

Discovery of the panelling

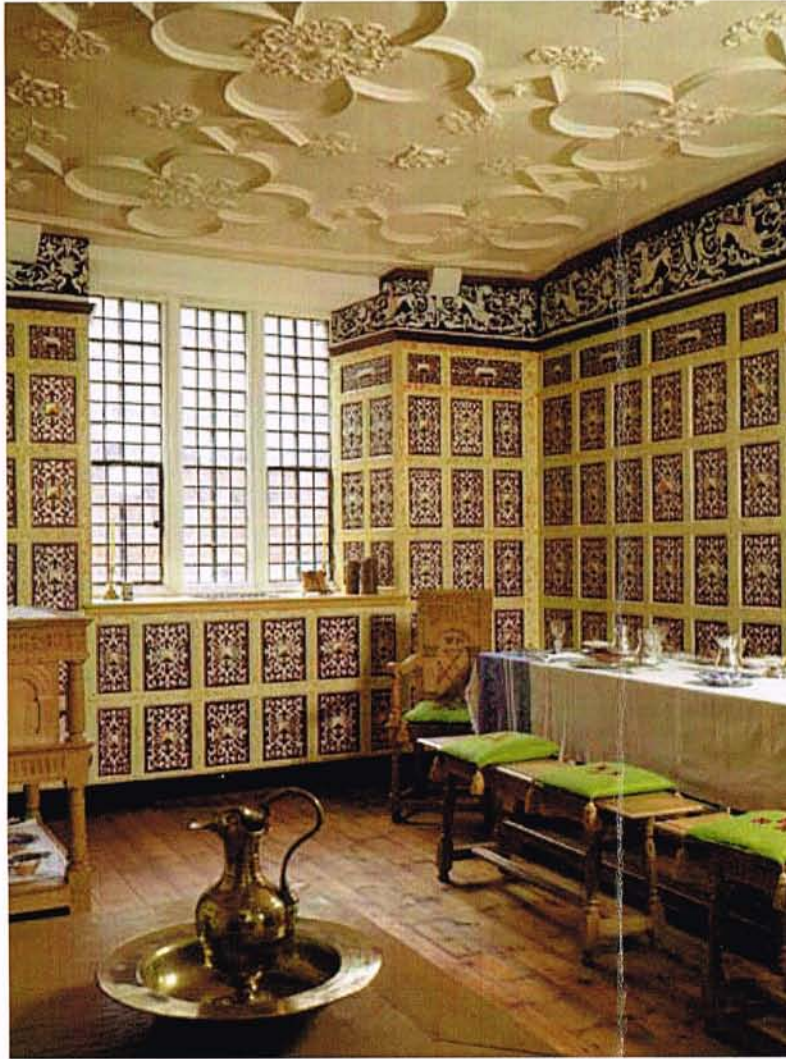
Until a disastrous fire in 1995 the building was a shop, and many of its special historic fittings were hidden. Although it caused damage, the fire did reveal painted panelling in the rear room, hidden and protected by later boarding. Such panelling was once common in higher status Tudor and Stuart buildings, but only rarely survives in its original location. Initial studies confirmed it was an important survival unique in Devon, similar to the repainted panelling now on display at St Nicholas' Priory.



The painted door when first seen



After the fire – panelling emerging from behind later boarding.



Contemporary repainted panelling at St Nicholas Priory
© St Nicholas Priory & Exeter City Council 2008

The panelling

This once decorated the merchant's dining room, which may also have been used for business meetings. It is a mix of oak and pine, and varies in size, detail, and origin. Some sections may have always been on this wall, others probably came from elsewhere in the building during the later refurbishment. Tree ring dating confirms that the earliest panelling in the sequence was made from an oak tree felled sometime between AD 1573 and 1609, and was probably installed when the building was constructed around AD 1600.

The earliest paint scheme, common in the Tudor period, is a repeating "arabesque" pattern. When the building was refurbished and the panelling moved around, this was replaced by a second botanical scheme, including fruit trees, shrubs and flowers. In places fragments of this can be seen overlying the earlier one, although it is best preserved on the reused door, which was not painted before. It is thought that both schemes – as the posh wallpaper of the time - were probably commissioned from specialist painters, who copied the images from pattern books.



Arabesque pattern, c.1600



Later painting of lily overlying earlier arabesque scheme