

# Suburban life in Roman *Durnovaria*

Additional specialist report



**Finds**  
**Painted plaster**

*By Kayt Brown*

## Painted plaster

Kayt Brown

(The cross references denoted 'SL' in this report relate to *Suburban life in Roman Durnovaria Excavations at the former County Hospital site Dorchester, Dorset 2000-2001* M Trevvarthen 2008)

A total of 3018 fragments of wall plaster (136499g) was recovered during the excavations, of which 931 were retained for future reference. Quantification and preliminary identification of the plaster was undertaken by Jan Symonds; this brief report is based on these descriptions. The plaster was recorded by count and weight by context with a basic description of the colour, decoration and any other characteristics such as wattle or stone impressions. A proportion of the plaster was discarded following quantification, comprising unpainted and monochrome plaster (with the exception of unusual colours such as blue). Decorated, polychrome examples were retained. Much of the assemblage comprised monochrome fragments. Of the polychrome material, geometric designs were the most common, with only a small number of naturalistic designs present.

A broad distribution of plaster was observed from phase 2 through to phase 5 derived from re-deposited layers resulting from later building disturbance. The only painted plaster fragments from blocks 1 and 3 were recovered from deposits associated with late 2nd century Buildings 2 and 6. This included over 70 fragments of a multi-coloured border or frieze section (SL Fig. 46). Fragments of red, yellow and white plaster and a single dado fragment (red with white dots) were recovered from demolition deposits and the open area around Building 12 (block 2). Plaster from the late Roman town house (Building 13) and associated yard, was highly variable in terms of colour and decoration. Contexts relating to the terracing and construction of this building contained red, yellow and white painted plaster, occurring as single colours or in combination. Plaster fragments from the sequence of external deposits was also largely dominated by monochrome reds, yellows and creams but also polychrome pieces, including thin bands of several colours on a white or cream background and two white fragments with curvilinear yellow design. Over a hundred fragments from make-up deposit (2165) included ten dado fragments with a red background mottled with blue and dark red or purple, and six fragments of red background with two-tone green tendrils (Fig. P1). A large proportion of the wall plaster recovered was from post-Roman contexts, including moulded plaster fragments, presumably from the area surrounding a door or window, and a small number of white plaster fragments with red curlicule design.



Plate P1: Fragments of painted plaster with two-tone green tendrils on a red background, make-up deposit, context 2165

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