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THE NEED AND METHODS OF STUDYING HISTORICAL WALLPAPERS IN ESTONIA

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Wallpapers constitute a significant part of historical interior design and studying them is no less important than analysing painted surfaces. Over time, many wallpapers have been removed from their original locations, and therefore not much research material has survived. In order to study, interpret and document the existing material as successfully as possible, a suitable methodology should be employed. The current article focuses on the methods that rely on the principles suggested by the conservator and researcher Frank Sagendorph Welsh, and the authors' own observations. The main aim is to teach people to notice and appreciate historical wallpapers by presenting examples of excellent and less successful solutions.

RESEARCHING WALLPAPERS

IN SITU VERSUS AS SEPARATE FRAGMENTS

Researching wallpapers can be divided into working *in situ* and analysing secondary materials, including the context of the object and supplementary materials. Interior design can be revealed via historical photographs, memoirs and chronicles. The more methods used, the more objective the results of the research. Relying on Frank S. Welsh's article, the two mentioned research trends are divided into five main stages.

1. *In situ* research. Researching wallpapers in their original location can yield material in layers, as well as fragments. Besides the design, printing method and the materials of the wallpaper, this makes it possible to study the context and fitting. If the wallpaper has already been removed from the wall (destroyed), only fragments can be studied. This situation is unfortunately prevalent in Estonia. In order to find fragments, the surfaces underneath floors, doors and window casings should be inspected. It is also advisable to check behind cupboards, wall panelling, window shutters and switches.

2. Evaluating wallpaper in the context of the rest of the interior requires investigating other layers of decoration in the room and comparing them with wallpaper findings. It is then easier to establish the extent of alterations in the room.

3. Establishing the wallpaper pattern, which helps to date the wallpaper. Comparing analogues with finds makes it possible to determine the missing details in a

partially surviving pattern. Thoroughly systematised collections are good sources to track down patterns. Web databases are the easiest to access. Currently, a virtual catalogue of wallpaper samples found in Estonia is being compiled and supplemented (www.tapeedikogu.ee), combining many small and large private collections. The aim of the catalogue is to offer information for researchers and other interested people, to help them to date and evaluate finds according to analogues. Anyone needing more information should examine the virtual database created by the Finnish National Board of Antiquities, <http://tapetti.nba.fi/>.

4. Establishing the print method used for producing wallpaper, which indicates both the age and the price of the wallpaper. Until 1850 wallpaper was printed using printing blocks or stencils carved from wood. They were later produced industrially, with rollers, and beginning in the early 20th century by the silk-screen technique.

5. Establishing the composition of materials used in wallpaper production. This stage should be an inseparable part of any research, but due to limited resources it is rarely undertaken. Carrying out lab tests on rare wallpaper finds is strongly advised.

DOCUMENTING RESEARCH

Wallpapers should be investigated before demolition and restoration work begins. It is sensible to include in the research process specialists, not just interior architects. The documentation should contain necessary photographs that record the state of the object, as well as colour and measuring scales. The locations photographed should be noted on a plan or drawing. The report should always mention the precise location of the analysed bits of wallpaper, their chronological succession, producer's marks on the borders of the panels, the widths of the panels or the sizes of paper sheets, the manner of installation and the use of mackle paper. As the decision about preservation — whether to preserve and how — primarily depends on the results of the research, the work should be carried out *in situ*. To separate the layers, the wallpaper that is lifted should be covered with a prophylactic layer. Layers partially removed from the wall can be re-attached with Japanese paper and methyl cellulose. Taking wallpaper samples from just any place could give a misleading idea

(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)



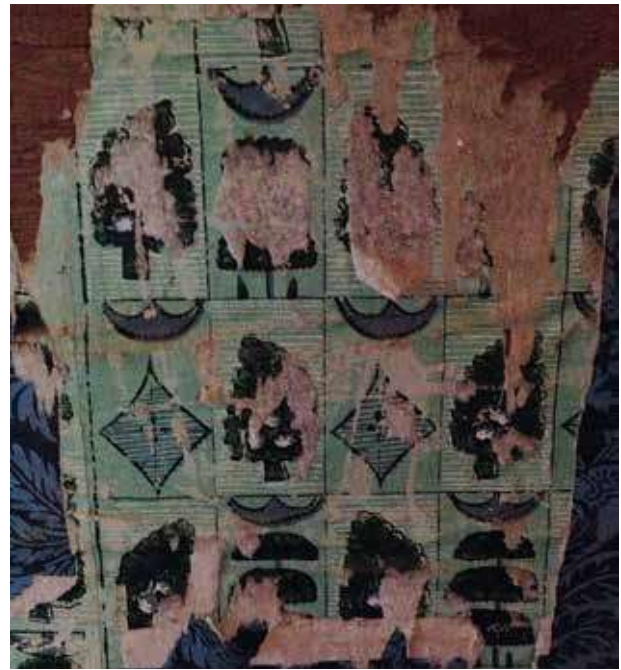
(1) *In situ* research. The uppermost layer can be separated from the lower ones by a prophylactic layer made of Japanese paper. Photo by Andreja Dragojevic (2) Older wallpaper layers can also be displayed as sample areas. Photos by Kadri Kallaste (3) Wallpapers surviving in their entirety can often be found behind panelling. The neo-Rococo panelling in the dressing room of the countess of the Puurmani manor revealed a beautiful Chinoiserie wallpaper (4) A wholly surviving 1930s wall scheme discovered during interior finishing work at Roopa 11 in Tallinn

