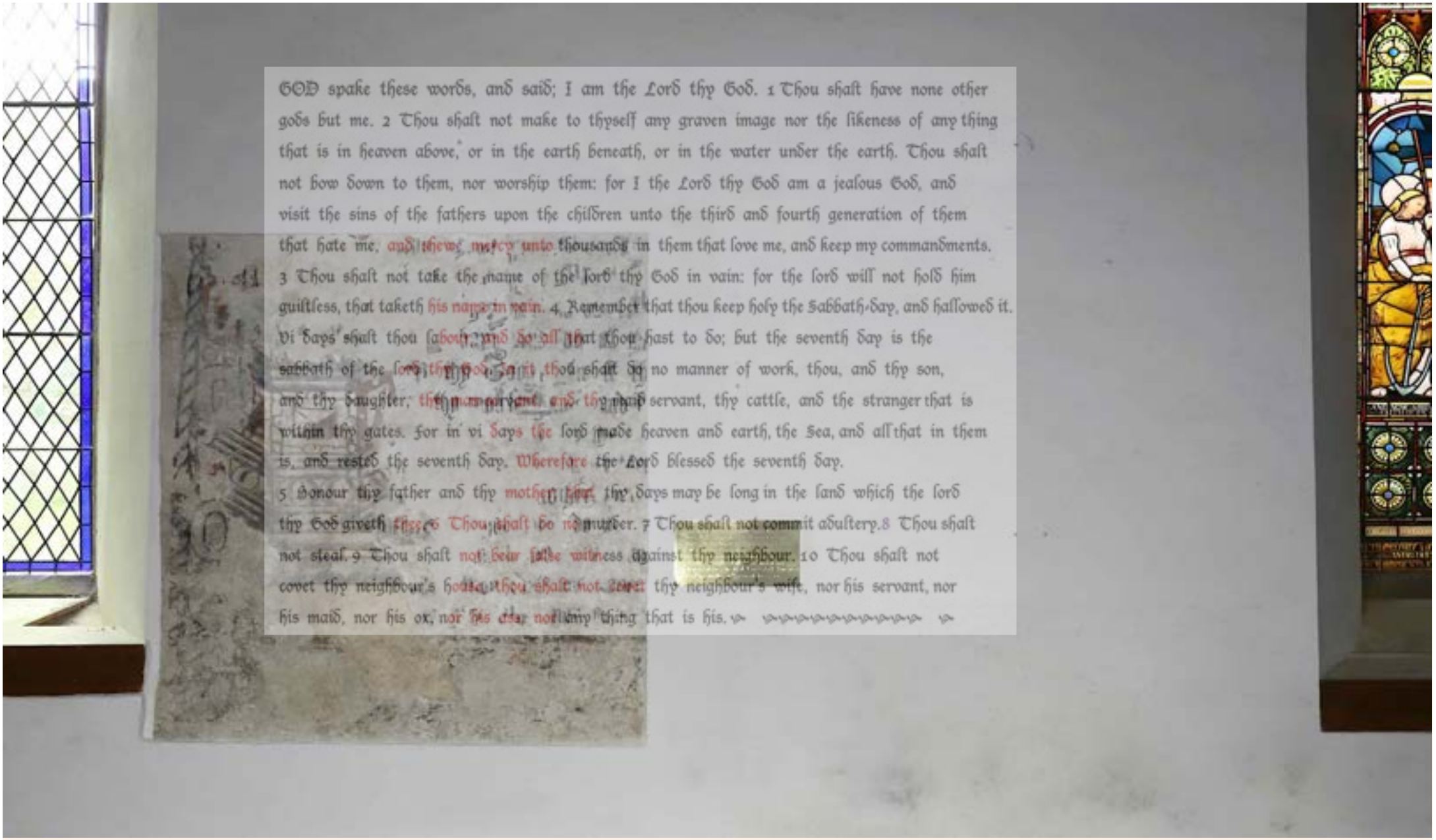


me, and shewe mercy unto thousan
halt not take the name of the lord
hat taketh his name in vain. 4 Remem
halt thou labour, and do all that th
f the lord thy God. In it thou shalt
aughter, thy man servant, and thy
y gates. For in vi days the lord mo
sted the seventh day. Wherefore the
thy father and thy mother; that th
iveth thee. 6 Thou shalt do no murd
9 Thou shalt not bear false witnes
neighbour's house, thou shalt not c
nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any th

