



CONDITION AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT
Internal War Memorials and Commandment Boards
St Mary Magdalene Church, Stockland Bristol TA5 2PZ

Client: PCC of St Mary Magdalene Church, Stockland Bristol
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Prepared by: Shelley Day

Signature S. Day

Reviewed by: Sally Strachey ACR

Signature 

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1. Executive Summary

A survey was conducted to assess conservation options and expectations for the war memorials and commandment boards in the church, led by John McVerry, who is spearheading the heritage funding initiative. Mr. McVerry noted that little is known about the two wooden wall memorials and the commandment boards, yet they hold historical value for the church. The First and Second World War Memorials were found to be in relatively stable condition given their age and location, although some paint layers show signs of deterioration. The Commandment Boards are also generally stable, but certain areas exhibit woodworm damage. It is recommended that these items be conserved, and this report provides the items' detailed condition and useful guidelines on their possible treatment and future storage while work is being carried out at the church.

2. Brief

A survey of the internal war memorials and commandment boards was commissioned by John McVerry, who is leading the heritage funding bid for St Mary Magdalene Church. The objective was to establish condition and conservation options for the memorials as part of this bid.

The brief was to prepare a full and detailed report and include the current condition of two wooden wall war memorials located on the east wall and two wooden commandment boards located in the tower. The report will also include treatment recommendations and storage options for the boards.

The survey was arranged with John McVerry and conducted at the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Stockland Bristol, Somerset on the 24th of September 2024 by Shelley Day of SSH Conservation.

3. Historical Context and Significance

John McVerry reported that very little is known about the two wooden wall memorials and the commandment boards, however, they are clearly a significant part of the church's history.

Many war memorials were established by communities following the First World War. A war memorial serves to honour the memory of a war or conflict and those involved. It can take various forms, created by anyone at any time, and may be permanent or temporary, such as a tree, a building, or traditional plaques, monuments, or sculptures. Architecturally, most war memorials feature conservative designs, utilising established styles to create a tragic yet comforting, noble, and lasting tribute to the fallen.

4.0 Description

4.1 Wooden War Memorials

The wooden war memorials are located on the east wall of the north aisle, with the World War I memorial to the north of the pair, and the World War II memorial to the south. The upper section of the two wooden war memorials features text honouring the fallen soldiers of World War I and War II. The lower section of the memorials pays tribute to those who returned from conflict.

Regrettably, there is limited information available about the history of these memorials, including details about their creation, location, or the artisans involved. These frames were mass-produced and were probably commissioned by the parishioners.

Both memorials share a similar design, characterised by a half-lap mitre joint at each corner, with a hollow carved frieze framed by raised mouldings on both the inner and outer edges. The inscriptions are elegantly painted in gold against a black background.



Figure 1 The war memorial plaques are located on the east wall of the north aisle

4.1.1 First World War Memorial

The framed memorial plaque measurements are 1370mm x 840mm x 44mm. The Imperial War Museum has a record of the fallen soldiers that appear on the memorials. See the link below.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/names/search?filters%5BmemorialString%5D%5BSt%20Mary%20Magdalene%20Parishioners%20%28WMR%2046371%29%5D=on>

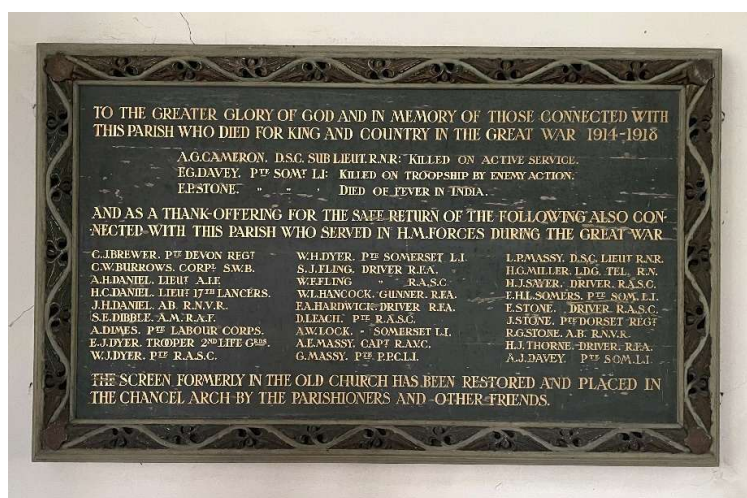


Figure 2 The First World War Memorial as it appears on the east wall of the north aisle.



Figure 3 The outer and inner frame borders are painted sage green, and the wavy line that runs between the ornately carved leaves is also painted sage green. The carved leaves are exposed dark wood with remnants of faded gold paint.



