

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 James Church, Dursley, Gloucestershire (Diocese of Gloucester)

Internal wall monuments

Conservation Report



February 2022

Introduction and Brief

This report describes work undertaken in January and February 2022 to a number of wall monuments in St James' church, Dursley. The project was commissioned on behalf of the PCC by Mr Austin Meares and overseen by the inspecting architect Toby Falconer, who both visited site regularly to discuss the situation. The work followed recommendations made in our earlier report of January 2021 and involved the stabilisation and associated cleaning of monuments flagged as unstable in that earlier report.

This report takes each monument in turn, for clarity retaining the numbers given to the monuments in the 2021 report, describes briefly the condition of the monument as found and then the work undertaken to stabilise both structural and surface condition. It is illustrated with digital images, some taken on a Canon EOS 7D digital camera and some on a Samsung A03 mobile phone.

The monuments – a brief overview

In our earlier inspection and report, we identified seven monuments with serious structural problems, caused mainly by the rusting and subsequent expansion and jacking of iron or mild steel fixings. Four of these monuments, Samuel Clarke (41), William and Sarah Pegler (42), Jos and Mary Pulley (43) and Ann Tippetts (45) were on the west wall of the north aisle, which has experienced persistent water penetration due to the intermittent failure of the rainwater goods, as well as its position on the west facing into the prevailing weather. All of these required refixing and some care to their surfaces. Two monuments on the north wall of the north aisle, William Purnell (32) and Samuel Wallington (33) had similar fixings-related issues and the large monument of John Phelps and family (15) had structural problems of unknown severity. The upper part of the monument was certainly unstable and cracked, and the stability of the lower areas was not clear.

These monuments were selected to be treated in the first phase of a programme of conservation, principally to alleviate potential danger to members of the congregation and public.

John Phelps and Family (monument number 15)

Location and Date

South wall of the nave at the east end and close to the vestry door. The wall is at least partially internal. The last date of death on the monument is 1789, but this last epitaph may have been added after the monument was erected, and the monument may date from closer to 1771, when John himself died.

Description

A large and impressive monument, consisting of a central inscription flanked by curling brackets and surmounted by a cornice moulding. On top of this cornice is a cartouche bearing the arms of the deceased, with supporting ornament and above this an ogee cornice. Foliage drops adorn either side of the colourful backing plate; at the base of the monument is an apron with fluted brackets and palm leaf ornament, supported on three small corbels.

Materials and Construction

The Phelps monument is interesting for both its materials and construction type the inscription and main decorative elements are carved of Carrara marble of high quality, whilst the supporting architectural ornament is of Carrara Siciliana, with grey veining. Some elements are of black limestone, probably from Derbyshire and the backing plate is made from an interesting multi-coloured brecciated marble of unknown provenance. Polychrome is oil-based.

Structurally, the monument appears to be carried on three shallow corbels at its base. It is generally a shallow monument without too much cantilevering, but it is also likely that there are significant metal restraint cramps in the sill that are performing some of the support.

Condition as found

The monument was showing signs of disruption caused by failing and rusting fixings – open joints, displaced elements and a large crack in the topmost cornice. The lower parts of the monument appeared stable, with no open joints or signs of disruption. Surfaces were soiled but generally the stone was sound; polychrome on the cartouche was being lost.

Conservation Work

A secure and load-bearing scaffold tower was erected to permit work, and the monument was photographed and drawn to assist in dismantling work. The upper parts of the monument were then dismantled and all ferrous fixings found within were removed. Some of these were severely corroded, but others appeared still generally sound.

Old mortars were removed from monument stones and fixings stubs were drilled out of the supporting wall as necessary. All surfaces were cleaned with Synperonic A7 non-ionic detergent in water, sometimes with a little added pumice to assist the cleaning. Flaking polychrome was fixed with Primal B60a acrylic dispersion (10%) Areas of the backing plate were friable and these were filled and buttressed with lime mortars. The fractured cornice was repaired with an 8 mm threaded internal dowel and two surface cramps, all in 316L grade stainless steel, set in polyester resin. The monument was then re-erected, using 316L grade stainless steel cramps and resin for wall anchors, lime mortars and plaster for bedding joints, as appropriate.

A metal survey revealed the presence of metal elements in the lowest parts of the monument, and in the side panels of the backing plate. However, since these had caused no disruption or staining, the wall was very dry and the multi-coloured marble of the backing plate was fragile and could be damaged if further dismantling was undertaken, a decision was taken after consultation to leave these

elements undisturbed and monitor them over the next few years. It is expected that any corrosion of these will progress very slowly.

