

MCNEILAGE CONSERVATION

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

St George, George Nympton, Devon (Diocese of Exeter)

Gay family wall monument

Report on cleaning and retouching project

October 2020

Introduction

This brief document describes work undertaken over the summer and autumn of 2020 to the Gay family wall plaque in George Nympton church, Devon. The work was commissioned by Mr Ian Bateman and undertaken by the author. Due in part to the Covid 19 situation, the work was extended over several months.

St George's Church – brief comments about the building

St George's church is a Grade II* listed building and stands in the centre of the village of George Nympton. The church is fifteenth century in origin and the tower was apparently added in 1673; there was then a major restoration and partial rebuilding in 1882 under E H Harbottle. There have been in recent times some damp problems associated with external cement pointing and it is understood that the west wall of the north aisle, where the Gay family monument is mounted, was repointed with lime-based mortar less than 10 year ago. The internal wall surface, around the plaque was also re-plastered, at least superficially and finished with a breathable paint. It is notable that the paint surface has failed in several areas, and that salt efflorescence stands out on the surface, indicating that the wall is still drying out, or that possibly there is a continuing problem of water penetration here.

The Gay family plaque

The monument consists of a large corbel carrying an inscription and on top, an obelisk panel with a cross within a sunburst, presumably representing the promise of the resurrection through Christ. The monument gives a strong impression of being a truncated remnant of a larger monument, even though it cannot have originally been erected before 1832 (the latest date of death – unless the monument was mounted and later names were added as deaths occurred).

The monument corbel is signed "I Gould Barum".

Inscription and obelisk panel are of Italian white marble, probably sourced from Carrara, whilst the corbel is of Ashburton marble.

The monument commemorates three siblings, Thomas d. 1796, Eleanor d. 1802 and Elizabeth Gay d. 1832 of George Nympton.

Condition As Found

The monument had been affected for many years by moisture on the surface of the stone. This had not caused much damage to the marble itself, although it had made the surface dirty and streaked with water runs. The letters of the inscription had lost much of their black infill and had become, in places, difficult to read.

Cleaning and Re-touching work

A small scaffold tower was erected to give good access to all parts of the monument.

An initial proposal made from studying a photograph was to remove plaster around the wall plaque to allow the wall to breathe. However, on examination, it was determined that the wall had already been re-plastered, as mentioned above, and that this would not be necessary. An exploratory hole made beside the monument confirmed that the surface plaster is of lime; a harder backing plaster, which may still be a lime-based material, though somewhat more hydraulic, was found behind, and extends behind the monument as well.

The surface of the Carrara marble was cleaned carefully with V and A mix (water, white spirit and Synperonic A7 non-ionic detergent) applied and removed with cotton swabs. A small amount of pumice powder was added to the mix to achieve a very gentle abrasive effect and improve the

cleaning capability of the mix. This cleaning was augmented in places by cleaning with 10% Tri-ammonium citrate in water, also applied on cotton swabs. Splashes of plaster, paint and lime residue from water runs, which had disfigured the stone surface were removed where possible using sharp scalpel blades. All work was undertaken under magnification and strong light.

