

FINAL REPORT
SOUTH SHIELDS TOWN HALL COMMITTEE ROOMS A & B
ANALYSIS OF HISTORIC PAINT SCHEMES

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CLIENT: WILLMOTT DIXON CONSTRUCTION LIMITED

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Conservation, restoration and research of historic buildings and artifacts

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1.0: Introduction

Crick Smith were contracted by Willmott Dixon Limited to analyse the historic paint schemes applied to two Committee Room at South Shields Town Hall. The two rooms are adjacent to each other and identified as Committee Rooms A & B.

Fig.1: South Shields Town Hall



South Shields Town Hall was built 1905 – 10 to a design by the architect Ernest E. Fatch. The building is listed Grade II (HE list entry no. 1232325)¹

¹ Historic England, list entry available from: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1232325>

A number of complete paint samples (including substrate) were removed from the decorative plaster cornice, ceiling, lunette and walls in both Committee Rooms, along with an ornate plaster pediment in Committee Room A. All samples were mounted in cross section in polyester resin and examined at high magnification under a Leica binocular microscope using both simulated daylight and ultra-violet. Daylight illumination provides an indication of colour, distinguishes primers from top coats and highlights specialised finishes (e.g. wood graining and gilding). Ultra-violet causes different types of paint and varnishes to fluoresce in a characteristic manner defining the type of paint used (lead, zinc or modern alkyds) and clearly highlights natural varnish layers. In addition to the removed samples a small area of wall face in both rooms was revealed and the paints cleaned back to reveal the sequence of colours used over time.

This report displays annotated cross sectional microscope image of representative samples clearly defining the sequence of paint schemes applied. The earliest layer is at the base of the image (defined as scheme 1) with subsequent layers stacked above, as they would have been applied in real time.

An illustrated nomenclature of the terms used to define the features on the cornice and pediment are also included along with a scheme chart for each. The scheme chart provides a quick reference guide to the chronology of decorative schemes applied along with their inter-relationship.

2.0: Summary of Findings

South Shields Town Hall was completed in 1910 and was doubtless first decorated at this time. This is approaching the end of the Edwardian period of Baroque revival in both architecture and internal features and was notable for the lack of elaborate plasterwork, the use of dark bold colours and polished or varnished hardwood for raised features, such as dados, skirting boards and picture rails².

2.1: The earliest appearance

Both Committee Rooms have received 12 decorative schemes, with the walls in Room A originally painted dark Brunswick Green with a varnish coating on the surface. The varnish will have been applied to provide a hardwearing, glossy finish to the flat lead oil paint used. This was repeated, with the varnish at scheme 2 (the first re-paint). The walls in Room B were painted in pale green, but un-varnished and again this was repeated at scheme 2.

The cornices in both rooms were painted uniformly, in stone coloured lead oil paints with this theme continuing onto the decorative, ornate pediment in Room A. There is no evidence that any of the features on the cornices in either rooms or the pediment were picked out in contrasting colour. The intention here was clearly to provide the impression of a stone classical cornice, running around the perimeter of both rooms and extending onto the pediment in Room A.

The curved waggon roof ceilings in both rooms were simply distempered white and have essentially always remained white or pale cream, until relatively recently. The shape of the wagon roof forms two lunettes at both ends of each room and it is

² Calloway, S. (Ed) (2008) *The Elements of Style*, Firefly Books, UK

important to note these were painted to match the cornice and not the ceiling. This uniform application of colour continued until approx. the mid 20th century, but with the use of pale cream lead oil paints, rather than stone colours (up to and including the 6th decorative scheme applied), to the cornice and pediment. The walls in Room A began to take on a lighter appearance, initially in mid green and then yellow/cream. The colour of the walls in Room B changed from pale green to beige and later pale cream.

2.2: The intermediate appearance

This refers to approx. the 1960's onwards, starting at scheme 7.

This saw the introduction of colour to the cornices and pediment and is a reflection of the times – moving away from the dull and colourless post-war past and entering the “modern age” in the 1960's.

At this time the walls had taken on a lighter appearance in pale cream and beige, with both cornices (Rooms A & B) painted pale cream with certain features picked out in red, blue and pale green. Also, some of the relief mouldings and fruit swags on the pediment in Room A were picked out in gold, red, blue and green oil paint. The precise allocation of this colour scheme (to both cornice and pediment) is defined in the accompanying scheme charts and sample locations within this report. The ceiling remained pale cream, with the lunettes painted to match the cornice.

2.3: The more recent appearance

This refers to the final three paint schemes, probably from the 1980's onwards.

From this time, all areas were painted white with wallpapers introduced for the first time and lining papers on the ceilings. Some features on the cornices and pediment were

picked out in gold oil paint and a coloured border added to the cornice, just above the modillions in both areas.