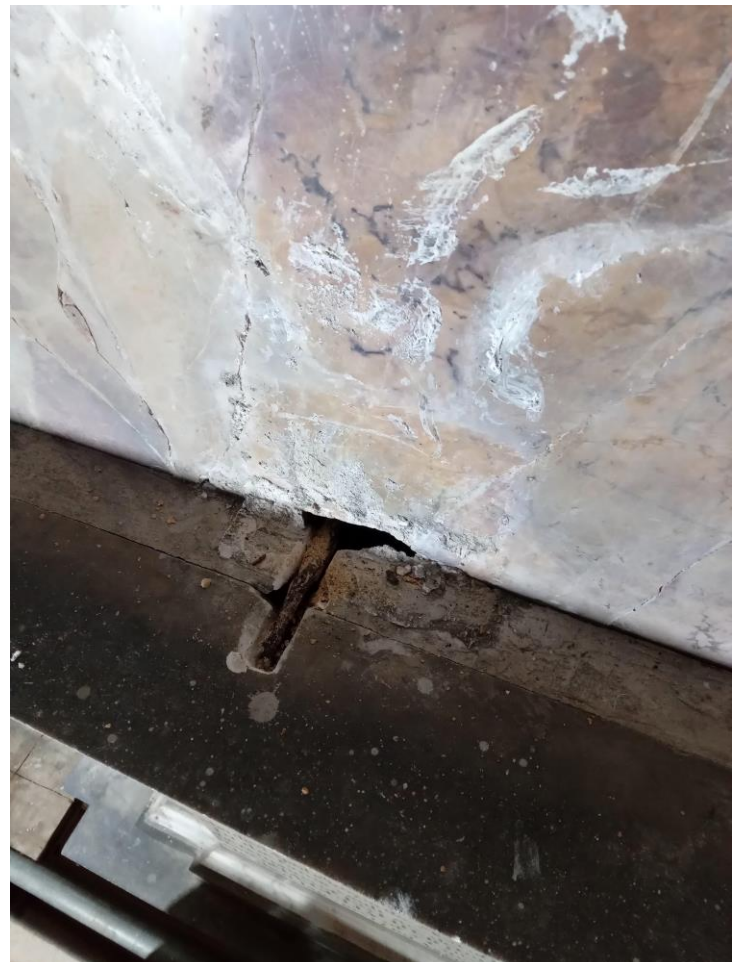


The Phelps family monument before work

Right: crack in the cornice moulding caused by expanding ferrous cramp

Below left open joints showing effects of iron expansion

Below right: iron cramp exposed during dismantling





Work in progress, clockwise from left: the monument at fullest extent of dismantling; mixing and laying plaster for refixing; fixing a bracket into place; cleaning with cotton wool swabs





The Phelps monument after work

William Purnell et al (monument number 32)

Location and Date

The monument is mounted high on the north wall of the north aisle. The latest date of death is 1787.

Description

The monument consists of a nowy-headed inscription with a frame moulding, set on an elaborate armorial apron with a single large foliated corbel.

Materials and Construction

The inscription is of Carrara marble and the frame and other elements of painted Cotswold limestone.

