



Danby Wiske - Diocese of Leeds

Recently revealed wall paintings – Preliminary report

Peter Martindale – 6 May 2026



Example of recently revealed wall painting, nave south wall

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Historical background.....	1
3	Investigations	1
4	Conclusions.....	3
5	Recommendations	4
•	Photographs (1 - 16)	
•	Appendix – Two illustrations, prepared by Neil Aldridge. Development of the church over time and Historic plan of the church. Used with permission from Neil Aldridge.	

Distribution list

- Angela Aldridge – Churchwarden, Danby Wiske

This report is supplied in electronic (PDF) form only

Acknowledgements

I thank Angela Aldridge, on behalf of the PCC for commissioning this report from me; and I too thank her for the considerable assistance extended to me with regard to my inspection. My thanks also to Neil Aldridge for providing valuable historical information regarding the church. I too thank The Cathedral and Church Buildings Department for providing grant aid with regard to this report.

1. Introduction

As a result of recent redecoration work in the church, instances of wall painting on the south wall of the nave have been revealed. Redecoration work has been suspended so that an in-situ assessment of the wall paintings could be undertaken, and results from that assessment documented for the consideration of the Parish and those (like the Diocesan Advisory Council and their architect) who advise them.

Redecoration to date has involved some plaster repair (using lime plaster) and repainting with limewash¹.

This report, describing the results from an in-situ assessment, was commissioned by Angela Aldridge (churchwarden). It was carried out by Peter Martindale for a short time on the evening of 27 April, and for half a day on 28 April. The report to comprise a cover, two to three pages text and eight photographs.

2. Historical background

Danby Wiske church is Grade 1 listed. The dedication is not known. The following is taken from the Historic England listing:

Church. C12 south wall and doorway, C14 chancel and north aisle, later C15 tower and C18 porch. Rubble and ashlar sandstone. Welsh and Westmorland slate roofs. West tower, nave with south porch, clerestory and north aisle, chancel. Tower of ashlar with offset diagonal buttresses, stair tower with 2 slit windows, 2-light C15 belfry-window and embattled parapet. Nave: 3 bays. South doorway has Norman tympanum and on it 3 standing men in long robes. South porch: gabled with raised verges, shaped kneelers and stone coping. To right of porch a 2-light window with hoodmould and a single-light pointed-arch window. Clerestory is in ashlar with 2-light windows. Offset buttress at east end. Embattled parapet. Chancel: rubblestone with stone dressings. 2 bays. 2 windows of 2 lights with cusped Y-tracery under hoodmoulds flank trefoil-headed priest's door. Nave and chancel roofs have stone coping with gable cross to chancel. Interior: tower has a vault of diagonal and ridge ribs round a large circle. North arcade: 3 bays of round piers with octagonal abaci supporting double-chamfered pointed arches. Stalls have some re-set Jacobean panels. C14 effigy of lady, aumbry and piscina.

There was, in the C 14, extensive rebuilding which included raising the roof of the nave and creation of a clerestory². Please see the illustrations in the appendix and photo 1.

3. Investigations

3.1. Observations in three locations

Three areas were studied, two with limited ladder access. Photos 2 & 3.

a) Nave south wall, east end

Close to the chancel arch a significant area of medieval wall painting has been revealed. The overall maximum width is around 43 cm, and the height around 70 cm. Photos 4 – 6.

¹ This was explained to me by Angela Aldridge.

² From 'Danby Wiske church history', by Neil Aldridge.

It comprises red paint on a lime ground (appearing pinkish). Foliate forms are described by the red paint, and what has been revealed is (in this area) the first layer of decoration. The decorative layer appears to extend into the window splay, under later layers of paint.

The condition of what has been revealed is, fair, but there are fragile areas of detached lime ground and paint flaking. The edges of the islands of paint are vulnerable.

b) Nave south wall, east end, to the west of 'a'

This area was studied at a distance only. Traces of red paint can be seen, and their appearance appears identical to the more extensive traces of wall painting described in 'a' above. The condition of the paint and plaster has not been inspected at close hand. The area revealed is around 50 cm wide. Photo 7.

c) Nave south wall, western end, to east of south door

This is the largest and most eye catching area of wall painting. The main area, where the painted text can be seen, has a maximum width of around 90 cm and height of around 86 cm. Photos 8 & 9.

Access to view this area was limited, permitting some close observation, photos 9 – 11.

Within the main area there appear to be three layers of wall painting:

- Red medieval paint believed to be coeval to that in 'a' and 'b' above.
- Some lettering from a post-Reformation text, and a border to that text above. That border above appears to comprise elements from two styles of border; a simpler one, and another with elements of bead and reel decoration. Closer examination is needed to check that there are indeed two separate text borders as appears to be the case.