There is a timber rail running the perimeter of both rooms, just below the frieze. It is painted white in Room A and varnished in Room B. At first glance this appears to be a later insertion due to a lack of apparent decorative finishes. However, the frieze in both rooms has never been painted in with the walls, so we must assume a frieze has always been defined and painted as a separate feature. The evidence suggests that both rails were originally varnished, and this has been retained in Room B. The rail in Room A appears to have been thoroughly rubbed down in the relatively recent past and painted white, or alternatively replaced.

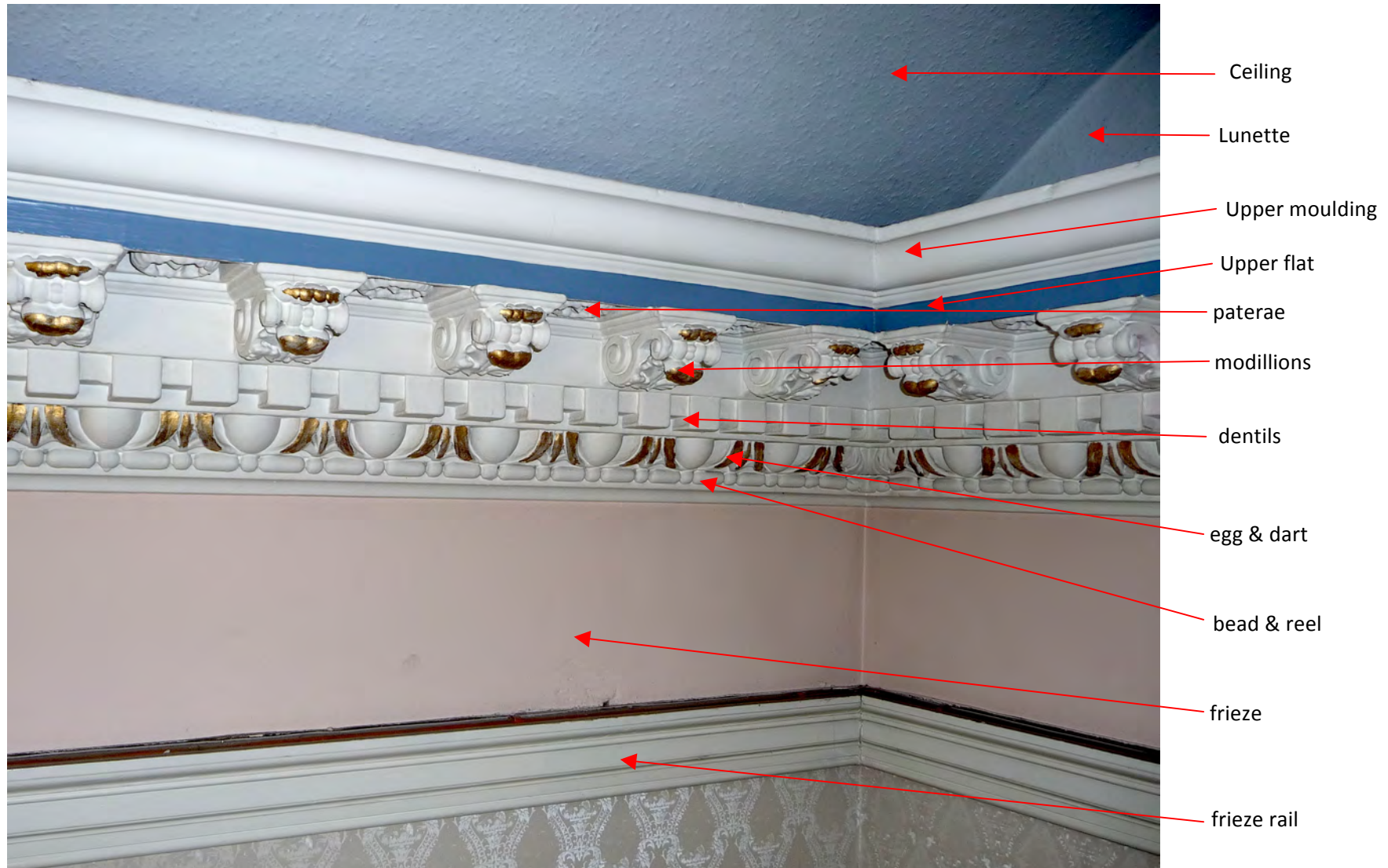
Fig.2: Committee Room B



Fig.3: Committee Room A



3.0: Nomenclature for both cornices (Committee Rooms A & B)



4.0: Sample locations, decorative pediment (sample numbers correspond to scheme chart & sample location list)



The sample location numbers provided here correspond to those listed in the sample location list at the back of this report. For example 6.33 refers to sample block 6, number 33 (the gold ribbon).

This convention is also used in the scheme chart for the decorative pediment.