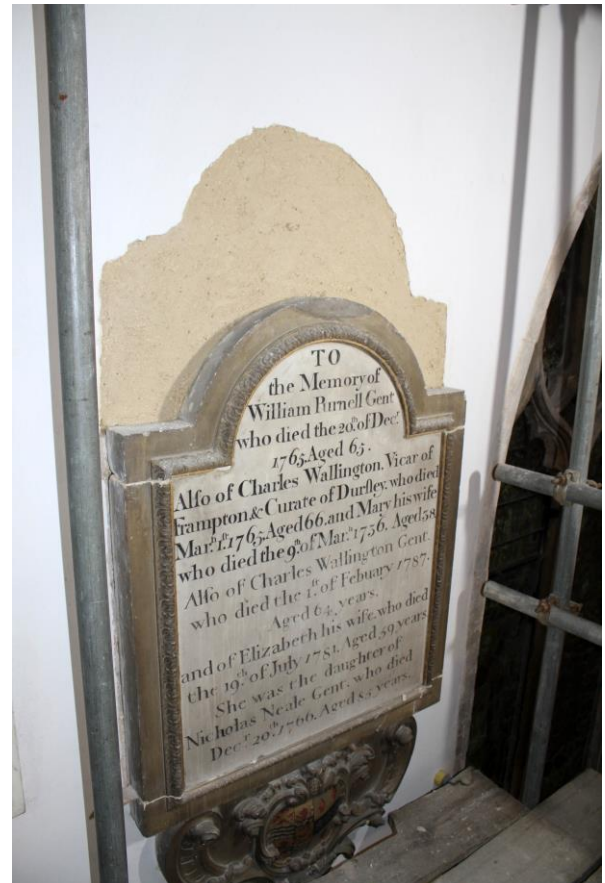
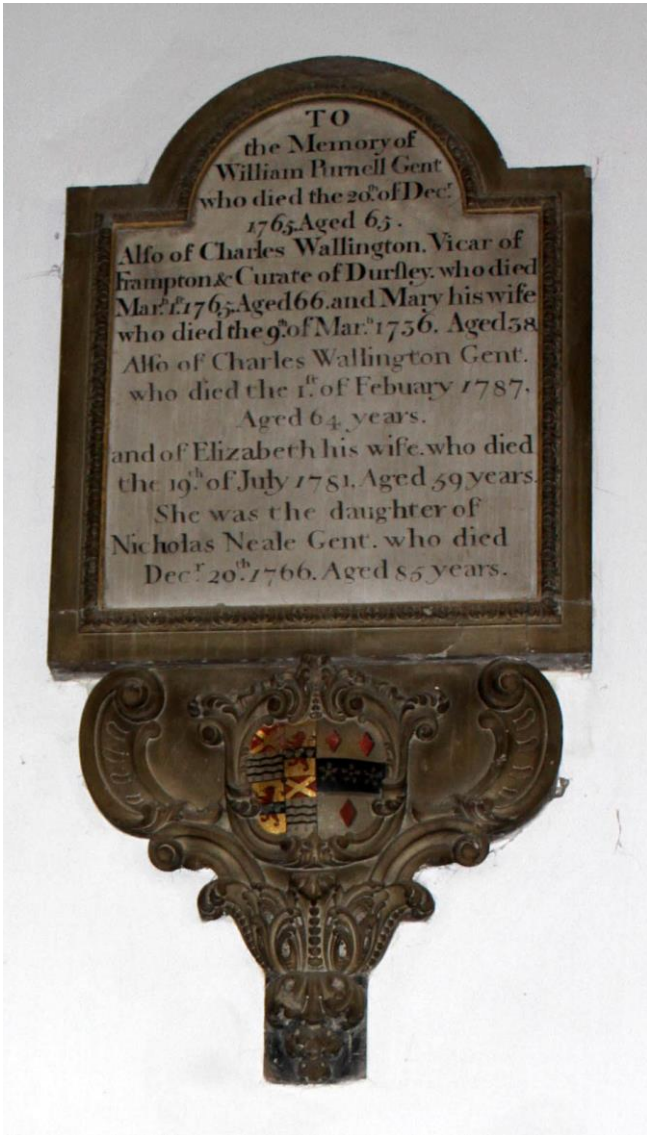
The monument is essentially supported on the large built-in corbel, and restrained to the wall with ferrous cramps.

