



THE REREDOS ST MATTHEWS CHURCH MARSTOW MONMOUTHSHIRE

Treatment Report
The Reredos
St Matthew's Church, Marstow, Monmouth

December 2020

Reference No: 2068



Revision

Date	Revision	Comments
15.12.2020	1	


Quality Assurance Review

Prepared by: Christina Kaye

Signature

Reviewed by: S A Strachey ACR

Signature



Date: 15.12.2020

Sally Strachey Historic Conservation Ltd
The Barn
Temple Cross House
Lower Godney
Wells
Somerset
BA5 1RZ

office@sshconservation.co.uk
www.sshconservation.co.uk



1. Observations and Trials

1.1 Observations

The Marstow Reredos is a stunning canopied, pink veined alabaster reredos with a fine east window above. It has polished, dark marble columns and a polished grey marble corbelled shelf. The expert execution of the high relief carving of the last supper is in a mostly clear, white alabaster, shifting to pink on the dexter side. The last supper is flanked by angels set in deep niches. The ashlar stones below are also alabaster and meet with the encaustic tiled floor. Fixed to the ashlar on either side are two dedication strips in copper/brass which have interesting crazed coloured lettering. On the dexter side is the dedication to the reredos and on the sinister the dedication for the east window. They have been secured with iron pins and on the dexter side the dedication's fixings have leaked ferrous staining into the alabaster ashlar.

The site inspection noted that the reredos was extremely dusty with accumulations of cobwebs, wax, general dirt, and debris over all surfaces and behind it on the east window cill. The packing out and support behind the reredos appears to be constructed from brick and mortar. A close inspection of the support material confirmed it was stable although very dirty.

The cover meter survey detected metal fixings in the base of the columns and capitals as well as in three out of the four corbels under the marble shelf and flanking angels. Nothing was detected in the sinister most corbel. Metal was also located in the small alabaster turrets just above the grey marble shelf and either side of the last supper carving. No other fixings were found. There were no signs of movement or decay in the areas around the fixings or anywhere else. The reredos can be classified and structurally sound.

The moisture meter indicated a rise in moisture levels at floor level, either side of the reredos but there was no sign of decay, visible damp, or movement in this area. All further readings recorded dry.

The overall condition of the alabaster was found to be good although it did appear that the pale alabaster from which the last supper is carved has been cleaned in the past resulting a rougher texture and an associated greyer and duller appearance than the architectural setting.

The sinister flanking angel was found to be rocking in its niche and had lost its bedding plaster. The angel also had a section of its hair loose. This is an original piecing in which has also lost its plaster bedding.

The apostle on the far sinister side also has original pieced in sections on its forehead and the top of the head. Both sections were stable.

The alabaster backing to the carved supper behind Christ and the Apostle's heads has been stained with and ochre wash to help highlight the detail of the carvings. This wash was found to be soluble in white spirit, so care will be needed when the main cleaning programme takes place.

The dexter flanking angel's canopy has a loose alabaster infill strips on its upper, inside edges against the chancel wall.

Small areas of bruising were noted on alabaster figures namely on the tips of fingers and noses. Overall, very little surface loss was found; two of Christ's dexter fingers, a tiny chip in the rim of the chalice, the sinister thumb to the apostle on the far dexter side and one other apostle's fingertip.

1.2 Cleaning Trials

	Method	Result
1	Acetone applied with cotton wool swabs.	Removed a small amount of dirt but not enough to recommend it as a cleaning method.
2	White spirit applied with cotton wool swabs.	Proved to be an excellent cleaning method, breaking down the wax and dirt which once mobilised could be lifted immediately off the surface of the alabaster.
3	White spirit with Synperonic N applied with cotton wool swabs.	The combination did not remove any more dirt than just using the white spirit.