*Left: In this transcription of the revealed text, the words shown in red are those that are most legible. This allows adjacent words that are now missing or damaged to be added in their approximate places (indicated in black).*

GOD spake these words, and said; I am the Lord thy God. 1 Thou shalt have none other gods but me. 2 Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewe mercy unto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments. 3 Thou shalt not take the name of the lord thy God in vain: for the lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain. 4 Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it. Vi days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man servant, and thy maid servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in vi days the lord made heaven and earth, the Sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day.
5 Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land which the lord thy God giveth thee. 6 Thou shalt do no murder. 7 Thou shalt not commit adultery. 8 Thou shalt not steal. 9 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 10 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

*Left and Above: Contextualization of the legible words and phrases in a complete transcription of the Ten Commandments. The word spacing and line lengths are somewhat approximated.*




*Above: Superimposing the reconstructed text on the revealed wall painting fragment gives an indication of the original extent of the Ten Commandments, which would have occupied much of the wall between the two windows at this east end of church. The alignment is approximate.*

# The ‘architectural’ fragment

**Although considerably more of the fragment of painting that was partly exposed in around 2012 is now visible (see page 34), it remains difficult to explain. It survives on a thin layer of plaster superimposed on the Ten Commandments. The painting is illusionistic and perspectival, depicting with some skill a faceted architectural feature. Details such as the square bosses segmented by diagonal lines are shaded to give the impression that they are projecting forwards. Similarly, the blue-grey shading on the moldings is intended to convey an impression of rounded forms. In style and concept, it is quite different from the ‘flat’ decorated frame that borders the Ten Commandments.**