Condition As Found

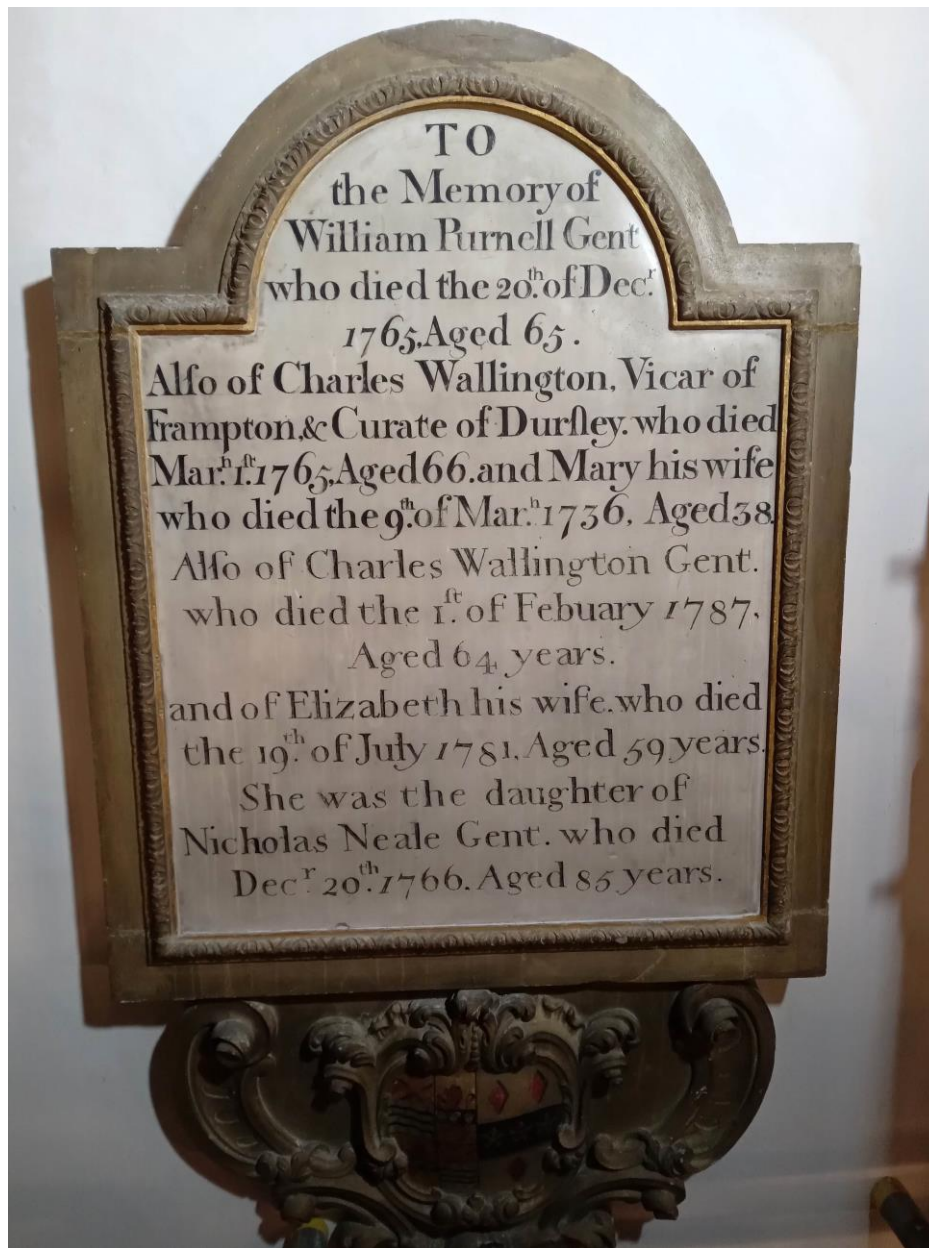
The monument had a number of open joints and one large failure, where the lower eastern section of the frame had been spalled away by the expansion of an internal dowel. Its stability could not be guaranteed. Surfaces were lightly soiled but sound.

Conservation Work

A secure and load-bearing scaffold tower was set up to give access. The monument was recorded with digital images and drawings to assist with re-erection work. The monument was then dismantled down to the lowest point with ferrous fixings – the apron. All ferrous elements and old mortars were removed and the cracked section of frame was repaired with stainless steel dowels and polyester resin. The monument was then re-erected using lime mortars for bedding joints and stainless steel cramps, set in polyester resin for wall anchors. A large area of wall plaster had to be cut out above the monument to allow dismantling – this was made good with hot-mixed lime plaster, and limewashed to blend with the surrounding wall.



Above, the Purnell monument before work; above right: large iron dowel causing damage to frame. Right: re-plastering above the re-erected monument in progress



Purnell monument after work

Samuel and Sarah Wallington (monument number 33)

Location and Date

The monument is mounted on the north wall of the north aisle.

Description

This is a simple but elegant monument consisting of an inscription panel with inlaid border and a triangular pediment stone above. The monument is carried on two corbels with foliated ornament.