From the observations during the site survey and the cleaning trials the following works were proposed and executed:

1	Using dry soft brushes and a Hoover remove all loose dirt, dust and debris including the wall above the flanking angels' heavy deposits of cobwebs, dust, and debris.
2	Using white spirit and cotton wool swabs clean all surfaces.
3	Re-fix the loose sections. Grout the sinister rocking angel and fill all open joints with Plaster of Paris. This includes the sinister loose brass dedication plaque. Joints touched in to match surrounding alabaster with acrylic paints.
4	Poultice iron staining with Restorative Iron Stain Remover, to help reduce the stain around the dexter dedication plaque. Water must not be used for this process.
5	Reinstate lost areas of the ochre limewash behind the heads of the Apostles and Christ. Use acrylic paints combined with earth colours.
6.	Apply two coats of protective microcrystalline wax to all surfaces with a soft cloth and buff in.
7.	Carefully polish brass dedication plaques. The coloured lettering to be checked for stability prior to this process.

1.3 Comment on Conservation Programme

The grey, dull appearance of the last supper figures and areas across the flanking angels was possibly due to an inexperienced attempt to clean the works in the past which has opened up the surface of the alabaster and driven the mobilised dirt further into the pore structure of the stone. The method of cleaning had to be amended for these surfaces with an additional clean after the use of white spirit using acetone to reduce the embedded dirt within the pale alabaster.

2. Maintenance of the Reredos

A gentle dust using a soft cloth and a dry soft brush to remove any loose dust and dirt. If there is any need for further intervention, please contact a specialist.

Under no circumstance should water be used on the alabaster.

The metal inscription panels can be gently buffed using a soft cloth.