4.1: Sample locations, Pediment cont



3.15 (strap)

4.17 (fruit)

4.16 (leaf)

4.18 (corner)

5.0: Committee Room A, Cornice, Walls & Ceiling – Scheme Chart

	Ceiling	Walls	Cornice background (includes all features apart from those listed on the right)	Modillions	Egg & Dart mouldings	Paterae	Bead & reel mouldings
Scheme 12 (Current)	pale blue alkyd	Wallpaper	white alkyd	GOLD OIL TIPS	GOLD OIL	white alkyd	white alkyd
				white alkyd	white alkyd		
Scheme 11	mid blue alkyd LINING PAPER		white alkyd	GOLD OIL TIPS	GOLD OIL	GOLD OIL	GOLD OIL
				white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd
Scheme 10	white alkyd paint	olive green oil primer	white alkyd	GOLD OIL TIPS	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd
				white alkyd			
Scheme 9	white alkyd paint	green alkyd primer	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	pale blue oil	pale blue oil
						white alkyd	white alkyd
Scheme 8	white alkyd paint	blue alkyd primer	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	pale blue oil	White alkyd
						white alkyd	
Scheme 7 (approx 1960's)	pale cream oil paint	beige oil paint	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	red oil paint	blue oil paint
						pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 6	pale cream oil paint	yellow/cream oil primer	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 5	pale cream oil paint	yellow/cream oil primer	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 4	white oil paint	mid green oil paint	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone
Scheme 3	white oil paint	Dark green oil paint	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone
Scheme 2	white oil paint	VARNISH	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone
		dark green oil					
Scheme 1 (Earliest – 1910)	white distemper	VARNISH	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone
		dark Green oil					
Substrate	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster

6.0: Committee Room A, Decorative Pediment – Scheme Chart

	Area between ceiling & cornice (lunette)	Pediment background (includes all features apart from those listed on the right)	Corner straps (3.15)	Straps (5.23, 4.21, 6.30)	Fruit swag (5.26, 5.22, 6.29, 7.36, 7.37)	Fruit swag (5.24, 6.31, 7.40)	Gold Ribbon 6.33
Scheme 12 (Current)	pale blue alkyd	white alkyd	GOLD OIL	GOLD OIL	white alkyd	white alkyd	GOLD OIL
			white alkyd	white alkyd			white alkyd
Scheme 11	mid blue alkyd	white alkyd	GOLD OIL	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	GOLD OIL
	LINING PAPER		white alkyd				white alkyd
Scheme 10	white alkyd	white alkyd	GOLD OIL	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd
			white alkyd				
Scheme 9	pale blue oil	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd
Scheme 8	white alkyd paint	white alkyd	GOLD OIL	white alkyd	green oil paint	white alkyd	white alkyd
			white alkyd		white alkyd		
Scheme 7 (approx 1960's)	pale cream oil paint	pale cream	GOLD OIL	blue oil paint	green oil paint	red oil paint	pale cream
			pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	
Scheme 6	pale cream oil paint	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 5	pale cream oil paint	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 4	white oil paint	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone
Scheme 3	white oil paint	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone
Scheme 2	white oil paint	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone
Scheme 1 (Earliest – 1910)	white distemper	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone
Substrate	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster

7.0: Committee Room B, Cornice, Walls & Ceiling – Scheme Chart

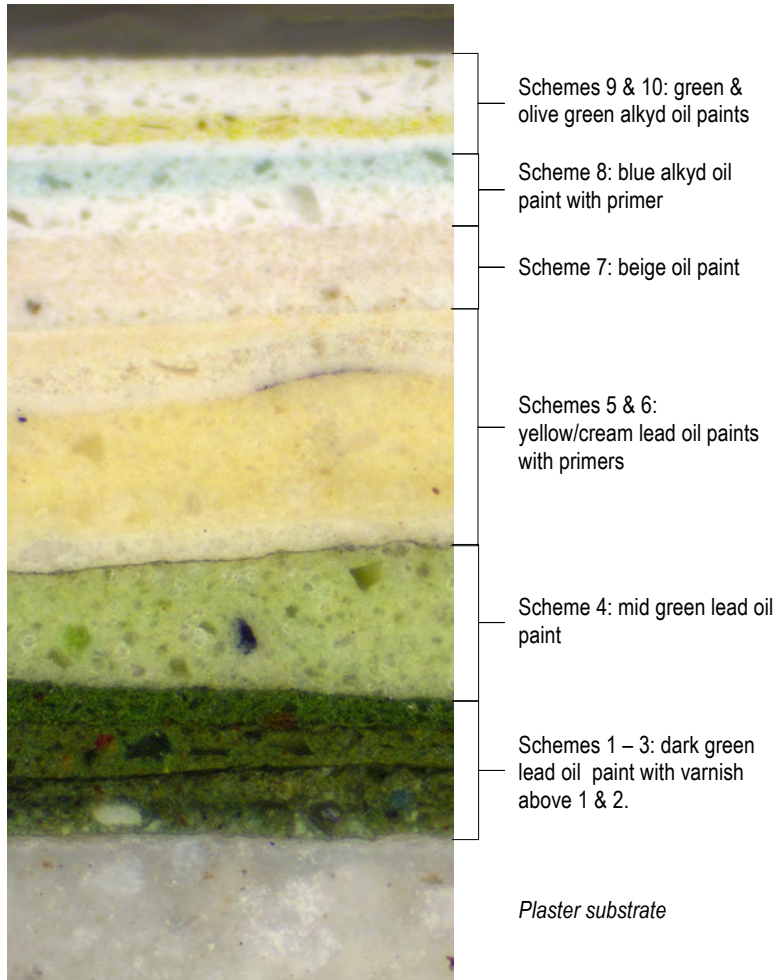
	Ceiling	Walls	Cornice background (includes all features apart from those listed on the right)	Modillions	Egg & Dart mouldings	Paterae	Bead & reel mouldings
Scheme 12 (Current)	Lining paper with beige oil paint	Wallpaper	white alkyd / green border above modillions	GOLD OIL TIPS	White alkyd with dart picked out in gold	white alkyd	white alkyd
Scheme 11			white alkyd / red border above modillions	white alkyd			
Scheme 10			white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd
Scheme 9	white alkyd paint	mid blue alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd
Scheme 8	white alkyd paint	white alkyd	white alkyd	white alkyd	pale cream with egg picked out in pale blue	white alkyd	pale blue
Scheme 7 (approx 1960's)	pale cream oil paint	pale cream	pale cream	pale green			pale cream with egg picked out in green