Figure 4 There are shields on four corners of the frame.



Figure 5 The memorial is attached to the wall with four brackets, two on each side.

4.1.2 Second World War Memorial

The Second World War Memorial is smaller than the First World War Memorial. The measurements are 1070mm x 770mm x 400 mm. The frame is mostly painted black, the ornately carved frieze is painted gold and so is the lettering.



Figure 6 The Second World War Memorial as it appears on the east wall of the north aisle

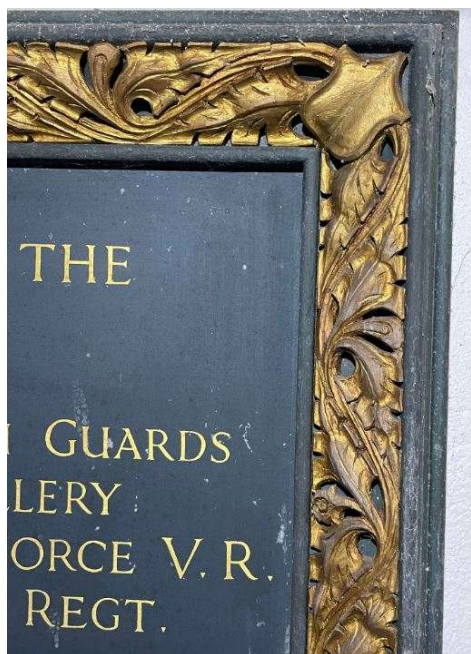


Figure 7 A close-up image of the top proper right corner of the frame. Gold-painted decorative frieze and gold painted lettering on a black background.



Figure 8 A close-up image of the top proper right corner of the frame. Gold-painted decorative frieze and gold painted lettering on a black background.

4.2 Commandment Boards

There are two commandment boards situated at the base of the tower on the church's west end. These boards display the ten biblical commandments and date back to 1836, having been made or commissioned by J&W Hawkins, the Churchwardens.

The boards feature a simple arched design, with an outer frame in sage green and a thin inner frame in yellow. The background is black, and the lettering is yellow. The wood surface was not primed or sealed, with the paint applied directly to it.



Figure 9 The boards' location in the base tower which is also a storage area.

4.2.1 Board of Commandments No. 1

Commandment Board No. 1 is located on the north wall of the base of the west tower. The measurement of the board is 2140mm x 1550mm x 50mm, it is attached to the wall by four wall brackets, two on each side. It features the first four commandments, and it ends with the date 1836 and the people who possibly made or commissioned it H&J Hawkins, Churchwardens.

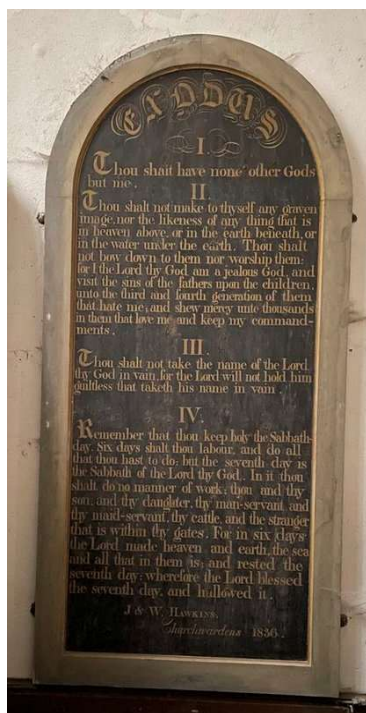


Figure 10 The first four commandments from Exodus 20:2-17 are located on the proper right side of the tower base.



Figure 11 A close up look at the board in natural light is showing a yellow decorative calligraphy on a black background. The inner frame mould is also painted the same colour. The outer mould is painted in a thin layer of greyish green. The substrate is not primed therefore it is easy to see the wooden pattern.

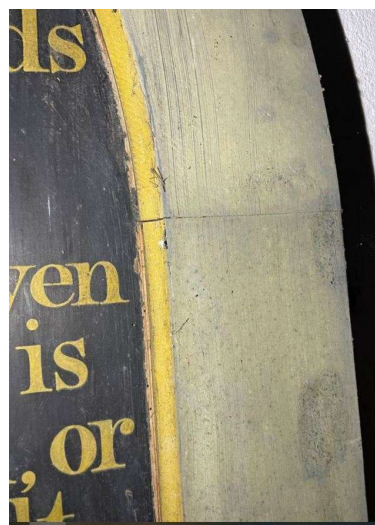


Figure 12 There are five joints that make up the frame mould.