Materials and Construction

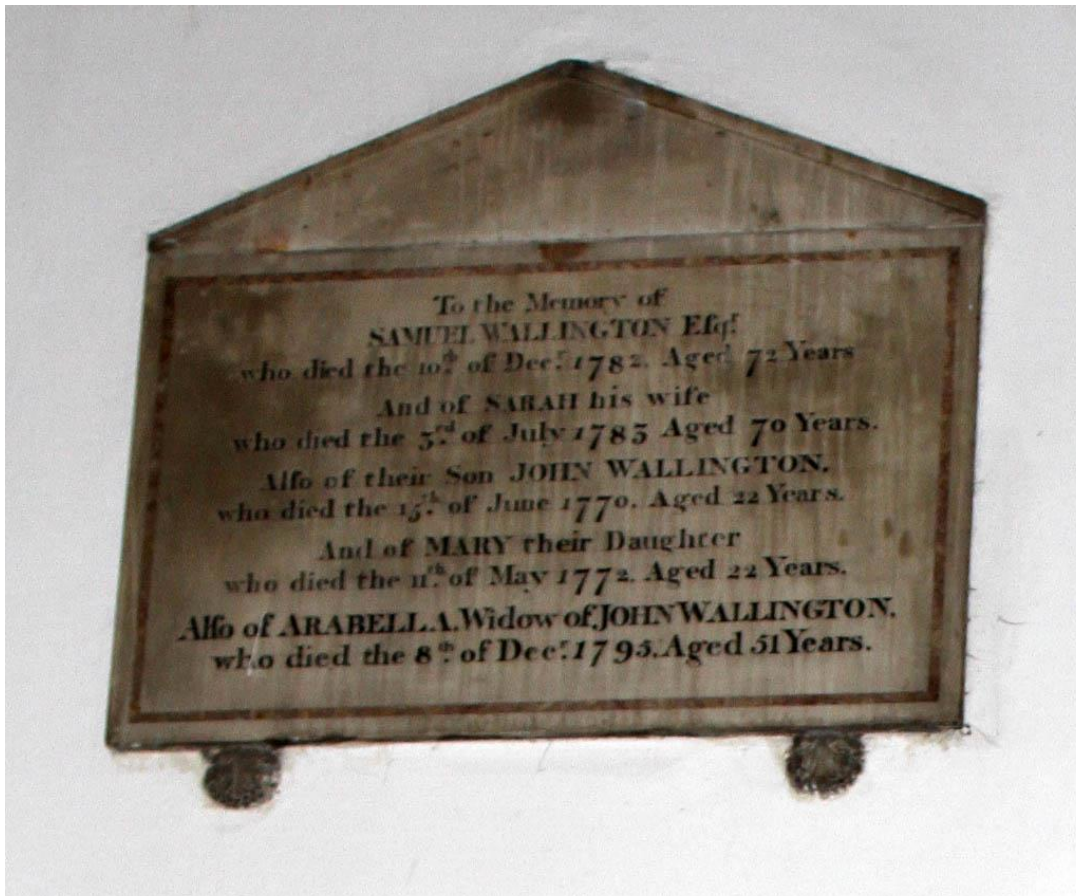
The entire monument is of Carrara marble, with the exception of the inlaid border, which is of coloured marble or possibly hard scagliola-style composition. The monument is supported on the two corbels and restrained with metal cramps in the top of the inscription and pediment.

Condition as Found

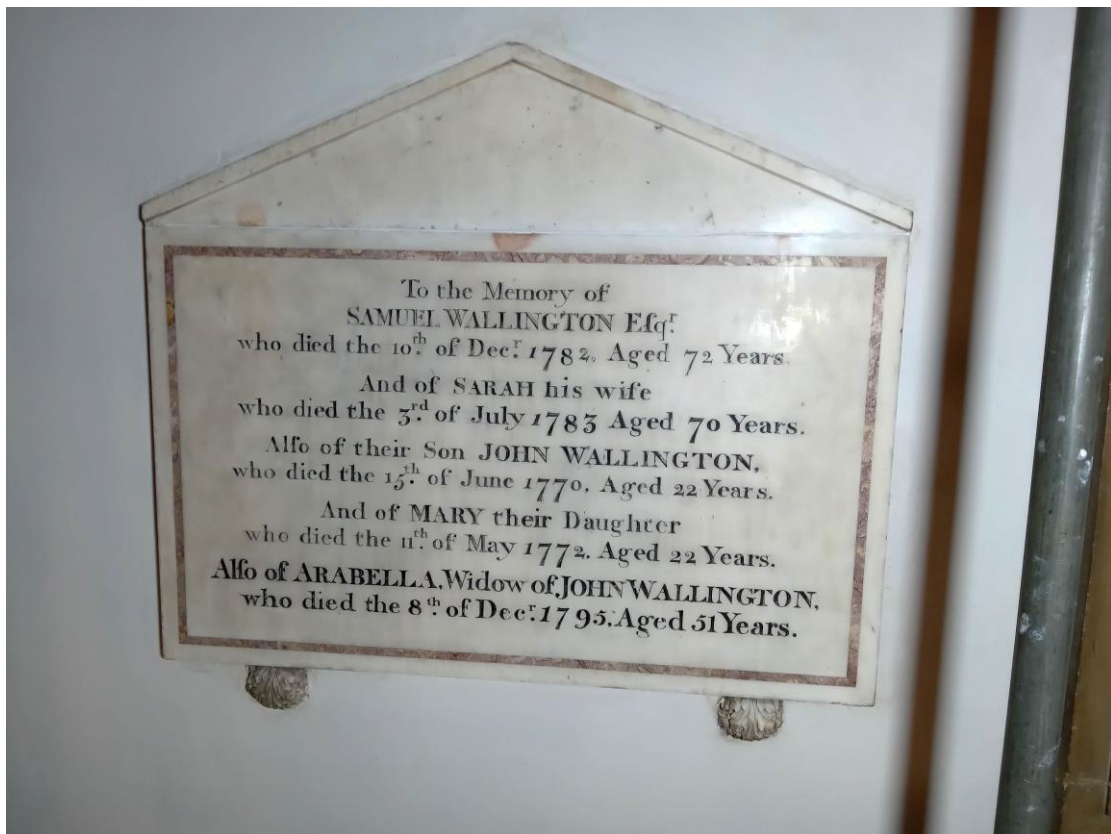
The ferrous fixings had begun to corrode, creating stains in the marble and an open joint between inscription and pediment, and its stability was uncertain. Surfaces were very heavily soiled and streaked with dirt and condensation runs.

