

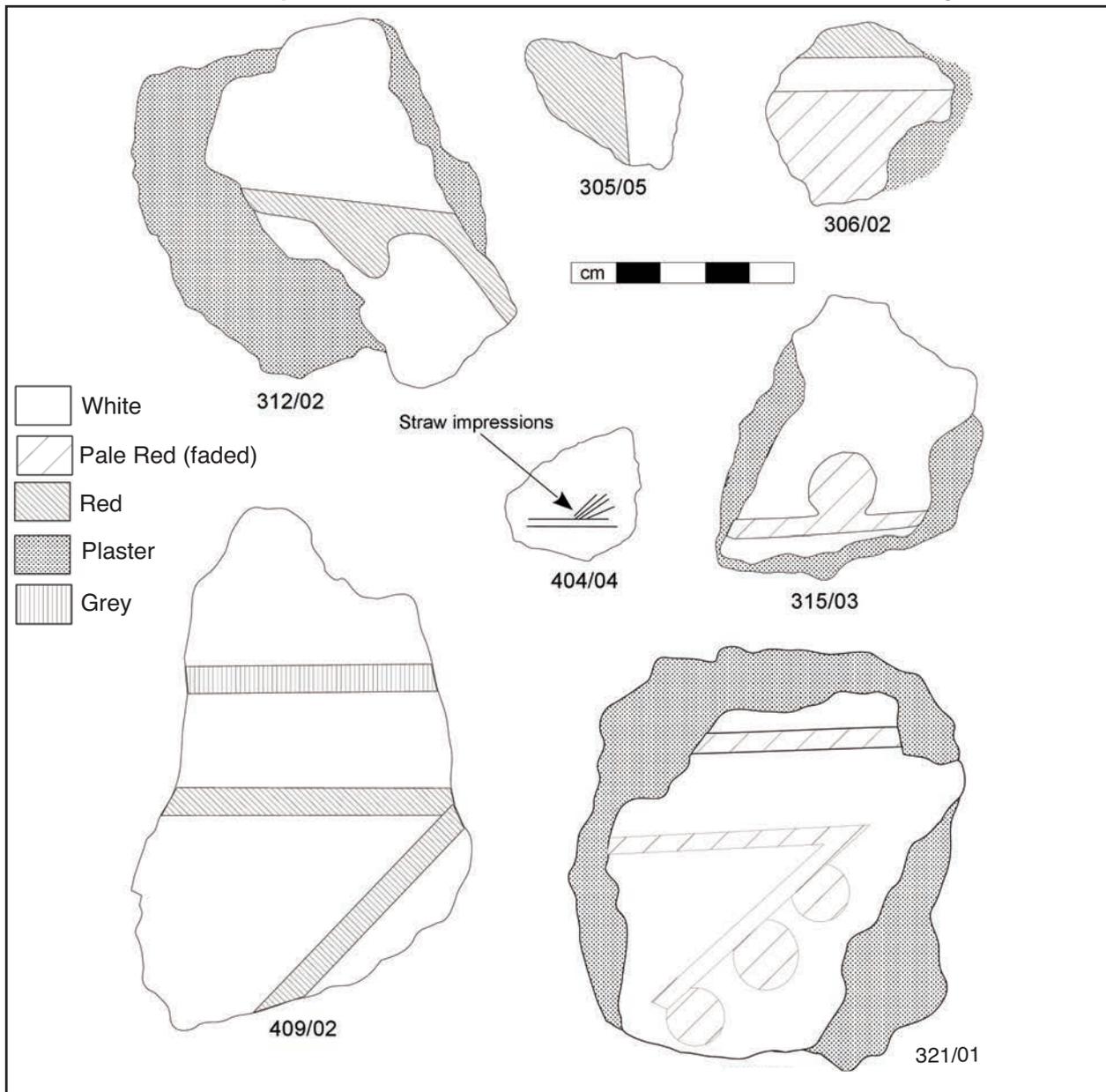
Peart Painted Wall Plaster Report

Summary of Romano-British painted plaster found at 2012 excavation

Clive Green

Pearth Roman Villa was excavated by BACAS in April 2004, following much ploughing of the area, to discover the state of preservation of possible building remains and to further investigate findings made during a geophysical survey there in late 2003 and early 2004, which was recorded at PRN 28024. The excavation itself, which was recorded at PRN 28025, reported that a hypocaust had been found which had “been filled with fragments of figure painted plasterwork”. The wall plaster recovered included a couple of fragments showing small pieces of possible figures, or other objects, as well as displaying a variety of decoration styles and vibrant colours, including a rich azure blue and a striking orange; the other more common colours, ochre, red, white and black were also present. By comparison, the wall plaster from the May 2012 excavation, which took place in an adjacent field, was more poorly preserved, of poorer quality, lacked the range of colours and showed only simple, fairly crude decoration. In total, some 131 fragments (11.97kg) of wall plaster were recovered from 21 contexts within 4 trenches, of which 61 fragments (3.53kg) were painted. Summary details of the wall plaster recovered in 2012 are set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Illustrations of wall plaster decoration PRN 24723 - 2012 Peart Wall Plaster Summary.



Discussion

Much of the wall plaster recovered was in small fragments, highly degraded and its paintwork weathered and faded, for example, the majority of its normally deep red-coloured paintwork had changed to a pale red or brown/ochre colour. It is surmised that this is most likely to be due to a

combination of the local soil conditions and discovery of most of the plaster remains very close to the present day land-surface, where the consequent agricultural use of the land would have led to a greater degree of disturbance.

Figure 2 below then clockwise
Sample of the painted wall plaster 305/05.

Figure 3
Sample of the dainted wall plaster 321/01.

Figure 4
Sample of the dainted wall plaster 409/02.

Figure 5 below
Sample of the dainted wall plaster 312/02.