(5) (6)



(7)

(8)



(9)

(10)



(11)

(5) The first layer of wallpaper in the room adjacent to the big hall in the Juuru vicarage, dating back to the renovation in 1842. Photos by Viljar Vissel (6) Wallpaper of the 1860s with stylised ivy vines in the office of the Juuru vicarage (7) The third layer of wallpaper, from 1875, in the office of the Juuru vicarage (8) Unique wallpaper imitating drapery in the main building of the Loodi manor. Turn of the 18th–19th centuries. Photo by Karin Ojaste (9) Late 18th century wallpaper resembling Tarot cards and inspired by motifs of nature in the former staircase in the main building of the Loodi manor. Photos by Viljar Vissel (10) The second layer of wallpaper with lavish ornamentation in the former staircase in the main building of the Loodi manor dates from the mid-19th century (11) Striped wallpaper from the early 19th century in the main building of the Loodi manor

of the object's design, and does not provide information about possibly existing bordures or the whole design scheme of the room. A sample should cover at least one panel width and a repeated pattern. Historically, walls were not always covered with the same pattern from skirting board to ceiling cornice. This kind of design is typical of mainly 20th century interiors. Researchers of earlier interiors should thus investigate typical wall schemes of a particular era and use them to determine other applications related to wallpaper. Studying wallpapers and their rich and fascinating world helps to better understand the peculiarities of local interiors and evaluate them in the context of materials from neighbouring countries and elsewhere. In addition, wallpaper patterns, materials and quality can indicate the function of the location, the inhabitants' preferences, social status and financial resources.

EXAMPLES

Among the latest examples of wallpaper research are the historical wallpapers found in the Juuru vicarage and in a wing of the Loodi manor. In 2012, 65 different kinds of wallpaper were discovered in the six rooms of the Juuru vicarage, made between 1840 and 1980. The building itself dates from the second half of the 18th century. The fine architecture of the building indicated quite clearly that the seemingly modest interiors might conceal much more. Great help in dating the wallpapers was provided by the careful recording in the Juuru church chronicles of repairs and reconstructions. A significant dating method involved comparing the style of ornaments with analogues. Analysing the layers revealed the extent of repairs. The Loodi manor wallpapers date from the post-construction period and were discovered in summer 2013, when a plan for preparatory research was being compiled. This is a remarkable find and offers an excellent overview of the original design of the whole floor. Besides drapery and contrasting striped wallpaper, mention should be made of the first of the two wallpapers in the former staircase. The pattern, with even distribution resembling Tarot cards, is adorned with naïve geometrical figures inspired by nature.

COMMENT BY HELI TUKSAM, TARTU ART COLLEGE, WHO STUDIED THE INTERIORS OF THE LOODI MANOR

The annex was definitely used by the family, as indicated by the grand design of the ground floor and majestic wallpapers on the first floor. The central axis had a room with a vaulted opening with the most imposing wallpaper. Interestingly, the light blue drapery wallpaper was put on

upside down. Either it was not considered crucial to follow the drapery or whoever carried out the task was not a professional. The wallpaper in block printing technique is on a thick, handmade paper put together with sheets of paper about 50 × 50 cm in size, each of which make up a panel. The fibre sample of the material revealed a mixture of flax and cannabis. The wallpapers were documented and it is advisable to restore the original design during restoration work.

THE STORY OF WALLPAPERS IN THE MAIN BUILDING OF THE SUUREMÕISA MANOR IN HIIUMAA BY VIILJAR VISSSEL

The interior of one of the biggest and grandest Baroque manor houses in Estonia was also decorated with a large number of different wallpapers. The building, used today by the Hiiumaa vocational school, was restored in 2014–2016. Unfortunately, time was limited and money and skilled workmen were scarce. The modest budget of restoration work sometimes justifies the well-known sentence, "Poverty conserves". With its large number of interior finishing layers, the Suuremõisa manor can actually be grateful to the tight budget: so much material was left over for future research. Before the latest restoration, extensive research into the interior finishing was carried out in the building. Besides specialists, students were involved, and did thorough preparatory work, among other things selecting wallpaper fragments with eloquent patterns to be displayed. Among the surviving wallpapers were four discoveries covering an especially extensive area. It was decided to restore two, as their condition was pretty dismal. Towards the end of the work, the National Heritage Board turned to paper conservators of the Estonian Open Air Museum's conservation and digitalisation centre Kanut, asking them to determine the quality of work. Not much good can be said about the restoration of these two wallpapers. The biggest achievement was perhaps the post-restoration general outlook of the blue wallpaper, whose brightness impresses all visitors. Unfortunately, massive overpaintings make it impossible to distinguish the wallpaper's original area. The idea of restoring the ground floor velvet wallpaper was brave, but the results are catastrophic. Displaying fragments surviving across the room on just one wall is impossible even in theory. Instead, the better preserved panels should have been chosen for display. The current outcome does not make it possible to see the charm of the wallpaper's printing techniques, which seem to have been originally luxurious and hedonistic.

(12)



(13)



(14)



(12) Wallpaper fragment displayed in the main building of the Suuremõisa manor, with a bit of painted panelling showing underneath
 (13) Velvet wallpaper with printed gold ornamentation on the ground floor in the main building of the Suuremõisa manor (14) Restored wallpaper in the first floor drawing room in the main building of the Suuremõisa manor