				pale cream		pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 6	pale cream oil paint	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	Pale cream	pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 5	pale cream oil paint	beige	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream	pale cream
Scheme 4	white oil paint	beige	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone
Scheme 3	white oil paint	beige	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone
Scheme 2	white oil paint	pale green	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone	mid stone
Scheme 1 (Earliest – 1910)	white distemper	pale green	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone	pale stone
Substrate	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster	Plaster

8.0: Photomicrographs.

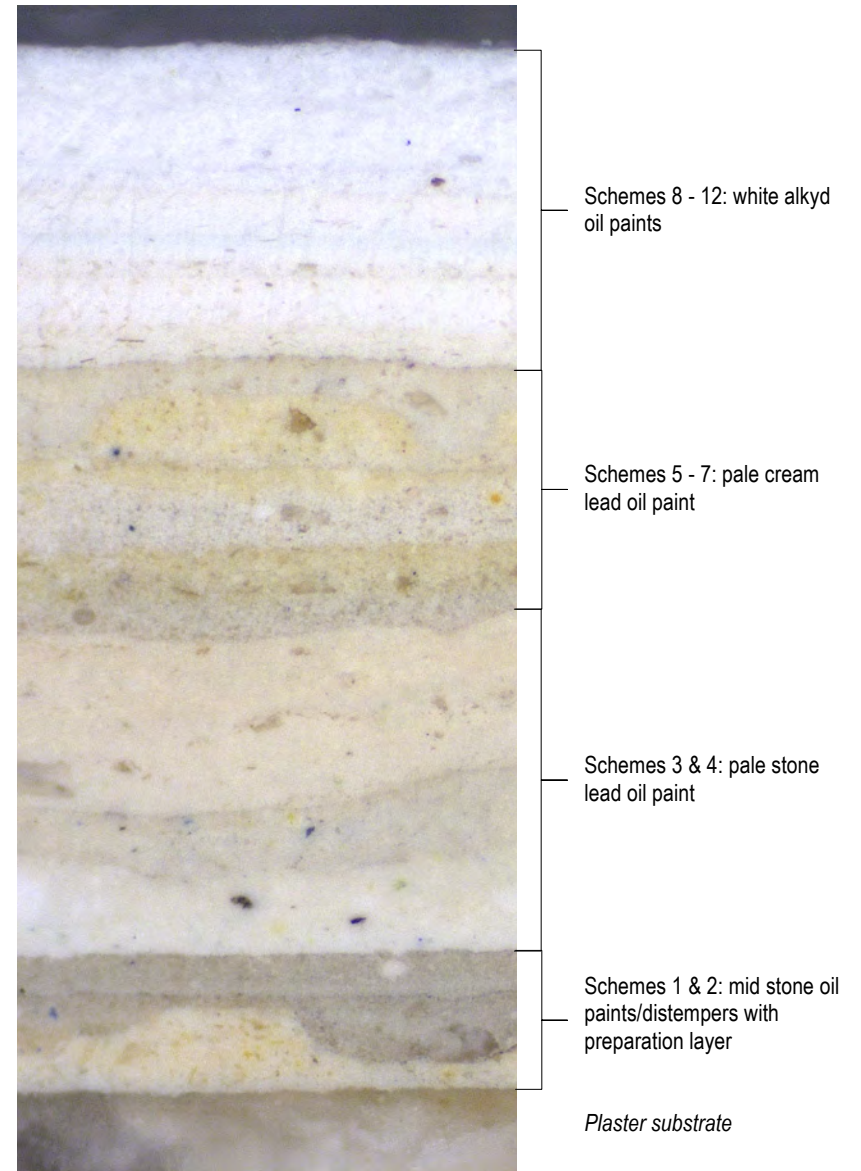
The following images have been taken through the microscope in cross – section. The earliest paint scheme applied is at the base with subsequent layers stacked above.