3. Contract Images and Site Record Drawings

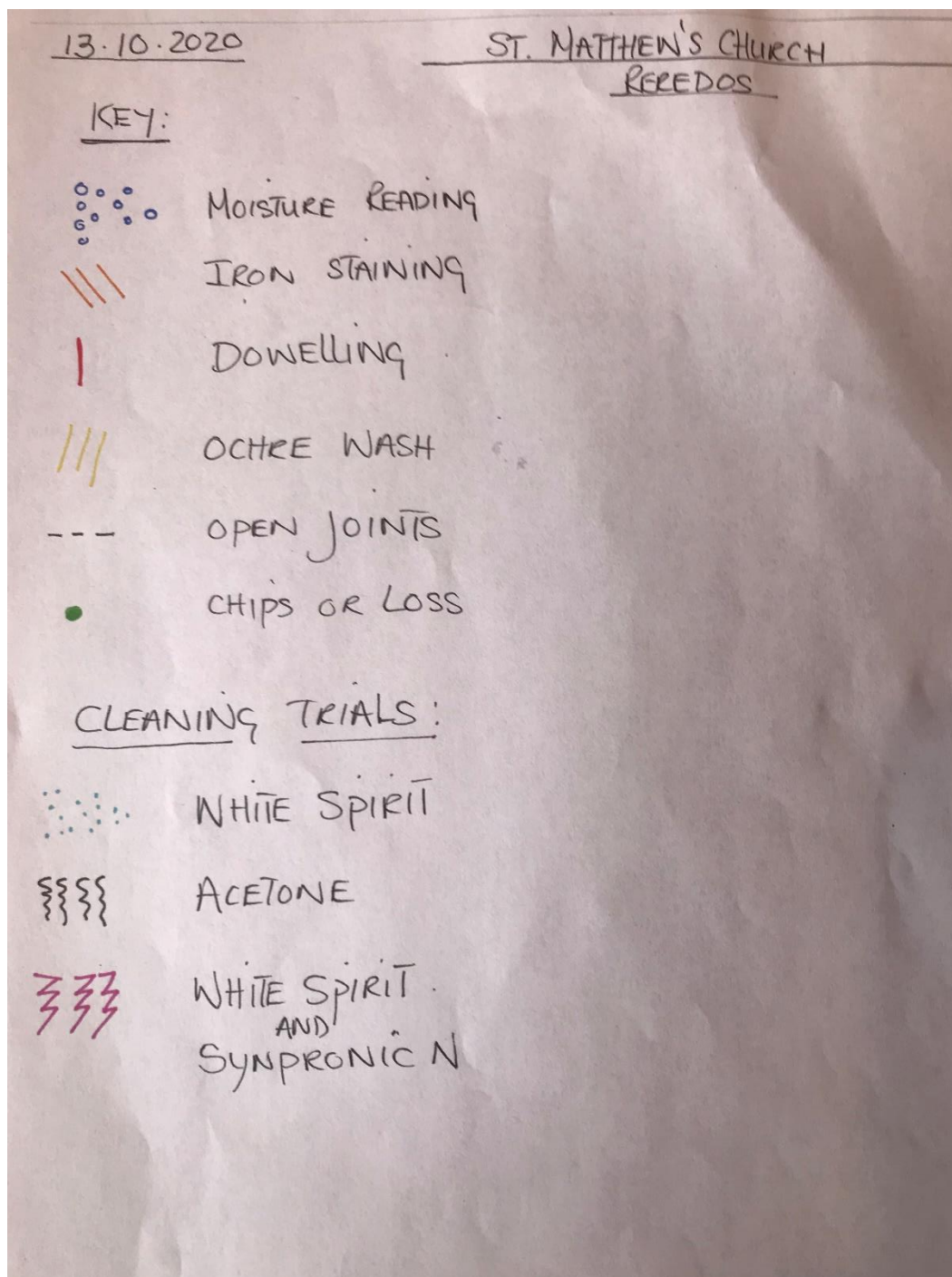
