



St James Priory, Bristol

Seventeenth Century Achievement of Arms above fireplace

The conservation and cleaning of this polychromed Achievement of Arms resulted from undertaking a detailed condition report into a number of aspects of polychromy associated with the entire building fabric of St James Priory, Bristol. The project received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Following the reformation St James Priory was both sold off and divided up. Situated above a fireplace in the ground floor room of Church House, formerly part of the west cloister range, is this Achievement of Arms. The Coat of Arms is thought to be those of George Winter from Dyrham, buried in 1638; and one of his two wives (Elizabeth Knowell firstly, then Mary Rodgers). If this is so the Achievement of Arms can be dated to the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

Before treatment the Achievement of Arms had a very dull and dirty appearance, due to the application of three toned varnishes, which analysis suggested dated from the nineteenth century. Treatment trials indicated that the combined varnish layers could be removed revealing decorative polychromy dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

Removal of the toned varnishes had a dramatic and beneficial impact on the appearance of the Achievement of Arms; and detailed investigations indicated that the revealed polychromy closely follows the original dating from the seventeenth century. Other work associated with the removal of the varnish included limited repairs to broken or damaged elements, retouching and the application of a conservation grade coating.