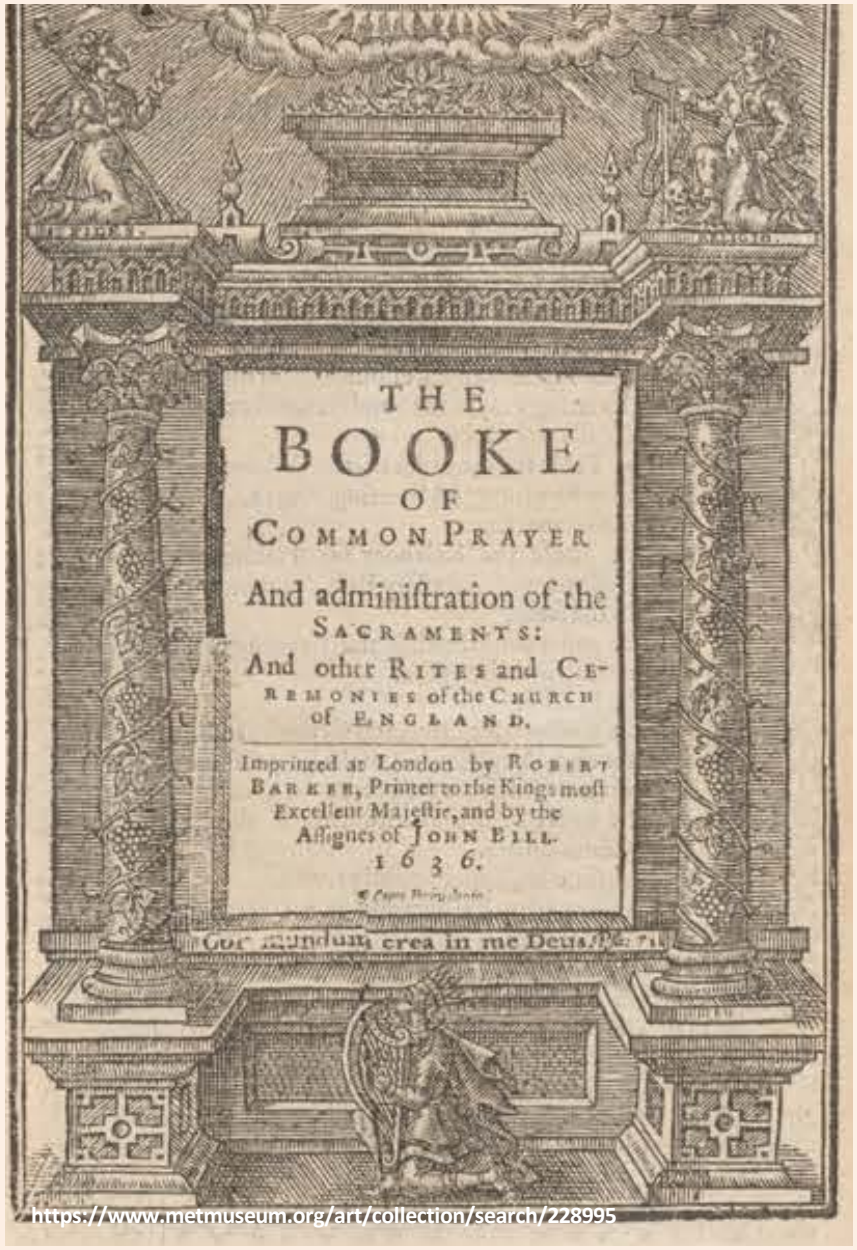
**Still, the fragment is also likely to be a frame, albeit of a more exuberant and accomplished type. This could have been for another text painting or possibly, given its more ambitious appearance, for a Royal Arms. Assigning a precise date is not easy, as architectural motifs of a similar classicizing nature are a long-standing feature of wall paintings in the post-Reformation period. However, the density of ornament and articulation that characterizes the Castleton fragment is in keeping with decorative trends in the C17 (see images, pages 27–29).**

**Despite their differences in style, the ‘architectural’ painting was probably done not very long after the Ten Commandments. Stylistic trends overlapped and coexisted in this period, and artistic differences between paintings may have had more to do with other factors, such as competing patronage and levels of expenditure, and the availability of skilled painters.**

*Right: Detail of the ‘architectural’ fragment which overlies the Ten Commandments.*

https://seearoundbritain.com/venues/st-cosmas-and-st-damian-church-sherrington-wiltshire

https://www.flickr.com/photos/norfolkodyssey/3187682397/in/pool-1019347@N20/




https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/228995

*Above: Other examples of the use of architectural frames in the C17 which can be compared with the Castleton painting: a religious text painted in 1630 on the interior of the church of St Cosmas and St Damian, Sherrington, Wiltshire (top left); the Lord's Prayer painted in the church of St Mary the Virgin, Astley, Warwickshire (bottom left); and the frontispiece of the Prayer Book printed in 1636 (right).*

*Left and Above: The illusionistic architectural detailing on a pulpit dated 1636 in the church of St Cuthbert, Wells, Somerset, provides a close parallel for the Castleton painting.*


*Above: The monumental appearance of the frame in the Castleton painting may indicate that it belonged to a more ambitious composition such as the Royal Arms. In the example shown here, the Royal Arms of Charles I painted in 1631 in the church of St Cuthbert, Wells, the frame incorporates comparable architectural motifs.*

# Other paint fragments and their phasing

**Other smaller, scattered remains of painting survive on top of both the Ten Commandments and the architectural fragment. Some of these may belong to the same phase, others are clearly distinct and separate.**

