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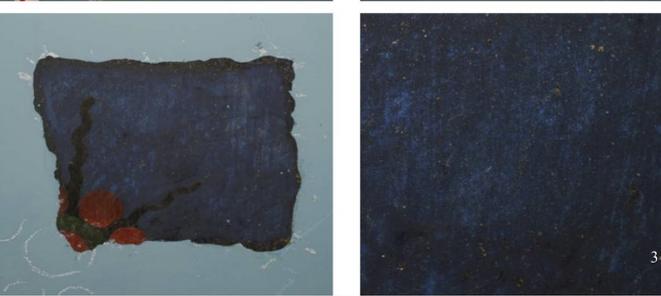
Recovering Cottier's:

Approaches to Restoration and Interpretation in a Major Scheme of Painted Decoration in Glasgow's West End

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Dowanhill Church, now Cottiers Theatre, in Glasgow's West End is the only one of three early church interiors by Daniel Cottier to have survived. The painted decoration (1865-6) forms part of a comprehensive scheme including stained glass and painted furniture, all designed in collaboration with the architect William Leiper. Cottier went on to build an international reputation as a stained glass artist, decorator, furniture designer, art dealer and promoter of younger artists and designers. Cottier's painted decoration at Dowanhill was covered over by subsequent schemes, two of which were based on but modified the original. A third, more recent, plain scheme had no relation to the one by Cottier. By the 1980s, he had been largely forgotten in Scotland, and many of the important decorative schemes by Cottier and his company were being lost. In 1984, when Dowanhill ceased to function as a church, its painted decoration scheme had just been rediscovered but looked unlikely to survive. Four Acres Charitable Trust, which took over the building, was faced with difficult decisions in order to save the structure and as much of the decorative scheme as possible. The approaches to conservation and reconstruction of the painted decoration adopted in subsequent years, in dialogue with Historic Scotland and others, reflect many of the key debates about authenticity and replication.



The Painted Decoration Scheme

The Original Scheme

Bold design and ambitious colour harmonies and combinations of design sources were the hallmarks of Cottier's original scheme, as was the integration of colour across the entire range of surfaces—timber, stone, glass and metal, as well as plaster. Modern examination of the paintwork on the plaster surfaces suggests the use of a traditional distemper technique applied to damp plaster (fig. 4), and this is also supported by the surviving documentary evidence. Other areas such as the elaborate timber pulpit canopy (fig. 2) appear to have executed been in oils. The extensive array of line and ornament was expressed in an artistic and freehand manner combined with stencils.

The Redecoration Schemes

1899: The original scheme was covered over by Guthrie and Wells, a firm associated with Cottier himself. Archival evidence shows their concern to preserve the scheme as originally designed. On the walls, this was achieved by reproducing it in oil paint.

1937: On the advice of the artist D.Y. Cameron, Celtic motifs replaced the original designs (fig. 4) but Cottier's scheme was again respected in many other ways, including the varnish applied to the ceiling (figs. 1,3) in an effort to preserve it. Nevertheless, the highly decorated pulpit (fig. 2) was covered over in wood-effect graining.

1960s: The whole Cottier scheme was covered over by plain emulsion paints in purple, turquoise and light blue (figs 1-3).

Conservation Philosophy

All the schemes of decoration at Dowanhill are of interest, but the original scheme has special significance, given Cottier's role as a pioneer of aesthetic taste. It was therefore agreed that his whole scheme should be presented as far as possible, in spite of the damaged nature of the original material. Three different conservation aims were considered:

A *A complete aesthetic whole which appears more or less as originally intended by Cottier* Where original painting survives beneath the emulsion, the scheme would be repainted over the modern paint, which would act as an intervention layer. Uncovered areas to be stabilised, protected with an intervention layer, and the design re-created on top. The design in areas of loss would be researched. Option A was judged the least authentic, as most of the painting visible would be modern.

B *An example of living archaeology, where damage to surviving paint is left on display as a feature of interest in its own right* Areas of covered painting would be revealed, and lost areas reconstructed, with no attempt to bridge the aesthetic gap between the two. Option B was considered the most authentic in terms of presentation of the historic material, but also the most visually uncomfortable.

C *A combination of Options A & B, the main aim being to present an aesthetic whole, but with enough of the original painting exposed to demonstrate the historic scheme* The aesthetic whole would be visually dominant, but specified areas would display the original uncovered Cottier scheme, and provide historic context. Option C was judged to offer the most appropriate compromise.

Recovery of Cottier's Scheme

The principal phases of research and conservation are summarised below.

1988-89:

Detailed research, cleaning and removal of overpaint was carried out by Historic Scotland on the pulpit and pulpit wall (fig. 2).

1990-91:

Historic Scotland committed resources to record the rest of the painted decoration before structural repairs to the church were carried out. As much as possible was revealed to enable understanding of all the schemes. Plaster that held decorative content, but which could not be retained *in situ* due to dry rot, was removed for storage.

1992-2011:

Subsequent research concentrated on investigating the precise colour content, and determining the solubility of intervening layers (fig. 3), with a view to finding the best techniques of conservation, particularly for the original ceiling and timber tracery. The wall decoration was not recoverable but there is sufficient evidence to reconstruct the original scheme content and appearance.

2012:

The recent work is the first full-scale project of restoration and reconstruction to date. The removal of the Willis organ, installed in 1876, for restoration enabled the original choir area and southernmost bay of the nave at gallery level to become the site of the first major phase of recovery of the decorative scheme since 1989 (figs. 1,5,6). The work is viewed as a pilot phase from which lessons will be learned for the whole interior.

Cottiers is supported by:



Captions: Fig. 1 Restoration and reconstruction of the Cottier scheme carried out in the choir and first bay of the nave, August 2012, prior to reinstallation of the organ. Photo: Alan Crumlish. Fig. 2 Underside of pulpit canopy with original flame decoration being uncovered in 1989 from under the 1960s emulsion paint. Photo: Historic Scotland. Fig. 3 Solubility tests carried out on ceiling above choir gallery, 2010. Photo: Tobit Curteis Associates. Fig. 4 Exposure of earlier schemes of decoration on clerestory nave wall, showing Celtic motif overlying original Cottier roundel, 1989. Photo: Historic Scotland. Fig. 5 Preparation of original decoration surface with protective intervention layer, prior to reconstruction of decorative scheme on south nave wall, August 2012. Photo: Hare & Humphries. Fig. 6 Reconstruction of decoration at upper section of south nave wall, with conserved ceiling decoration above, August 2012. Photo: Hare & Humphries.