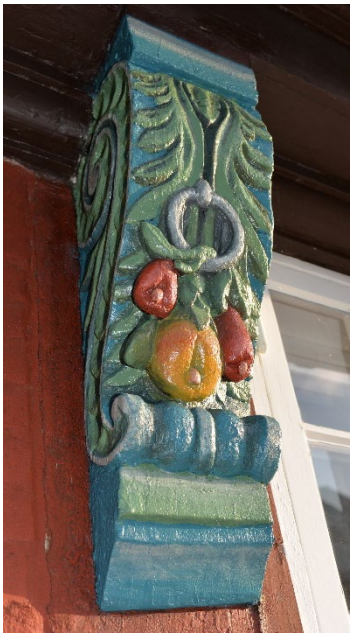




Figure 1: A wooden bracket from the top row on the façade of Mellemdammen 18.

Figure 2: Conservator Teodora Boyadzhieva repainting the decorative elements on the façade of Mellemdammen 18.

The Historic Colours of Mellemdammen 18 in Ribe

Layers of paint on carved wooden brackets reveal how colourful Ribe's historic houses once were. The original bracket displayed here comes from Mellemdammen 18, also known as Terpagerhuset. Its surviving paint links the history of one house to a broader investigation of colours, materials and craftsmanship in Renaissance and Baroque Ribe.

The house's timber framing dates to around 1580 and was remodelled in 1671. Its façade features seventeen carved brackets (knægte) of different types and periods, decorated with leaves, volutes and fruit motifs. Some are original, while others are later replacements.

The owner contacts the Conservation Centre

Research began in 2017 when owner Charlotte Bladt Hansen sought advice on preserving the building. Conservators worked with the owner, architect Steffen Søndergaard and the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces to document the façade and analyse its paint layers. Microscopic examination of paint samples revealed a long sequence of decorative schemes.

Among the earliest colours identified was a blue-green or turquoise paint on the timber framing and one original bracket. Scientific analyses suggest the use of verdigris, a copper-based pigment. Over time, yellowing varnish altered the appearance of this paint, making it appear greener. This may have influenced a later green repainting, probably connected to the 1671 remodelling. The green paint appears as the second layer on the timber framing but the first on the entrance door, suggesting that the door was added during this later phase.

The turquoise colour raises interesting questions about how historic colour schemes are interpreted. While green pigments were widely used during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the surviving paint at Mellemdammen 18 has a distinctly bluish character that distinguishes it within Ribe's colour history.

The restoration began in 2018

The investigations formed the basis for the conservation and repainting of the house in 2018, helping to make its carved details more visible. During this work, Charlotte Bladt Hansen donated the bracket displayed here to the conservation centre for further study. Although damaged by woodworm and rot, and repainted more than fifteen times, it preserves valuable evidence of the building's changing appearance. A second bracket from the same row, owned by Museum Vest, was also examined, including by X-ray imaging to reconstruct its earlier form.

New analyses by the TORCH consortium reveal further details

Paint analyses continue to reveal new details. Studies of the museum-owned bracket identified Prussian blue in some paint layers, while X-ray fluorescence detected copper in areas exposed by removing later layers. This suggests that traces of an even earlier copper-based paint, possibly containing verdigris, may still survive beneath later decorations.

What began as one owner's enquiry has since grown into the wider Ribe Colours research initiative and the TORCH collaboration, supported by Interreg Deutschland-Danmark. Konserveringscenter Vejle, Museum Vest, the University of Southern Denmark and Kiel University combine conservation expertise, historical research and scientific analysis to investigate surviving architectural elements from historic houses across Ribe.

Seventeen architectural elements from eight houses are currently under investigation. Through microscopy, paint cross-sections and a range of analytical techniques, researchers are reconstructing the colours and decorative schemes that once shaped the appearance of Ribe's historic streets.



Figure 3: Mellemdammen 18 in Ribe today.