4.2.2 Board of Commandments No.2

Commandment Board No. 2 is located on the south wall of the base of the west tower. The measurement of the board is 2140mm x 1550mm x 50mm. It is attached to the wall by four wall brackets, two on each side. It features commandments five to ten, and it ends with the name of the maker, *George Hall Junr Fecit (made by George Hall Junr)*.

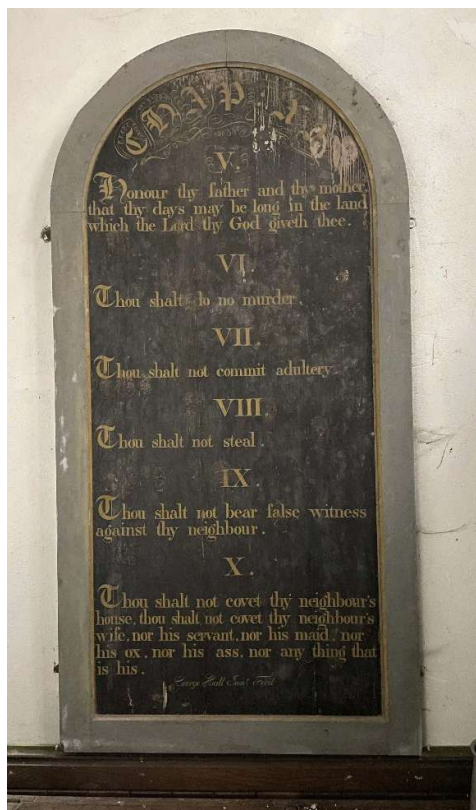


Figure 13 Six commandments on the second board located on the proper left side of the tower.



Figure 14 A close-up image of the painted surface. On the right is the outer frame painted greyish green, the inner frame and lettering are painted yellow, and the background is painted black.



Figure 15 One of the four wall brackets that attach the boards to the wall.

5.0 Condition

5.1 Wooden War Memorials

5.1.1 Condition of First World War Memorial Plaque

The plaque is structurally sound, and the joints of the frame are tight, however the paint surface on the commemoration board is deteriorating.



Figure 16 The frame is made up of several components, including the moulds and the hollow carved frieze. This construction is sturdier than the commemoration board (the black inner board), which may explain why the frame is in better condition than the inner -pai

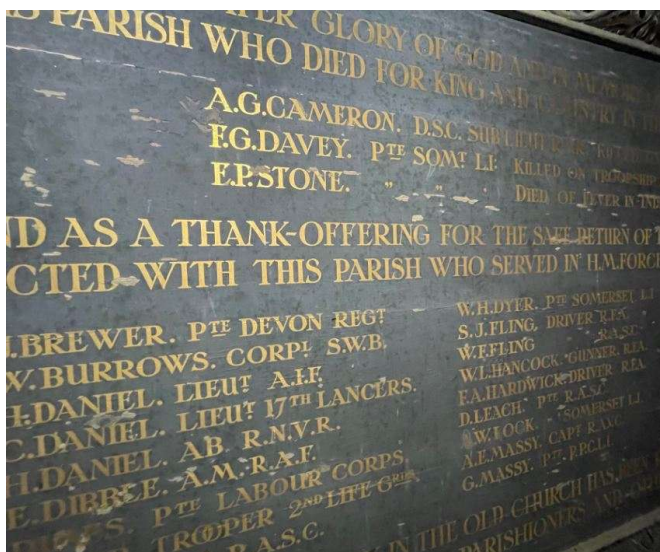


Figure 17 The black commemoration board is likely more vulnerable to moisture damage due to its closer placement to the wall and its thin construction. Significant cracks on the wall surrounding the plaque may be contributing to the extensive deterioration of the



Figure 18 The commemoration black board is closer to the wall and it may be the reason for the paint lifting

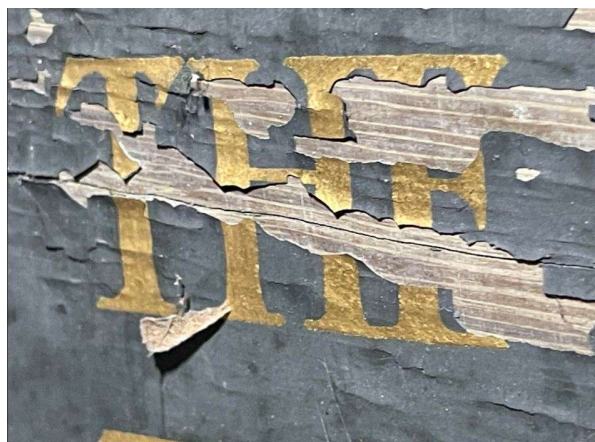


Figure 19 A closer look at the surface is showing cracks in the wood which may be the cause for the lifting of the paint layers.

