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St John's Church, Ivybridge, Devon (Diocese of Exeter)

Jane Phillips monument

Conservation Report

May 2019

Introduction

This report describes work undertaken in May 2019 to repair the monument of Jane Phillips in St John's church, Ivybridge, Devon. The work essentially followed the programme set out in our previous report of September 2018. During the project we met with and discussed the work with the churchwardens and identified the cause of movement that had damaged the support corbels to the monument.

Jane Phillips monument – brief description

The monument consists of a scroll-shaped inscription backed on a simple rectangular backing plate, and supported on two corbels of black limestone. The corbels are built in to the wall behind and the monument is then retrained to the wall with bronze cramps. Each corbel had a rebated upper surface, so that the monument sits behind a small upstand of approximately 5 mm. The intention of this was evidently to make the monument more stable.

Condition As Found

The monument was structurally unstable owing to the fracture of both corbels, the faces of which had broken away leaving the large plaque above vulnerable to collapse. The cause of this problem was not immediately clear (but see below).

Surfaces were lightly soiled and had splashes of paint and varnish on them. Otherwise both stone and paint were stable.

Conservation work

A fixed, load bearing scaffold tower was erected to give good access to the monument and provide lifting capacity with beam, trolley block and tackle. The monument was released from its upper fixings, removed from the wall and stored on the scaffold. Both corbel stubs were removed from the wall and taken to the workshop.

Soiled marble surfaces were cleaned with synperonic A7 non-ionic detergent applied on cotton swabs, and areas of varnish and paint were removed as far as possible with alcohol.

The removal of the monument revealed two things. First, there was a stencilled pattern on the wall behind, which had been obliterated by new paint layers since the monument was erected. Second, a large steel pipe was buried in the wall, passing down directly behind the monument, and had at its lower end rusted and expanded, forcing the monument forward and putting pressure on the corbels.

Owing to the rebated design, the monument was unable to push forward and had therefore fractured the corbels.

Above: stencilled decoration found behind the monument

Right: the steel pipe found buried in the wall behind the monument

This steel pipe was cut with a grinder and removed. The wall was then made good with hydraulic lime mortar.

The fractured front face of one of the corbels survived and this corbel was therefore repaired with a stainless steel threaded dowel and polyester resin.

Signature of the monumental mason, retained with the repaired west corbel

The second corbel had no surviving face section and was therefore turned around and the former built in section was re-worked to form a rebated face similar to its companion.

Both corbels were then returned to the wall and built in using natural hydraulic lime mortar. To ensure that the monument would be fully supported, a steel bar of 20mm by 12 mm gauge was inserted in the centre to alleviate load on the corbels and fixed with polyester chemical mortar.

The monument was then returned to its position and fixed with two stainless steel cramps to retrain it to the wall. The edges were pointed with lime mortar and the scaffold struck.

The monument after work was completed