Committee Room A

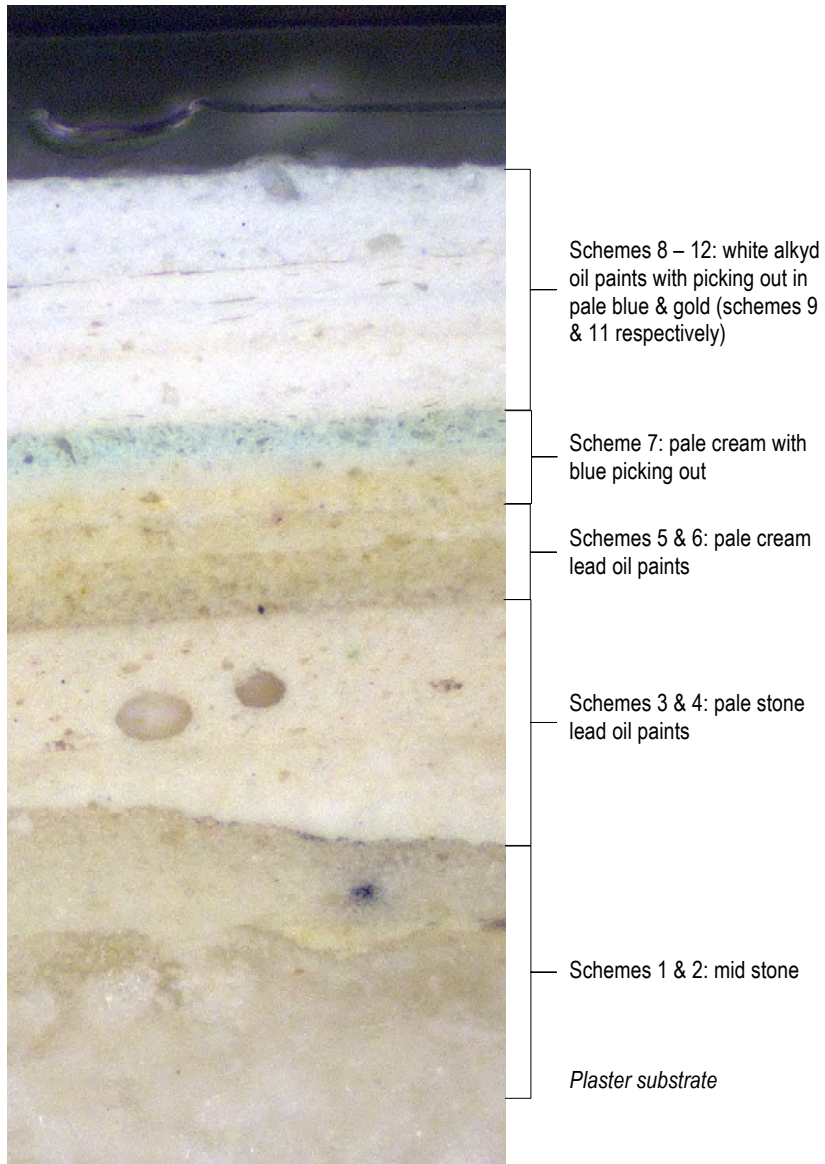
8.1: Sample 3.14, Walls



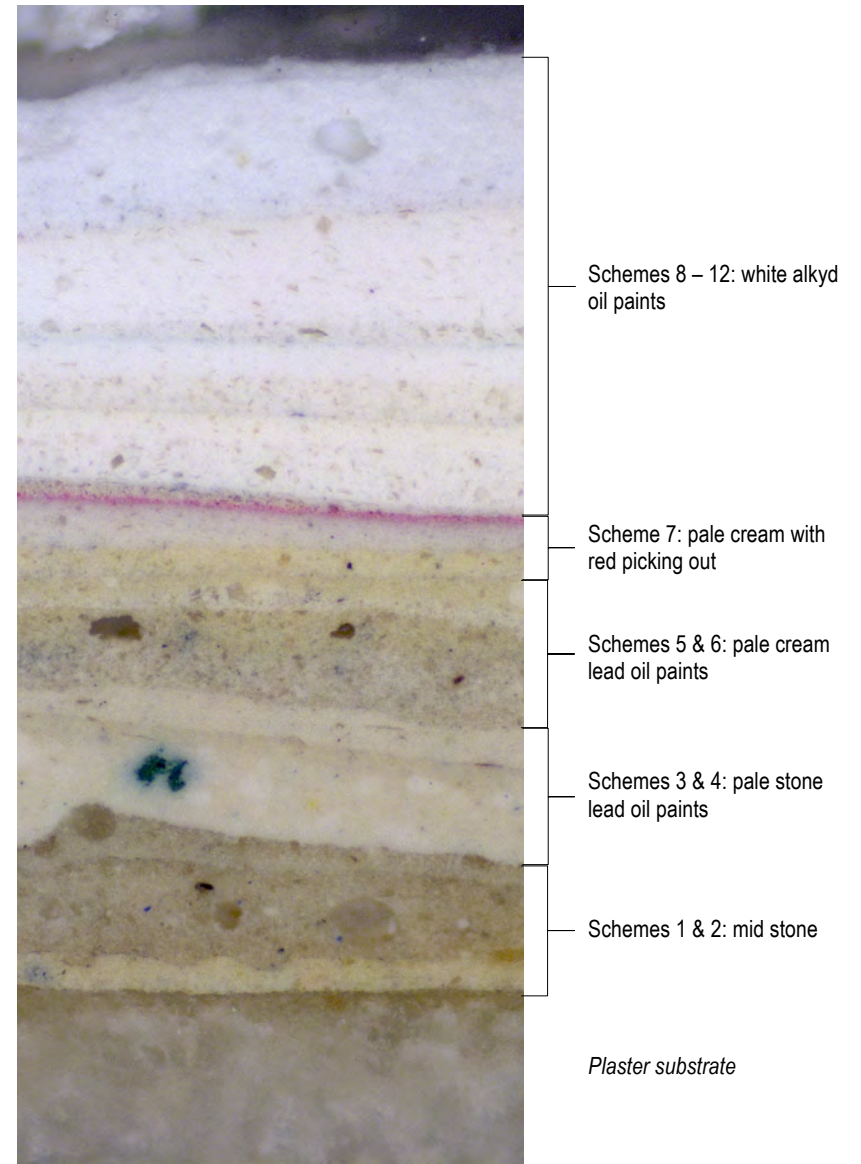
8.2: Sample 2.7, Cornice & Pediment background