Conservation Work

A secure scaffold was erected to give access and the monument recorded with photos and drawing. The pediment was removed, exposing the corroded cramps; a metal survey confirmed that no other metal elements existed within the structure. The cramps were replaced one by one with stainless steel set in resin and the pediment reinstated. Surfaces were successfully cleaned with Synperonic A7 non-ionic detergent with the addition of pumice. A pre-existing gap behind the inscription was retained to permit good ventilation.



The Wallington monument before and (below) after work





Above: cramps revealed in the top of the inscription



Left: reassembly in progress; note cleaned and uncleaned surfaces

Samuel Clarke (monument number 41)

Location and Date

The monument is mounted on the west wall of the north aisle, adjacent to the Purnell monument. The latest date of death is 1737.

Description

This monument, which may be a fragment, consists of a large corbel supporting a socle with short inscription, itself supporting the main rectangular inscription. On top of the inscription is a simple cornice moulding.

Materials and Construction

The monument is carved of oolitic limestone, although the corbel appears to be of marble, which might suggest that this corbel is originally from another monument, or may have been part of a reordering of the monuments – many of them have similar outsize corbels.

The applied layers on the monument proved to be interesting – see below.

Structurally, the monument was essentially supported on the large built-in corbel, and restrained with metal cramps.

Condition as Found

The monument was suffering from the failure of some of its ferrous fixings, and a large crack had developed between the monument and the supporting wall. Surface layers were fragile and flaking, and an unsightly later grey paint had been applied over the original surface.

Conservation Work

A secure scaffold tower was erected for good access and the monument recorded with photographs and sketch drawings to assist with re-erection work. The monument was then faced up with Japanese tissue, applied with Tylose MH 300, to ensure no surface layers were lost or damaged during dismantling. It was then dismantled down to the corbel (which was stable and therefore left in situ). Ferrous elements were removed and discarded. Areas of flaking applied layers were fixed with Primal B760a acrylic dispersion applied through the tissue and surfaces were cleaned with water and cotton swabs. In the process, it was revealed that the background to the lettering was gilded and the V-cut lettering painted black. The lower part of the inscription, which was simply painted and not inscribed, was partially lost. However, the upper inscription could still be discerned, and to allow it to be read from the floor, the lettering was retouched with Gamblin Retouching Colours. The monument was then re-erected with stainless steel cramps set in resin and lime mortar joints. The area around the monument was replastered with lime plaster as necessary.



The Samuel Clarke monument before (left) and after work (below); below left: a new stainless steel fixing set in resin





Above: flaking paint in the letters of the inscription; above right: cleaning in progress; below partially dismantled, note iron fixing and gilding emerging from under overpaint



William Pegler (monument number 42)

Location and Date

The monument is fixed on the west wall of the north aisle, immediately below the Clarke monument. The latest date of death on the monument is

It is not known whether William Pegler is directly related to Hester Pegler of Hetty Pegler's Tump fame, but it seems likely.

Description

The monument consists of an inscription panel on a backing plate, surmounted by an urn in relief on a triangular upper panel. The monument is supported on a single corbel. Some elements of the ornament are lost.

Materials and construction

The backing plates of the monument are unusually, of Blue lias limestone, rather than the more usual black Carboniferous limestone. Presumably this was a local choice, but the stone is not very durable and has suffered from some damp deterioration. The inscriptions are of Carrara marble and it seems so is the urn, although this has been painted as well.

The monument is structurally supported on the single corbel and restrained to the wall with metal cramps.

Condition as Found

The monument has some structural disruption and a crack between its stonework and the wall, and its stability could not be guaranteed. The upper backing plate was cracked. Surfaces were heavily soiled and the inscription had faded and become illegible.

