

# MCNEILAGE CONSERVATION

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Weeks Farm | Talaton | Exeter EX5 2RG | T: 01404 822076  
enquiries@mcneilage-conservation.co.uk | www.mcneilage-conservation.co.uk

Partners: Torquil McNeilage ACR | Ruth McNeilage ACR  
VAT No. 736768095

## **Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross, Crediton, Devon (Diocese of Exeter)**

### **Thomas Ley monument**

### **Conservation Report**

**March 2019**

## Introduction

This report describes work undertaken in March 2019 to the monument of Thomas Ley in Holy Cross church, Crediton, Devon. The work was commissioned by Mr Bill Jerman on behalf of the PCC, and essentially follows the recommendations in our previous Condition Assessment and Proposal of June 2018. During the project I discussed the progress of the work with Mr Jerman and other members of the congregation.

This report briefly considers the monument and its condition as found, before describing the conservation cleaning programme undertaken. Digital images are included to illustrate the work.

## Thomas Ley monument – description and materials

The monument to Thomas Ley d. 1721 is mounted on the south internal wall of the ambulatory, directly over the door into the Chapter House, about three metres from the ground. It commemorates the Reverend Thomas Ley, vicar of Crediton from 1689 to 1721. He is renowned particularly for his gift to the church of his library – almost 2500 volumes in all, which is still in existence and is on permanent loan to the University of Exeter. The monument was apparently erected by his brother John, who was the executor of his will. The inscription, in a debased form of Latin, is transcribed below in its entirety:

Memoriae Sacrum  
(Non ex more Sed ex debito)  
Thomae Ley. A.M.  
Hujus Ecclesiae Uicarij  
Et Poltimorensis Rectoris dignissimi.  
Qui felices memoriae, judicij non minoris  
Et injenij feracissimi;  
Eruditione multiplici instructus,  
Indigentibus maxime beneficus,  
In quam plurimos hospitalis,  
Omnibus benevolus  
Er in concionibus strenuus,  
Optimum egit pietatis monitorem,  
Exemplo ducem  
Ut merito audiret nuper,  
Parochiam par decus et deliciae;  
Nunc luctus et desiderium  
Piam clausit et beatam Uitam inchoavit  
Tertio Iduum Martij  
Anno ( Dom. 1720/1  
Aetatis Suae 67

The monument consists of the oval inscription, surrounded by an elaborately ornamented frame of interlacing foliate designs, and flanked by large side brackets. These elements stand on a sill with cyma-moulding, itself supported on the apron with funerary casket and palm leaves, and two corbels with leaf drop designs. The cornice over the inscription is decorated with leaf ornament, with a segmental open pediment and a central armorial achievement.

The inscription is of black Carboniferous limestone, probably from Derbyshire (Ashbourne) and the sill is carved of Ashburton marble. The remainder of the monument is painted with several layers of limewash, but is probably of Beer limestone. Cleaning revealed that the palm leaves were offset with black paint, and that the lettering of the inscription was originally gilded, significant remnants of both surfaces survive and have been uncovered.

### **Condition as Found**

The monument was inspected for any structural issues and was found to be stable and sound. Any ferrous fixings are in a stable state. The wall on to which the monument is fixed is internal, and can be expected to be dry.

Surfaces were heavily soiled with both loose dust and more ingrained dirt. The topmost paint layer was fragmentary and areas of underlying paints showed through. There seems to have been some variation in the paint colour used to paint the freestone elements. A top layer of unconsolidated “ceiling white” had been applied in some places only. Some areas of ornament had been partially obscured by the successive paint layers, but it was decided to leave the layers intact, rather than try to remove them and risk loss of important historic material.

The inscription and sill had been coated with some kind of surface material, which did not respond to cleaning by alcohol, acetone or Shellsol T (white Spirit) and was therefore not a spirit varnish or wax layer. This layer had discoloured to a pale brown colour over time.

### **Conservation Work**

All surfaces were dusted with soft brushes and a vacuum cleaner to remove the loose dust, cobwebs and debris. Further cleaning was then carried out with Synperonic A7 non-ionic detergent, water and Shellsol T, applied with cotton swabs and removed with deionised water. A small amount of pumic powder was added for the sill to assist in cleaning by providing very mild abrasion.

Areas of heavy and stubborn soiling, including the inscription, were cleaned further with a 5% solution of Tri-ammonium citrate in water, removed with deionised water. This produced a satisfactory result. Unconsolidated whiting was removed during this process.

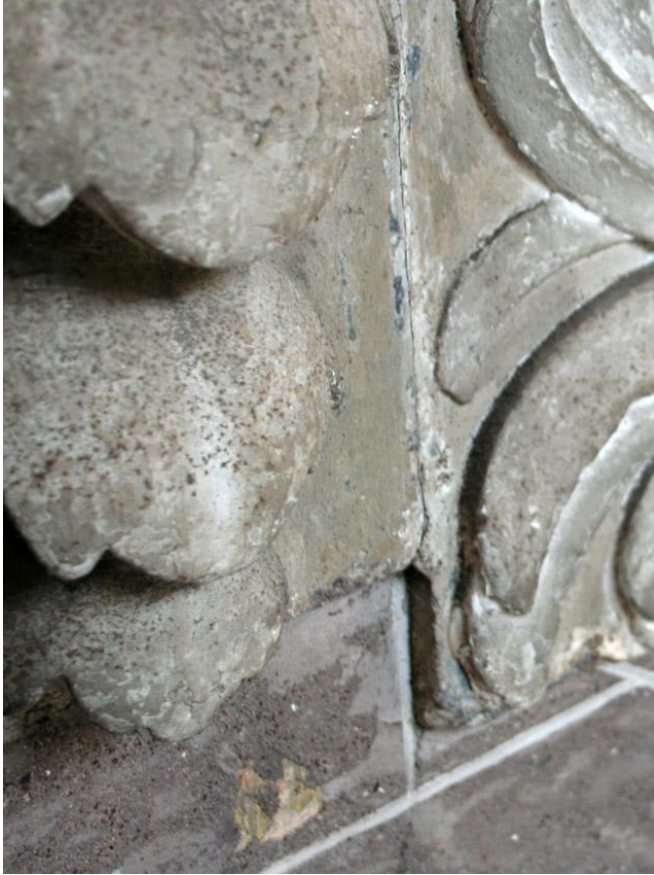
The inscription returned to its original blue-black colour, and considerable survivals of gilding were found in the letters. These survivals were consolidated with Paraloid B72 acrylic. The luster of the inscription panel was enhanced with a dilute application of Paraloid, which served to consolidate the flaking areas of stone between the central lines of lettering. The surface was then protected with microcrystalline wax applied with cotton swabs and polished.

Modern, pale-coloured wall paint was removed from the apron around the palm leaves, revealing the black original material underneath that emphasized the palm ornament perfectly. Black areas of paint were found to be powdery and were consolidated with a 5% dispersion of Plextol B500.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Thomas Ley monument before work began





Details of surface condition, showing heavy dust and dirt deposits, ingrained dirt and cobwebs





View of the apron, showing the white paint around the palm leaf ornament



Upper part of the monument, showing a cleaning trial on the frame, indicated with arrow





The armorial achievement before work began





The armorial achievement after work



Ley monument after work





The inscription after work





Base section of the monument after work and bottom, before work