From the fragments recovered, it is not possible to deduce the precise scheme(s) of design likely to have been used to decorate the building's walls. However, from the number and variety of coloured examples found and their simple decorative forms (largely plain or striped), one may reasonably assume that it would have been a variant of the standard Romano-British pattern of a tripartite scheme of dado, main frieze and upper frieze. The only variation to this was the presence of the bead decoration found on three samples.

Blobs or beads of colour are sometimes used to embellish the fine painted lines which often appear on the inner side of the framework of individual panels of decoration and may occur at the corners, for example at Sapcote and Great Staughton villas, or along the panel line's length, as in the case of Peart. Examples of this, both single and multiple beads, have been found at Rockbourne and North Warnborough villas, although in both these cases as part of a much more colourful and complex design than seems present at Peart. [The Roman Villa in Britain, (1969) Ed. A.L.F. Rivet, pp134-5].

The only observable impression found on the reverse side of any of the plaster fragments, was from a small amount of either grass or thin straw. Such a small occurrence could possibly have been due to such material being mixed into the plaster, so it can not be considered a definitive pointer as to the type of building construction that might have been employed, e.g. lathe and plaster. None of the samples shows signs of over-painting, other than for decorative purposes, nor are there signs of any peck marks, such as would have been made to allow re-plastering, and so there is no evidence of refurbishment or repair, at least on the part of the villa investigated in 2012.

The relatively large proportion of undecorated samples (70 out of 131) could point to these being from less important rooms, e.g. storage or work rooms. Certainly, the plaster recovered during 2012 has far fewer colours and less decoration than that found during the excavation in the adjacent field in 2004, leading us to the possible conclusion that the eastern end / wing of the villa complex was of lesser significance than the central rooms.

It is not possible to draw any further conclusions from the samples of wall plaster recovered from the excavation at Peart in 2012, there being insufficient examples present to make comparisons with decorated plasterwork from other Romano-British villa sites, other than that already highlighted above for the three samples with simple beaded decoration.

Figure 6 top
Sample of the painted wall plaster 315/03.
Figure 7
Sample of the painted wall plaster 306/02.
Figure 8
Sample of the painted wall plaster 315/04.
Figure 9
Sample of the painted wall plaster 404/04.