The text has yet to be identified. There are three rows of lettering, but little can be seen of the lowest row. What is apparent at present reads:

*God y father (should or similar word?)....
....our Lord (y?)...*

The condition of what has been revealed is better than anticipated upon first viewing. There are fragile areas of detached plaster and ground, and there are instances of paint flaking; there too are cracks in the plaster support, and the edges to islands of paint are vulnerable.

Beyond this area (above, to the right and below right) there are many traces of red paint, who appearance appears identical to that in 'a' and 'b' above. The locations of these traces are shown in photos 12 – 15.

When viewing the edges to some losses it is possible to gain an appreciation of the number of paint and plaster layers that remain on the wall in some places, photo 15.

A small instance of abraded black paint was noted close to the south door. It could be a vestige of post-Reformation decoration, or it might be an anomaly.

3.2. General observations

Many traces of wall painting have been identified, most of these lie in a band 2.8 – 4.0 metres above the floor of the nave. Instances of painted decoration have been identified

below that band, but none above. Although none have been noted above, it is possible that such traces do remain.

The surface of the wall, including the window reveals, which has recently been painted, undulates. Some small plaster repairs are apparent in the contours of the paint, as are areas where plaster has been lost and the paint lies on the underlying stone fabric. The presence of this undulation means that there could be a number of hidden islands of wall painting (medieval and later). Some islands could be as large as that we see at the west end of the south wall.

3.3. *Deterioration considerations*

Revealed examples of visible wall painting do not appear to be subject to on-going deterioration. Their condition, fragile in places, is due historic factors.

4. **Conclusions**

One layer of early medieval painting has been identified so far, and traces of its presence have been found across the nave south wall. Findings at the eastern end of the south wall (next to the chancel arch) suggest that decoration extends into the reveal of adjacent window. It is likely that further traces / islands of paint remain under later layers of paint both on the south wall and into window reveals. This layer of medieval paint is likely to date from the C 14 when the church underwent extensive rebuilding, including raising the roof of the nave.

Black painted lettering from one post-Reformation text is clearly apparent, and it is possible that others may remain hidden under later layers of paint. Above the lettering there is a painted border, but that border would appear to comprise elements from two styles of border. One a simpler linear border, and other more embellished with bead and reel decoration.

The condition of the revealed wall painting is fragile in a number of places. These revealed areas require conservation so as to preserve them for this and future generations. Flaking paint needs to be consolidated and areas of detached plaster secured. Thin lime slurry should be used to secure paint flaking, and a lime based grout for securing detached plaster. Losses and cracks in the lime plaster need to be filled with lime mortar, and vulnerable edges to painted plaster need to be supported with lime mortar fillet repairs. Loosely adhering dirt and dust should be removed. The practical measures employed should be recorded in an illustrated report which includes recommendations for their future preservation.

Revealed wall painting, which has been conserved as described above, can either be left on view or overpainted with plain limewash. These options are further considered as follows:

PTO

<i>Option</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Overpainting with unpigmented limewash	If the wall paintings are to be overpainted this needs to be carried out such that they can be revealed in the future. Their location needs to be documented. The first two coats of unpigmented limewash should be applied by an accredited wall paintings conservator.
Leaving revealed wall paintings on view	If sections of wall painting are to be left on view, it may be possible to improved their appearance with further cleaning. In addition, new lime mortar repairs, and other disfiguring repairs, should be toned so as to blend with their surroundings using toned lime grounds modulated with thinly applied watercolour paint.

It is possible to carry out further uncovering, and reveal more wall painting. There is some interest in the Parish for this³. The locations of interest to the Parish are:

- Medieval wall painting at the east end of the nave south wall. Revealing more of the recently revealed decoration.
- The painted text at the western end of the nave south wall. Further uncovering may enable the text to be identified.

5. Recommendations

Necessary

All areas of revealed wall painting, whose condition is fragile (detached plaster, flaking paint and vulnerable edges of painted plaster) need to be consolidated. The measures carried out need to be documented in an illustrated report.

Optional

Some or all the instances of wall painting (of which a few are small and fragmentary) could be left on view. The appearance of those left on view can be enhanced by toning lime all new lime mortar repairs (fillings etc) to blend with their surroundings. It too may be possible to enhance their appearance through further cleaning.

Further uncovering can be carried out. Areas of interest for this include the painted text and wall painting revealed at the east end of the nave.