Conservation Work

A secure scaffold tower was erected to give good access. The monument was recorded with photographs and sketch drawings to assist with re-erection work. It was then carefully removed from the wall and laid on the scaffold. Old ferrous fixings were removed from both the monument and supporting wall. Surfaces were cleaned with suitable materials and the crack in the backing plate was repaired with a cramp of 316L grade stainless steel set into a chase in the rear face of the stone with resin. The monument was then re-erected with new stainless cramps set in resin and plaster joints. And the surrounding plaster was made good with lime-based materials. The inscriptions were retouched with Gamblin retouching colours to enable them to be read from the ground.



Monument of William Pegler, left: before and below: after work

Below left: dismantling in progress



Jos and Mary Pulley (monument number 43)

Location and Date

The monument is mounted high on the west wall of the north aisle, to the south of the west window. The latest date of death is 1757.

Description

The monument comprises an inscription surrounded by a simple frame, the lowest rail of which also forms a shaped apron with an applied achievement of arms. There is a single built-in corbel.

Materials and Construction

The inscription panel is of black Carboniferous limestone and the remainder of the monument is of local Cotswold limestone. Applied surface layer appear to be oil-based paint, now very fragmentary.

The monument is supported on the single corbel (again, this may be from a different monument or a 19th century restoration.) it is then restrained to the wall with metal cramps.

Condition as Found

The monument had a large crack up the joint with the supporting wall and the topmost rail of the inscription frame was cracked where its central cramp had expanded and damaged the stone. The inscription panel was also cracked across just below the centre. The armorial achievement was held on a single corbel, and a metal survey confirmed that this was not made of metal. Surfaces of the stone were powdering somewhat, possibly as a result of historic water penetration in the wall behind.

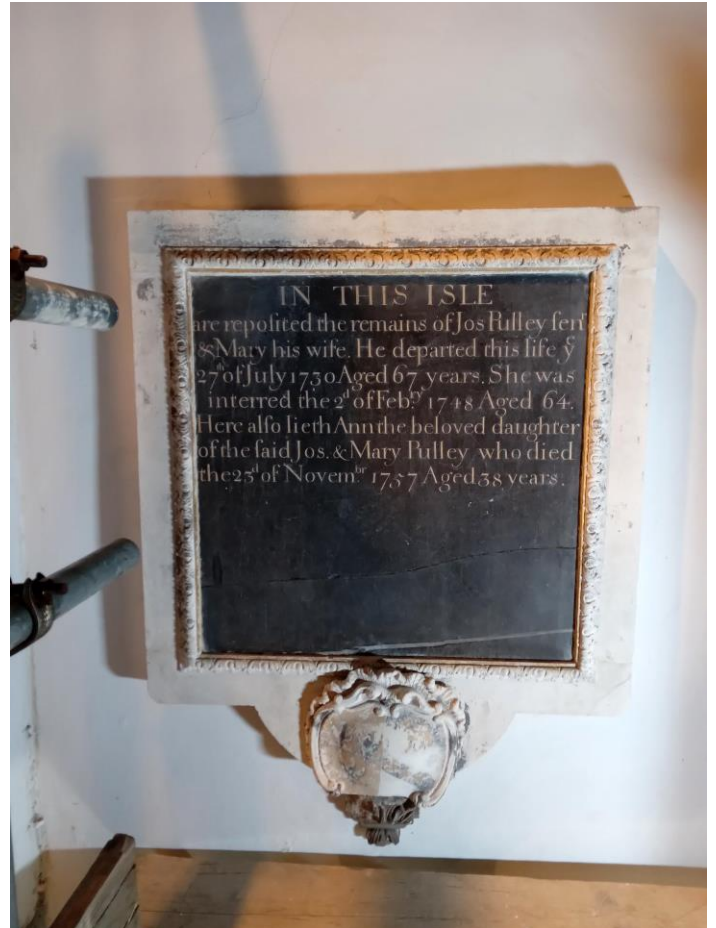
Conservation work

A secure scaffold tower was erected to give good access to the monument, which was recorded with photographs and working drawings to assist with re-erection work. The monument was then carefully dismantled; old fixings were removed from both monument and wall. The top section of frame was repaired with a stainless steel dowel set in polyester resin and gaps were filled with lime mortars. The cracked inscription was repaired with two 6mm dowels and a single flat stainless steel cramp set in to a chase in the rear face with resin. Surfaces were cleaned with cotton swabs and clean water to remove dust and any possible salt efflorescence. Remnants of the heraldic design were stabilised and consolidated with Primal B60a acrylic dispersion. The monument was then re-erected, using stainless steel cramps and resin for wall anchors and lime mortars for bedding joints. The plaster surrounding the monument was made good with lime plaster.



