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Textile,

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UPHOLSTERY +

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Gilt leather wall hangings at Dyrham Park. A trial for rehangings.

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Abstract:

The gilt leather in Dyrham Park, a house owned by the National Trust, was taken down in the 1950's, the edges were cut off, and it was nailed to the wall. Unsightly strips of leather cloth tape were put over the joins (See Fig 1). The purpose of the trial was to see if a better way could be found to hang the leather on the walls. The leather was strip lined with leather, and mounted on frames which were attached to the wall with mirror plates. This gave the illusion of a sewn seam, and also made it easier to remove the leather in an emergency.

Keywords: Leather, gilt leather, re-hang, strip line, frames.

The Aim of the Project:

The wish was that the leather should be re-hung so that it had an appearance at least similar to that of a sewn hanging. There was also a need to be able to take the leather down easily in an emergency. The project aimed to establish a viable method, and to establish the likely cost.

The possibility of re-edging all the leather so that it could be re-sewn was considered. However, the resulting sections would have been very large and difficult to handle. In addition, the paint and varnish layer was damaged and needed extensive work. Instead, a

system was needed where the leather was easier to work on, perhaps working on only a small number of pieces at a time. Two pieces of leather from store were treated so that the final effect could be assessed.

This part of the project did not address the question of the fragile paint surface, or of the loss of paint and varnish which exposes the silver. This aspect of the work is to be considered by picture restorers with experience of working on gilt leather.



Fig. 1. The leather cloth strips covering the joins.



Fig. 2. The two sections of leather prior to treatment.

The treatment:

The leather needed something added to the edges so that it could be mounted without nailing through the original leather. This was achieved by strip lining the sections with new leather. This was archival Scandinavian fair calf from J Hewit and Sons. This was chosen as the best quality that was readily available. The leather was given a base colour with Sellaset dye so that it would not show through as a light material in any gaps. The edge of the leather was pared down to give a smooth join with the original. It was applied with the flesh surface in contact with the original to give a strong bond. The adhesive was a mixture of Lascaux® acrylic dispersions, 498HV and 360HV in a 3:1 ratio. The softer 360HV is added to give a more flexible adhesive. (See Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The strip lined leather seen from the back.

The leather was mounted onto wooden frames. The timber for these was only 6 x 46 mm. so these were very lightweight. The strip lining was attached to the back of the frames using Monel (a rustless nickel and copper alloy) staples. (See Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The leather attached to the frames with Monel staples.

The greatest problem with using a series of frames is finding a way to attach them accurately to the wall. This was solved by fitting them to the wall prior to attaching the leather. Mirror plates, with a keyhole shaped hole at the top, were screwed to the back of the frames. A hole was made through the timber behind the keyhole. (See Fig. 5). This allowed the frame to be positioned, and the hole for the screw to be marked, and then inserted. An allowance for the thickness of the strip lining was left between the frames. Once positioned, the frames could be lifted off, and the leather attached.



Fig. 5. Right: The mirror plate on the back of the frame. Left: The hole in the timber allows the screw to be positioned in the wall, and leaves clearance for the screw head.

Because the strip lining was on the back of the leather, there was a small step at the edge of the original leather. In addition, the visible flesh side of the lining along the edge did not blend with the original. To finish the edge, a narrow strip of archival goat from J Hewit and Sons was inlaid along the edge. This was pared down on one edge so that it would blend into the main strip lining. The un-pared edge was butted up to the original to bring it level. The leather was first dyed to a green similar to the background colour of the original. The

adhesive was Evacon-R®, a water reversible ethylene vinyl acetate dispersion. This was used because it has good tack, allowing easy positioning of the strip. Once in position a small amount of Winsor and Newton® artists' quality acrylic paint was used to further match in the colour. (See fig. 6).



Fig. 6. The finished edges butted together.

Conclusion:

The system provided a viable way of attaching the leather to the walls, tidied up the cut edges, and gave an appearance with some similarity to that of a sewn hanging.

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Materials:

Archival leather, goat and calf
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Sellaset® Dyes
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Or, for small quantities:

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