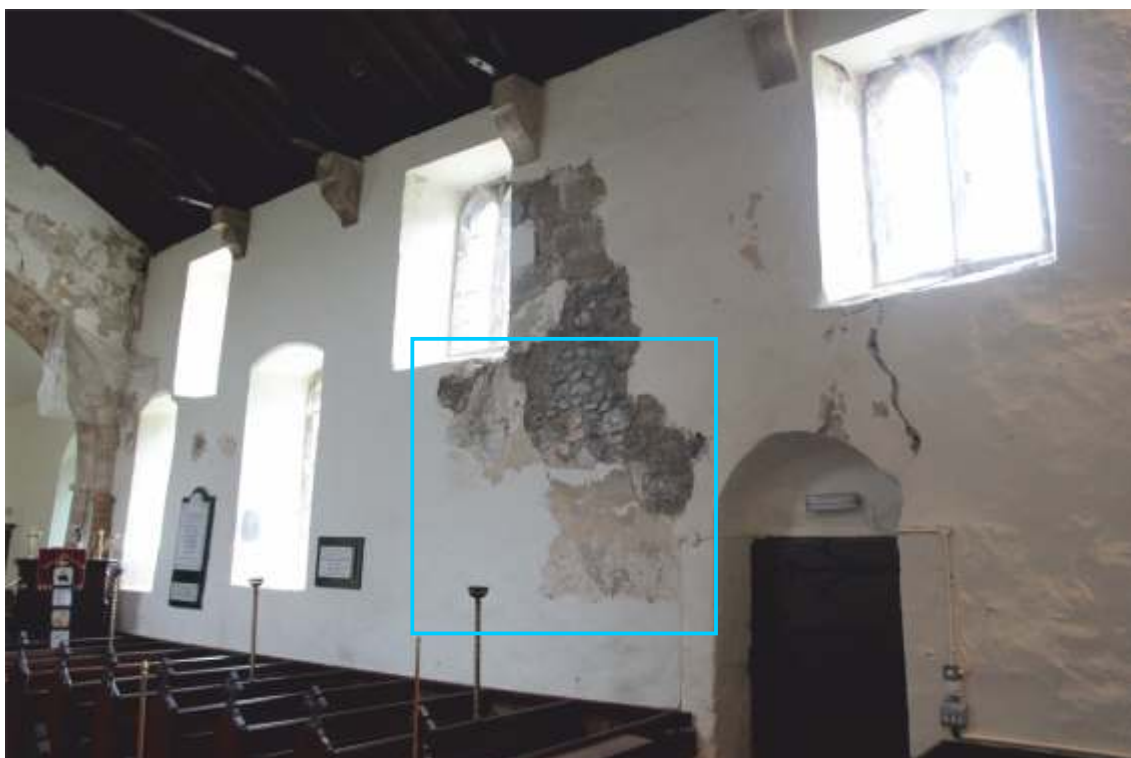
³ From discussions with Angela Aldridge.



1 - Left - Danby Wiske church looking north.

2 - Below - South nave wall looking west. Areas of wall painting studied in this report identified as follows - green rectangle area 'a' - orange rectangle area 'b'.

3 - Bottom - South nave wall looking east. Area 'c' of wall painting described in this report identified with blue rectangle.





4 - Left - Area 'a'. Medieval painting which appears to be the first layer of painted decoration layer applied to the interior building fabric. The medieval paint layer may extend into the adjoining window reveal.

5 - Above - Photo in raking light showing the paint and ground layers. The medieval paint has been painted over a number of times.

6 - Below - Detail from 4 showing areas of paint flaking and detachment of the lime ground.





7 - Left - Area 'b' of paint believed to be medieval and similar if not identical to that in area 'a'.

8 - Below - Area 'c' and fabric around area 'c'.





9 - Above - Detail from 8 as indicated by mauve rectangle. Some lettering from a post-Reformation text is very evident, as is the decorative border above it. That border appears to be of two types, a more simple one, and a more ornate one with bead and reel decoration. This area needs closer inspection at a later date.

10 - Left - Detail from 9 showing an area of fragile wall painting. Here there is a loss, in which the underlying building fabric can be seen. A section of the letter 'f' is missing, and in that loss red paint from the underlying medieval paint can be seen.

11 - Below left - Detail from 9 showing the decorative border to the painted text. There appear to be elements from two borders here, a simpler linear one and a more complex one involving bead and reel decoration. In places underlying medieval paint can be seen where there are losses in the post-Reformation layer(s).



12 - Left - Detail from 8, the green rectangle. Here instances of wall painting can be seen.

13 - Detail from 12, green rectangle. A loss in later paint layers reveals an earlier layer upon which traces of paint can be seen. Black at the bottom and dull yellow at right.

14 - Detail from 12, blue rectangle. Abraded traces of black paint can be seen here, possibly post-Reformation, or an anomaly.