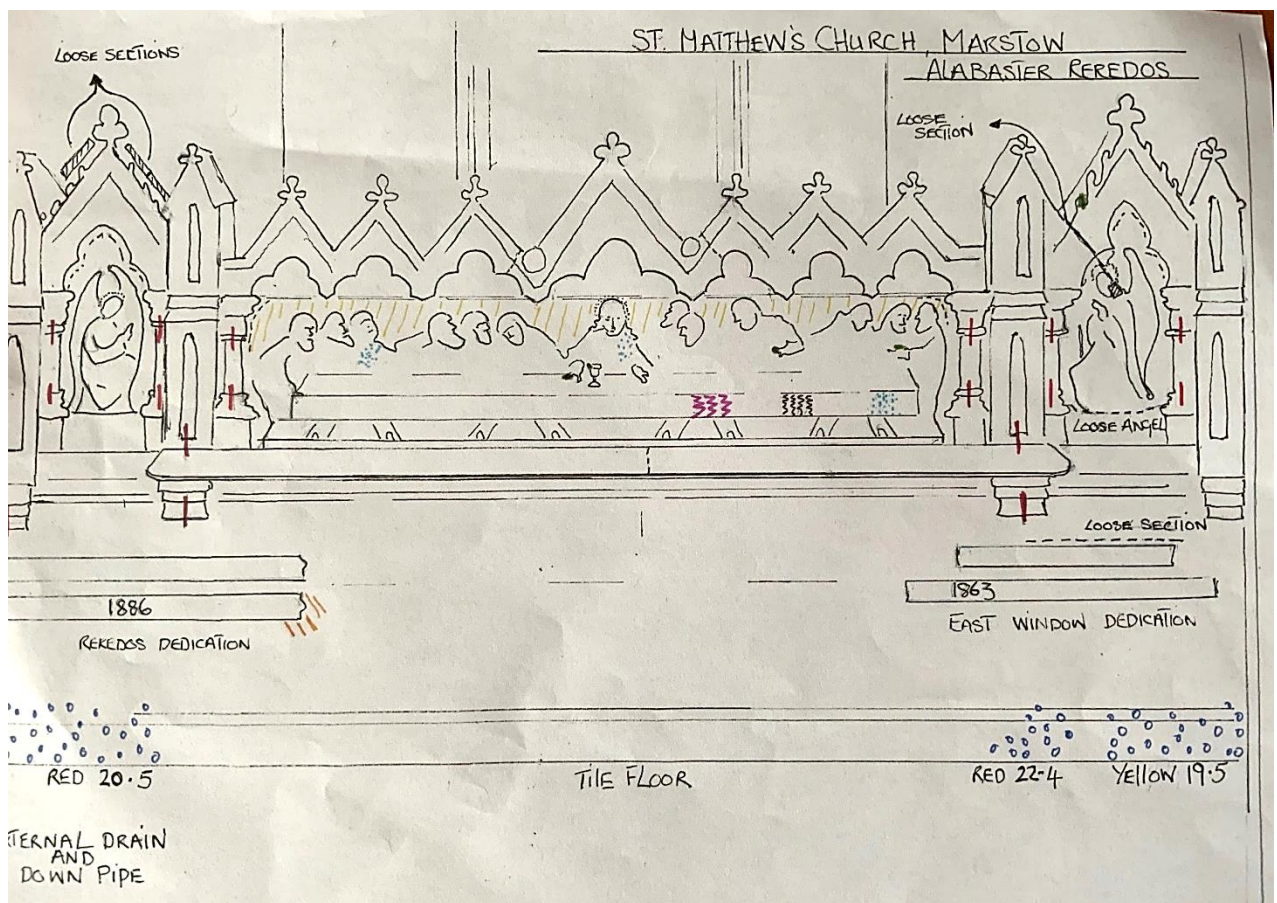
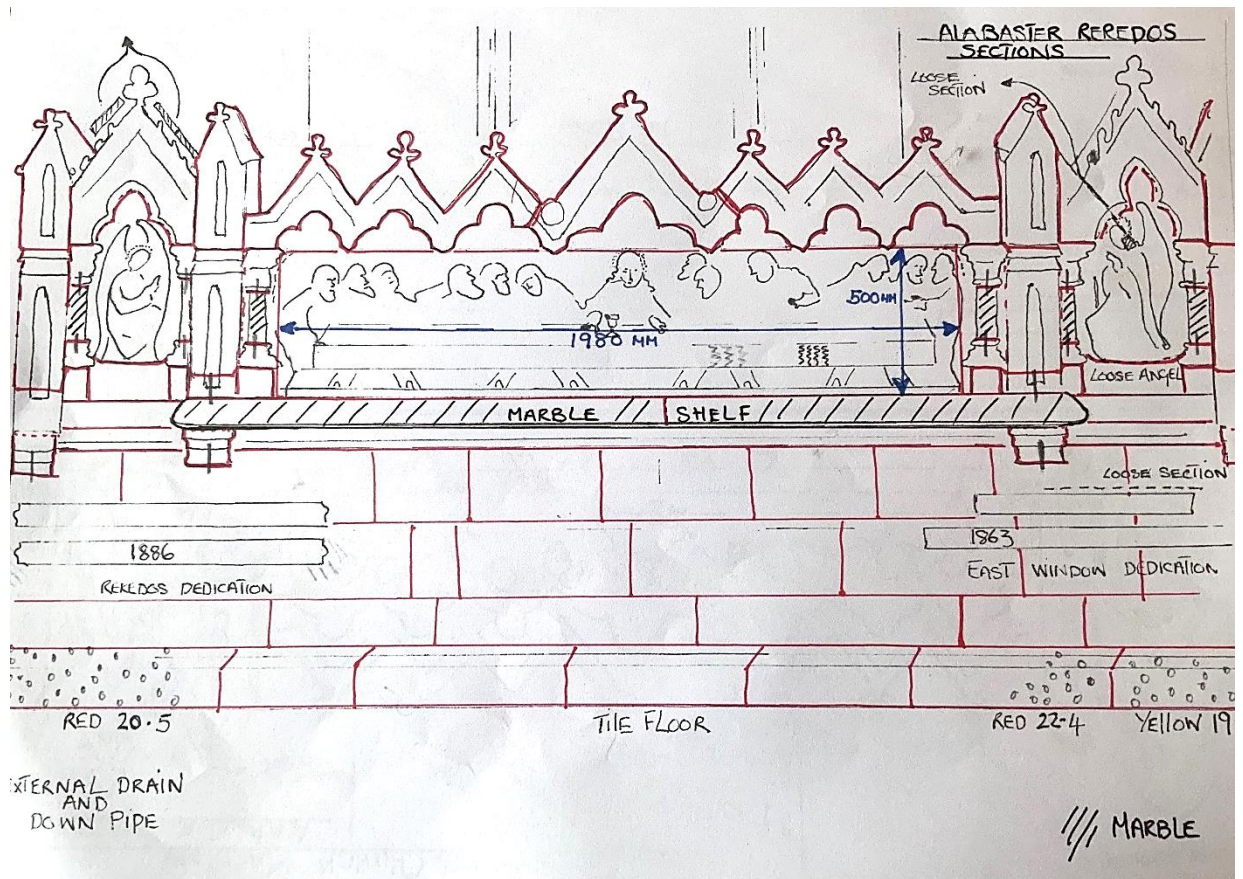