8.3: Sample 2.10, bead & reel mouldings

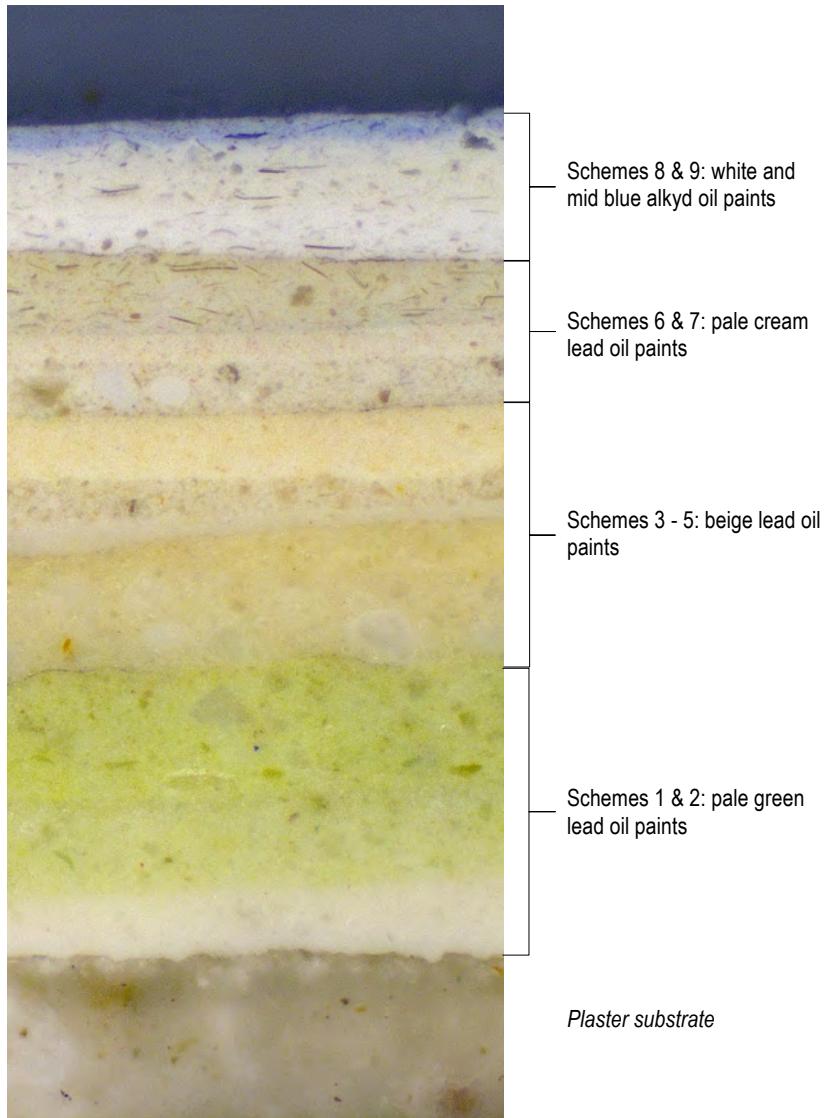


8.4: Sample 6.31, Fruit swag on decorative pediment

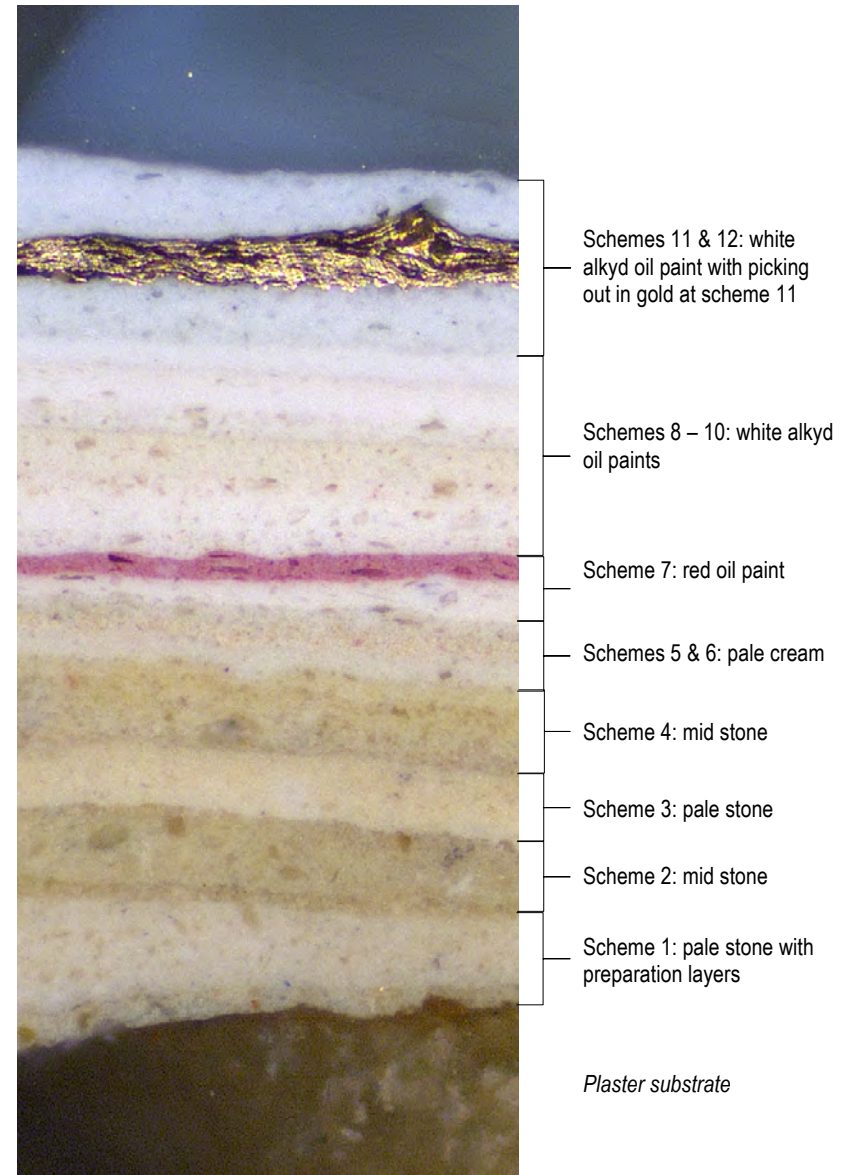


Committee Room B

8.5: Sample 8.41, Walls



8.6: Sample 8.44, Cornice paterae



9.0: Concluding remarks

The first decorative schemes applied to the cornices in both Committee Rooms were very similar, in a uniformly applied stone colour without any additional picking out. However, there was a subtle difference between the two with a mid-stone colour applied to the cornice in Room A and a paler stone colour to the cornice in Room B.

