

FOREWORD

This series of historical booklets was quite specifically developed to provide an authoritative briefing for all who seek to enjoy the heritage of what were the medieval baronial lands of Prestoungrange and Dolphinstoun. All are available on the Internet at www.prestoungrange.org the Baron Courts' website.

They have been sponsored by the Baron Courts of Prestoungrange and Dolphinstoun which my family re-established when we gained access to the feudal baronies in 1998 where my paternal great-grandfather, James Park, worked as a miner at the beginning of the 20th Century. But the credit for the scholarship involved in these books, and their timeous appearance, are entirely attributable to the Scottish historians who work with the Baron Courts now led by Annemarie Allan, and the myriad authors concerned.

This particular title focuses on Scotland's art treasure created in 1581 on the ceiling of Prestongrange House for the Baron of Prestoungrange. Whilst it has been removed to Merchiston Tower in recent times, the significance of the work for the town is beyond doubt.

We were at the outset confident that this series would find a welcoming readership and so it has transpired. But it has done much more than that for it is now providing the historical bases for the Arts Tourism programmes conducted by the Baron Courts through their own Arts Festival Society and in particular the insights required for the murals now being painted. As the Epilogue here shows, Andrew Crummy has done this admirably on the ceiling of the now restored Prestoungrange Gothenburg bar.

We thank the authors one and all for their contributions and for a job well done. It is one very practical contribution towards helping visitors and tourists to the town of Prestonpans develop a better understanding of the lives and ambitions of those that went before us all. For better and for worse we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors as we in turn craft our futures and tomorrow's world for our children. So often we see in the pages of history that the cast of characters most certainly changes but the issues that matter and get argued about remain the same.

Dr Julian Wills
Baron of Dolphinstoun
April 1st 2004

... .. / and, in 1962 transferred to Merchiston Tower in 1964 after cleaning and preservative treatment by staff of the National Trust and Ministry of Public Building and Works. The transfer was made by arrangement with the Coal Industry's Social Welfare Organisation and with the assistance of the Ministry. In order to fit its present site it has been reduced in size, the surplus pieces being preserved separately.

The paintings, on boards of Scots pine, bear the date 1581 on a scroll in the fourth bay of the ceiling from the east end. The motifs are painted in tempera (i.e. the pigments are applied with a size medium, not oil) in black, white, and grey; the background, which does not underlie the motifs but is painted round them, is of red lead. The motifs are arranged without reference to any particular theme; some of them occur on other painted ceilings of the period or in contemporary book illustrations. The ceiling as a whole is the best surviving example of what was known as Antique Work and is the earliest dated specimen in Scotland of painted Renaissance decoration.

Originally the oak beams were also painted, but most of the colour has been lost, partly as a result of the adzing of the undersides of the beams to provide a base for later plasterwork. The surviving decoration is not by the same hand as the paintings on the boards, & there are underlying traces of an earlier chevron pattern executed in pigments which match those on the boards.

Schemes of painted decoration such as this were comparatively common in Scotland towards the end of the sixteenth century & during the first half of the seventeenth century and are believed to be the work of local artist-craftsmen.

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