Figure 1: Key for Site Record



Figures 2 and 3 Site Records of sections, fixings, loose elements and cleaning trials



Figure 4: The reredos before the conservation programme



Figure 5: The carving of the last supper before cleaning. Note the dull grey surface of the carved figures most likely due to an inappropriate method of cleaning



Figure 6: Detail of the carved figures showing the dull grey surface to the pale alabaster



Figure 7: Detail of Christ and surrounding apostles showing the detail and movement to the carving. The ochre wash can be seen over the background and loss of fingertips most likely due to impact damage.



Figure 8: Detail of the dexter side of the carving illustrating the quality of movement and individual portraiture



Figure 9: Detail of Christ and apostles showing the ochre wash highlighting the carving



Figure 10: The sinister side of the carving showing further impact damage to fingers



Figure 11: The dexter flanking angel showing the difference between the polished surface of the architectural setting and the duller areas of surface to the angel which may have been subject to an inappropriate cleaning programme



Figure 12: The sinister flanking angel showing the difference between the polished surface of the architectural setting and the duller areas of surface to the angel which may have been subject to an inappropriate cleaning programme



Figure 13: The original inset to the hair of the sinister angel



Figure 14: Detail of an open joint



Figure 15: Open joint to the canopy



Figure 16: Image of the back of the reredos showing the brick and mortar support structure and the debris and dust over the surfaces



Figure 17: Sinister side of the reredos illustrating the alabaster ashlar and dedication panels

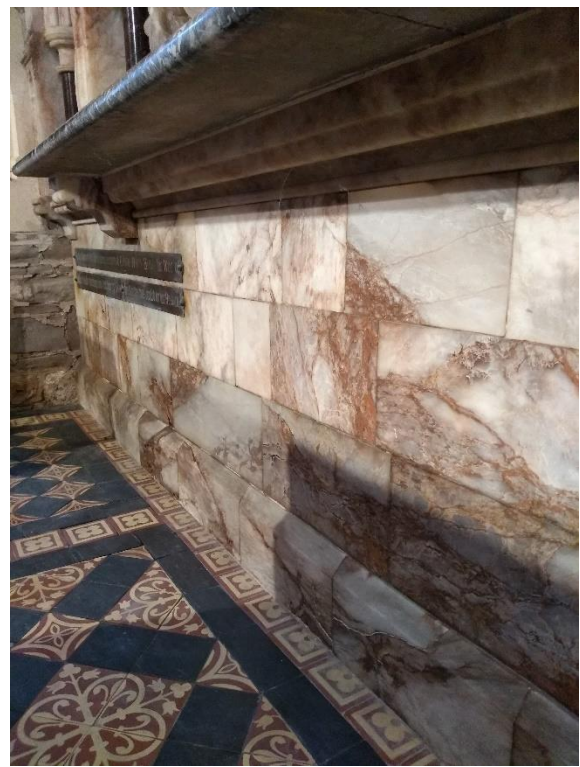


Figure 18: Dexter side of the reredos illustrating the alabaster ashlar and dedication panels



Figure 19: The coloured lettering to the dexter dedication panel. Not the iron staining caused by the fixings

Figure 20: Detail of the cracked effect to the coloured lettering



Figure 20: The reredos after cleaning and conservation repairs



Figure 21: The sinister side after cleaning, repointing, repairs and protection



Figure 22: The dexter side of the reredos after cleaning and conservation showing the difference between the surfaces of the carved figures and the architectural setting



Figure 23: Overview of the last supper carving after cleaning and conservation.



Figure 24: Detail of Christ and surrounding figures after cleaning and conservation showing the detail with more definition such as the folds of the tunics, cloaks, vessels and food



Figure 25: Detail of the reredos illustrating use of different marbles to frame the last supper



Figure 26: Overview of the last supper carving after treatment illustrating the complexity of the high relief design



Figure 27: The canopy to the dexter angel showing the smooth translucent quality of the alabaster



Figure 28: The dexter angel after treatment showing the grey areas to the drapery where the surface may have been subject to inappropriate cleaning methods



Figure 29: The sinister angel after treatment showing the contrast of surface appearance between the angel and the architectural setting



Figure 30: Detail of the sinister angel