**Over the lettering of "… lord thy God …" from the Fourth Commandment are some fragmentary remains showing a perspectival design painted in black (*right*). In its architectural style and execution on a thin plaster, it has some similarities with the main architectural fragment (page 26). However, it cannot be stated for certain whether they belong to the same phase of decoration. The black design may equally belong to an entirely different phase of painting.**

**Other fragments of overlying painting are illustrated and described on pages 31–33, overleaf.**


*Left and Above: In the top right corner of the currently revealed portion of the Ten Commandments are fragments of another overlying black-letter text, also executed on a thin plaster skim. The lettering is marginally broader and not as finely delineated as that of the underlying Commandments. Once again, it is unclear if this text painting is coeval with or separate from other overlying fragments. No words can be deciphered.*


*Left and Above: Very small traces of what appears to be a black-letter text painting survive on a limewash layer on top of the architectural fragment.*

*Right: At the top edge of the currently revealed portion of painting is a small fragment of plaster preserving two phases of painted decoration. The lower layer is particularly colourful, showing a design feature painted in black, red and yellow. The deep tone of the red paint resembles that used on the architectural fragment. It therefore seems likely that this phase of painting represents a continuation from the architectural fragment. On a limewash layer applied over this is another phase of painting, only visible here as a brighter red colour. This may be coeval with the traces of black-letter text found on the architectural fragment (see page 32). The survival of this fragment is especially tantalising as it clearly continues further up the wall beneath the covering plasterwork.*

# Closing remarks

Divine law and royal authority became as one at the English Reformation. By 1616, for example, the Somerset minister Richard Eburne wrote in a treatise that the Ten Commandments were as 'a Royal Law propounded unto us', and their display in churches embodied this in visual form [Willis 2020: 77]. The fragmentary Decalogue now revealed at Castleton church is a fine example of its type, which says much about the predominance of the written word during this period. Its finely crafted script stands in contrast to the rather irregularly painted border. A painter of church texts, Thomas Jones, who was active in Breconshire and Hereford in the first half of the C17, relates that it was his skill of 'rapid writing' rather than painting that enabled him in his job, and indeed he was also employed as a clerk or scrivener [Suggett 2021: 251–255]. It may sometimes have been the case that frames were designed and painted by different artisans.

This is not to say that church paintings were entirely focused on the didactic at the expense of the aesthetic. The multiplicity of painting phases dateable to the post-Reformation period at Castleton partly relates to normal processes of renewal: as paintings were damaged through wear and tear, or lost through deterioration, their replacement was to be expected. However, it seems clear that new and more elaborately adorned paintings were also done in response to competitive patronage. The skillfully painted architectural fragment at Castleton suggests these circumstances lay behind its commissioning.

While some medieval painting may still be concealed on the church's walls, the overwhelming evidence is that an almost total internal renewal occurred during the post-Reformation period. This testifies to embedded devotional practice in the C17 and to a period of prosperity which saw an outlet in the commissioning of paintings to adorn the church. This is also reflected in the family inscriptions on the box pews, which similarly attest to displays of social standing and wealth. It is very likely that the notable local families who occupied the pews also commissioned the paintings, signifying both their piety and status.

*Right: the fragment of painting (in colour) as it was initially exposed superimposed on the recently revealed painting (in greyscale).*

# References


**Everingham 2012** D. Everingham, 'Conservation of the wall painting scheme at the Parish Church of St Edmund, Castleton, Derbyshire', unpublished report 2012.

**Matteini 1991** M. Matteini, 'In Review: An Assessment of Florentine Methods of Wall Painting Conservation Based on the Use of Mineral Treatments', in **The Conservation of Wall Paintings**, (Proceedings of a Symposium organised by the Courtauld Institute of Art and the Getty Conservation Institute, London, July 13-16 1987), ed. S. Cather, The J. Paul Getty Trust 1991, 137-148.