Monument of Jos and Mary Pulley left: before work and below: after work

Below left: dismantling in progress





Pulley monument: dismantling in progress

Ann Tippetts (monument number 45)

Location and Date

The monument is mounted on the west wall of the north aisle at low level and south of the west window. The latest date of death is 1799, but this may have been added after the event.

Description

This is a simple inscription plaque set on a backing plate with two false corbels and a single built-in corbel. There was clearly more to the monument in the past – a cornice and possibly more has been lost. The monument is signed “King”.

Materials and Construction

The inscription and corbel are of Carrara marble, with a backing plate of figured black/grey limestone, possibly local.

The monument is in fact, not supported on the corbel, but on two metal base fixings.

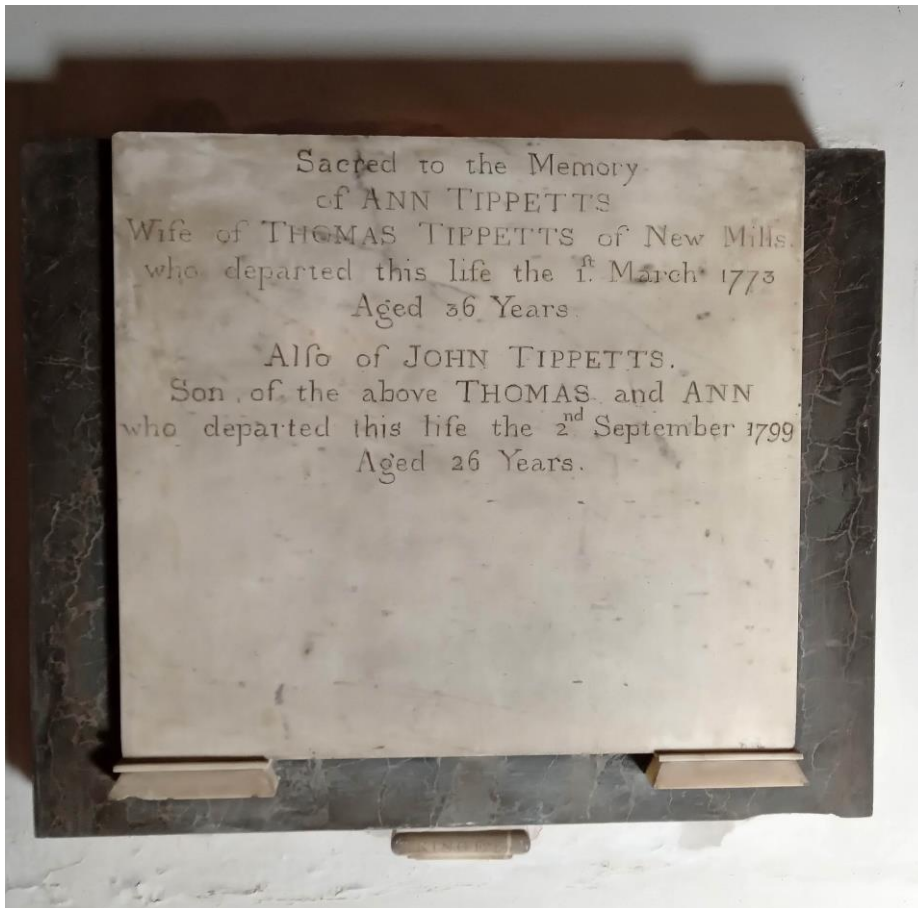
Condition as Found

The monument was beginning to become unstable. It had already lost its upper sections in the past, evidently because of the rusting of cramps at the top of the inscription. There was a crack up the joint with the wall and the base cramps were visibly corroded.

Surfaces were heavily soiled and stained and the inscription had faded and become illegible.

Conservation Work

A secure scaffold tower was erected to give good access. The monument was carefully released from its base cramps and removed from the wall to a work bench. Surfaces were cleaned with Synperonic A7 non-ionic detergent and pumice, and stains removed with appropriate solvents. Ferrous elements were removed from both wall and monument. New base cramps of stainless steel 316L grade were installed in the wall with resin and capped with lime mortar. The central stone corbel, which was loose, was rebedded in lime mortar. The monument was then re-erected and fixed with top cramps of stainless steel. The faded inscription was retouched so it could be read from the ground.



Monument of Ann Tippetts,
above: before and left: after
work



Left: Rusted ferrous fixings removed from the monuments

Below: the monuments of the west wall after work