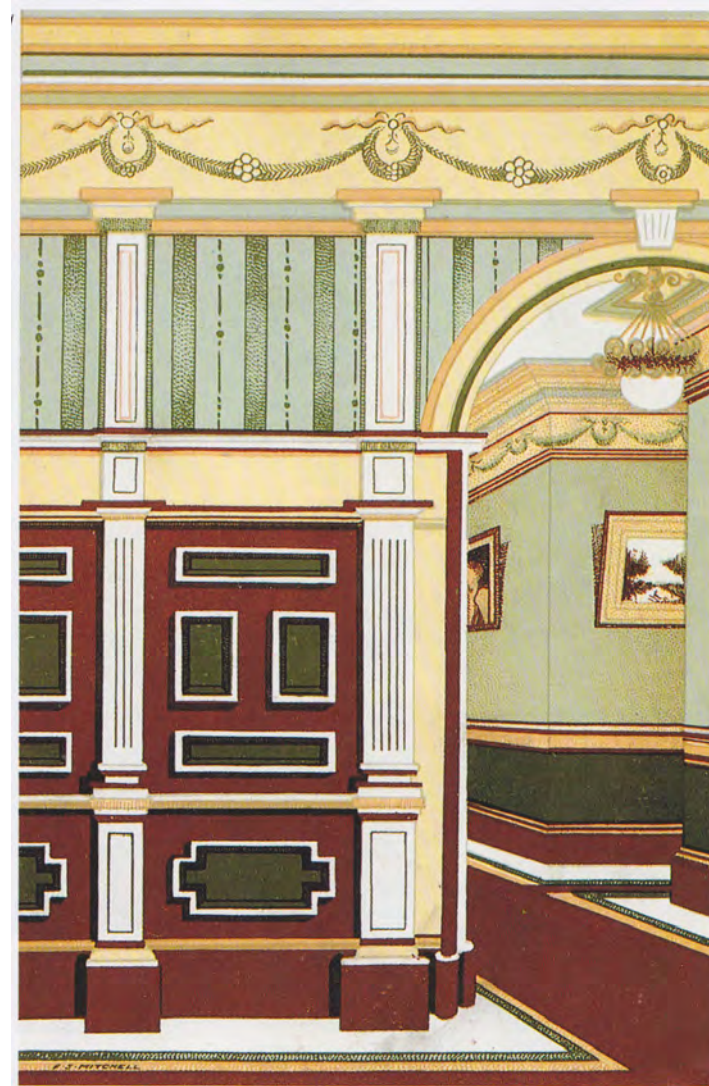
The paints applied to the walls were very different, with a dark Brunswick Green on the walls in Room A and a paler green on the walls in Room B. The overall effect in Room A would have been quite dark, particularly set against the dark varnished joinery. Arguably, this doesn't suit modern tastes. We have become conditioned and used to the pale magnolias and white so ubiquitous in homes and buildings today.

The image right is an idea for an Entrance Hall and published in 1909 by Thomas Parsons & Sons to advertise their ready mixed enamel paints. Note the similarities here with the earliest decorative schemes in the Committee Rooms, dating to 1910.

The use of pale and dark greens on the walls and creams or stone colours applied to the cornice and frieze, dark skirtings and timber panelling with white ceiling – very fashionable at the time. The swags shown on the frieze in the Parsons advertisement would have been stencilled and the frieze in both Committee Rooms was investigated under raking light for evidence of this type of stencilling. None was detected on site or under the microscope.

If there is a desire to replicate any of the decorative schemes mapped out in this report, Crick Smith can provide the necessary colour references.

Fig.4: Thomas Parsons and Sons advertisement³



³ Calloway, S. (Ed) (2008) *The Elements of Style*, p.363, Firefly Books, UK

Sample Location List: South Shields Town Hall

Committee Room A

Sample block 1

1. Ceiling
2. Lunette
3. Cornice (1) upper moulding
4. Cornice (2) upper flat
5. Cornice (3) paterae

Sample block 2

6. Cornice (4) modillions
7. Cornice (5) dentils
8. Cornice (6) egg/dart (egg)
9. Cornice (7) egg/dart (dart)
10. Cornice (8) bead & reel
11. Cornice (9) lower moulding

Sample block 3

12. Cornice (10) frieze
13. Cornice (11) frieze rail
14. Wall
15. Strap (12)

Sample block 4

16. Leaf (13)
17. Fruit (14)
18. Corners (15)
19. Cartouche (16)
20. Cartouche surround (17)
21. Strap (18)

Sample block 5

22. Swag (19)
23. Straps (20)
24. Fruit (21)
25. Fruit (22)
26. Fruit (23)
27. Husk (24)

Sample block 6

28. Fruit (25)
29. Fruit (26)
30. Fruit (27)
31. Fruit (28)
32. Background (29)
33. Gold ribbon (30)

Sample block 7

- 34. Background (31)
- 35. Wheat (32)
- 36. Fruit (33)
- 37. Fruit (34)
- 38. Fruit (35)
- 39. Fruit (36)
- 40. Fruit (37)

Committee Room B

Sample block 8

- 41. Walls
- 42. Cornice (101)
- 43. Cornice (102)
- 44. Cornice (103) paterae
- 45. Cornice (104) modillions

Sample block 9

- 46. Cornice (105) dentils
- 47. Cornice (106) egg
- 48. Cornice (107) dart
- 49. Cornice (108) Bead & reel
- 50. Cornice (109) Lower nib
- 51. Frieze beneath cornice (110)
- 52. Timber rail (111)