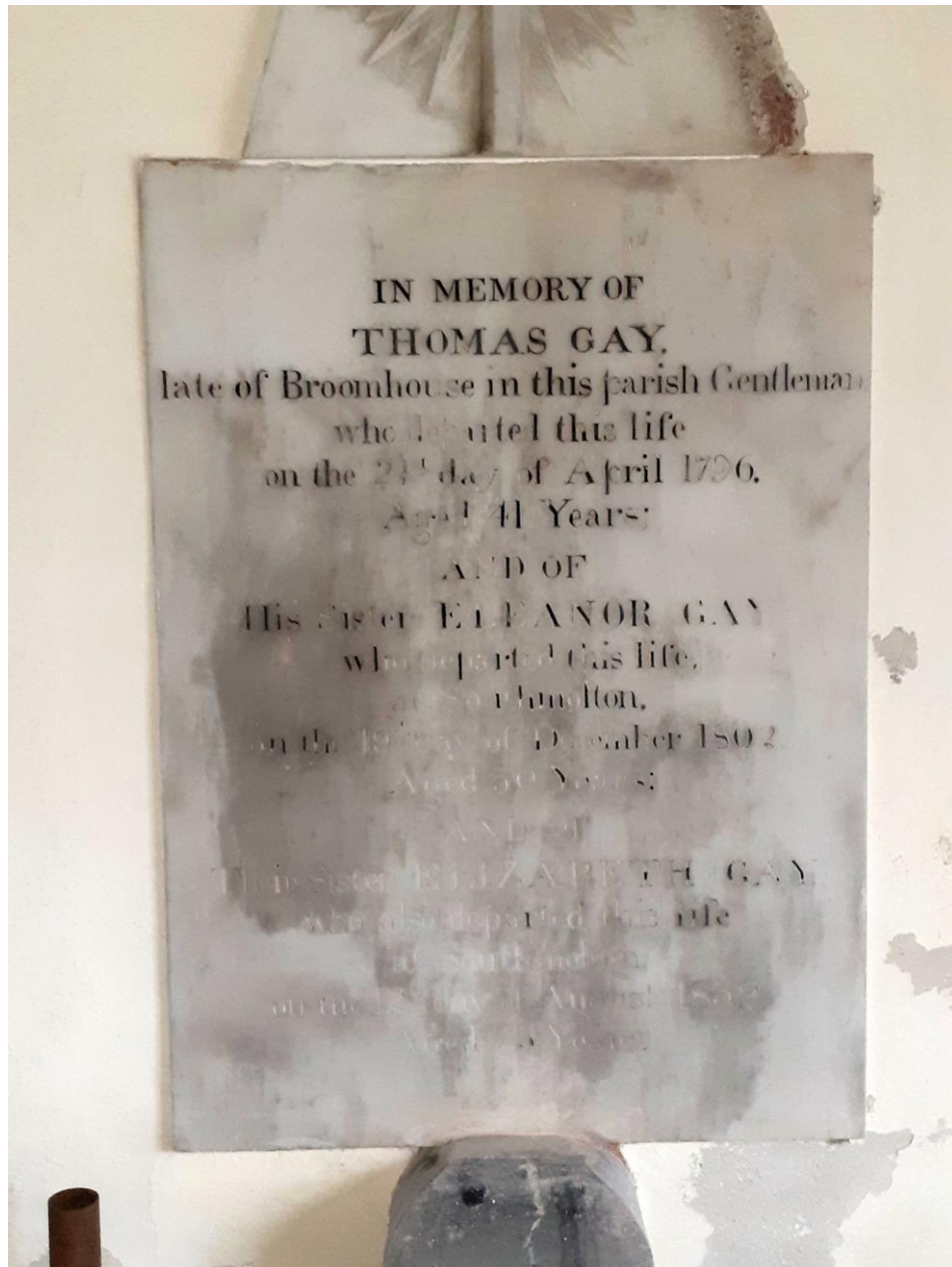
Once the stone had been cleaned, the lettering was re-touched using artists' quality acrylic paints; areas of loose lettering infill were stabilised with Paraloid B72 acrylic. The base corbel was cleaned with the same mix and given a coat of dilute Regalrez resin to enhance its lustre and protect the surface.

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The Gay family plaque early in the work programme



2. Detail of the inscription, showing staining and initial cleaned area top left



3. the monument after cleaning and retouching work was complete





IN MEMORY OF
THOMAS GAY,
late of Broomhouse in this parish Gentleman
who departed this life
on the 21st day of April 1796,
Aged 41 Years;
AND OF
His Sister ELEANOR GAY,
who departed this life,
at Southmolton,
on the 19th day of December 1802,
Aged 50 Years;
AND OF
Their Sister ELIZABETH GAY
who also departed this life
at Southmolton,
on the 12th day of August 1832,
Aged 75 Years.



4,5 and 6. Details of the completed monument