**Orlik 2022** S. Orlik, **Decorating the Parish Church in Post-Reformation England: Material Culture, Community and Identity in Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire, 1560–1640**, Shaun Tyas, Donington, 2022.

**Rickerby and Shekede 2021** S. Rickerby and L. Shekede, 'St Edmund's Church, Castleton, Derbyshire: Wall Painting Examination and Survey', unpublished report, September 2021.

**Suggett 2021** R. Suggett, **Painted Temples: Wallpaintings and Rood-screens in Welsh Churches, 1200–1800**, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 2021.

**Willis 2020** J. Willis, **The Reformation of the Decalogue: Religious Identity and the Ten Commandments in England, c.1485–1625**, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

# Appendix: future care and maintenance

Important principles of conservation practice are to be minimally interventive, to avoid adding too many new treatment materials, and to prioritize instead use of a limited range of compatible materials. This approach reflects a conservation history of failed interventions in English churches, which has left many wall paintings with exacerbated deterioration problems. For the Ten Commandments at Castleton a decision could have been taken to apply a surface treatment for its protection. For the reasons mentioned above – and because as a newly revealed painting, its original technology exists in a pristine state – it was decided not to do this. Nor is it advised that the painting be covered by Perspex®/glass for its protection, which could risk setting up a damaging microenvironment, as well as raising other complications (eg, problems of fixing without causing damage; difficulties of gaining access to the painting after installation).

**Future care and protection**

- **avoid physical contact:** as the painting has been stabilized without compromising its technical authenticity, this restrained approach also means that it remains somewhat fragile and vulnerable. ***Physical contact should be avoided.***

- **dirt accumulation:** cobwebs, dust and dirt will inevitably accumulate on the surface of the painting over time. However, this will probably occur very slowly and not be a significant impediment to viewing. Maintaining general cleanliness elsewhere in the church will help minimize effects of dirt accumulation. If cleaning is at some stage required, this should only be done by a qualified conservator.

- **lighting:** there are few risks to the safety of the painting from lighting (either natural or artificial), given that its original technology mainly comprises the use of simple and stable materials (principally carbon black). However, the border design appears to include a faded colour, presumably of organic origin; and the 'architectural' fragment seems to contain a darkened red lead. These paint materials are capable of being altered on exposure to light, although risks are difficult to quantify. Given these circumstances, it would be advisable to adjust the current lighting (which is very harsh and raking, and does not show the painting to best effect). It should incorporate the following:
  - **low uv-emitting light:** although all artificial lights produce uv radiation, good quality, low wattage LED lights emit low levels of damaging uv radiation (and heat), offering a means of mitigating risks. They are also long lasting and energy efficient. For these reasons, they are the preferred option;
  - **diffuse lighting:** the harmful effects of artificial lighting can be kept to a minimum by diffusing the light. This is also recommended to achieve even lighting and avoid spot-light and raking-light effects. This will optimise visitor viewing, as well as keeping illumination within safe parameters**;**
  - **appropriate colour temperature/rendering:** modern, good-quality LED light sources allow for customized adjustment of light intensity and colour temperature, to achieve optimal colour rendering of the illuminated object. The ability to do this should be a requirement of any new lighting system;
  - **timed lighting:** making viewing mainly dependent on a timed light switch which can be manually activated when required is recommended, as this will maintain light levels as low as possible.

- **monitoring:** the condition of the painting is currently stable and adverse change is not anticipated. However, it is advisable to keep this situation under review. It is recommended that this is done primarily by the Parish, using the images in this report as a baseline record. Should worrying change be noticed, then the input of a qualified conservator may be required.

Finally, the revealed painting remains difficult to interpret and appreciate, even in its conserved and clarified state. Conveying a better understanding of the painting is an important part of maintaining its future preservation. It is therefore recommended that information is made accessible to the visiting public, including about the nature and number of layers present, what they show, and the wider historical circumstances that provide the context for the painting's commissioning and creation. The information in this report can form the basis for this.