15 - Detail from 12, mauve rectangle. Looking slantwise at the side of the loss. Numerous paint and plaster layers can be seen, along with traces of early medieval paint.



16 - Detail from 8. Within the green rectangles there are traces of wall painting. These are mostly red from the medieval scheme, but there is some later black (post-Reformation).



Appendix

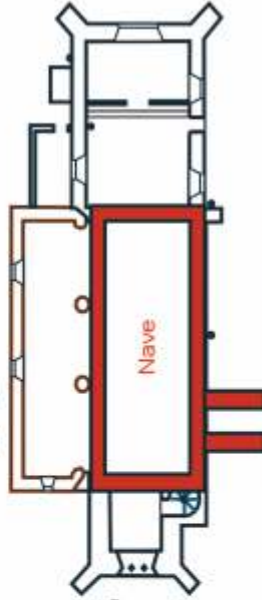
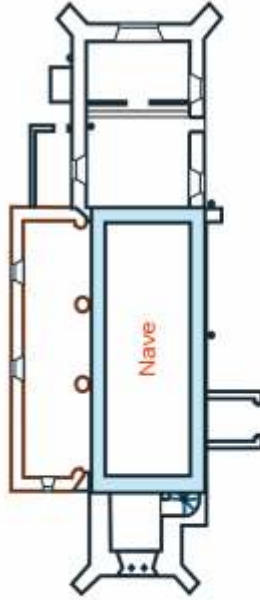
- Illustration showing Danby Wiske church through the ages – Neil Aldridge
- Historical plan of Danby Wiske – Neil Aldridge

These included with permission from Neil Aldridge.

Most local churches were initially timber buildings. The trend to rebuild in stone is datable to the period 1050-1150.

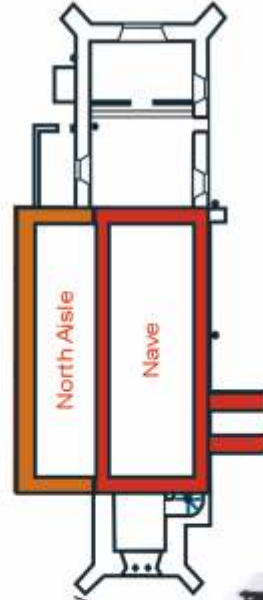
12th Century or earlier

Likely to have been built on the original footprint. Stone was also used at the base of the porch walls



13th Century

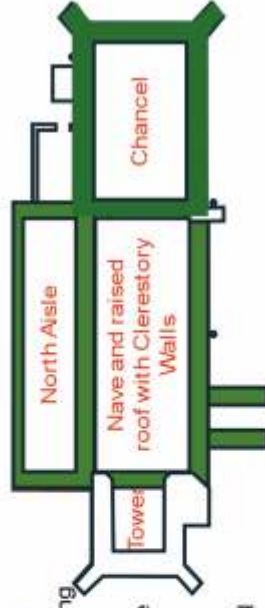
Late 12th/ early 13th century North aisle added
Detail of chancel unknown
Lancet window inserted at the east end of the nave wall.



DANBY WISKE CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

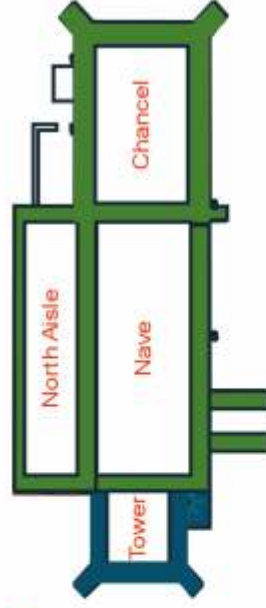
14th Century

There was considerable building work in the 14th Century, including:
-Rebuilding the north aisle, the chancel and much of the external walls.
-A raised Nave roof and Clerestory walls with high level windows.



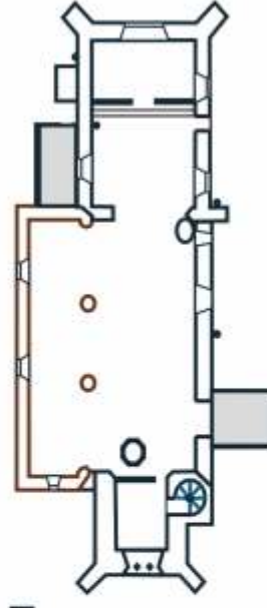
15th Century

The tower was added



Later

More recent additions include:
-An 18th Century brick porch with rendered walls, incorporating older stone raised verges and shaped kneelers.
-A Boiler house



The church is a Grade One listed building