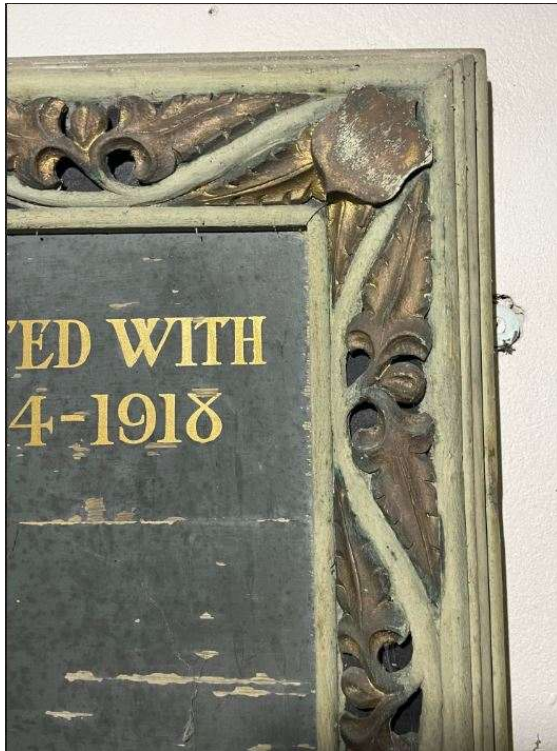


Figure 20 The carved frame is in solid condition, with all joints remaining intact. Some remnants of gold paint can be seen on the intricately carved leaf sections, and both inner and outer mouldings appear to have been repainted multiple times.



Figure 21 Green oxidation is visible on the carved sections, which may indicate that the substrate was coated with a gold-like paint, such as bronze or copper alloys. This type of paint tends to oxidize in the presence of moisture.

5.1.2 Condition of Second World War Memorial Plaque

The plaque is generally in condition. Its structure is stable, with no significant deterioration in the frame or inner board, and the paint layers are securely adhered to the surface. However, there are some issues that need to be addressed to ensure the plaque's stability. For more details, please see the condition report below the 'Treatment Proposal' section.



Figure 22 The black background and lettering remain intact, with only a few white marks visible. The absence of cracks on the surrounding the plaque, along with the likelihood that it was created decades after the World War I plaque, could explain why its condition is superior to that of the earlier plaque.

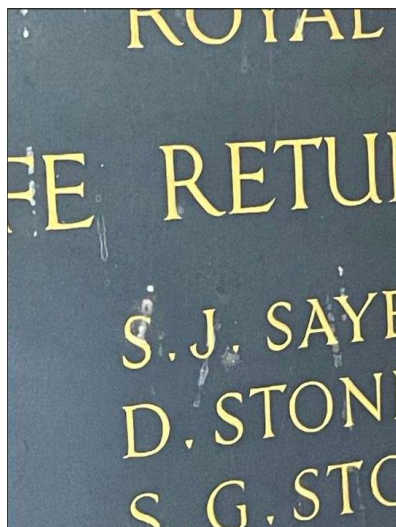


Figure 23 A close-up image reveals a smooth paint layer on the surface, although some white residue is present.

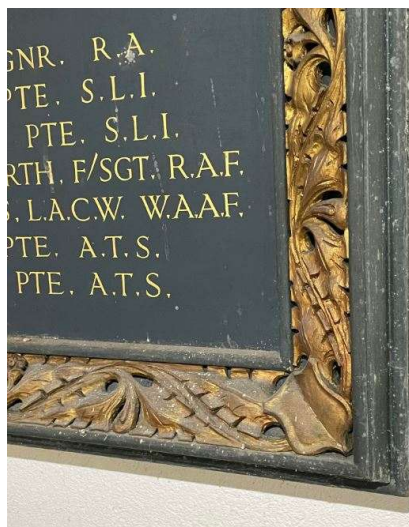


Figure 24 A heavy layer of dust is settled on the moulded and carved sections of the frame. On the exterior of the frame there is a dusty white coating that could indicate the initial stages of mould, likely due to elevated moisture levels in the wall.



Figure 25 Signs of woodworm holes can be seen at the top of the frame, indicating potential early woodworm activity.

5.2 Commandment Boards

The boards are likely made from Pine wood, which is a softwood that features knots, sap pockets, and other imperfections that may impact its look and structural stability. Since surface of the boards was not treated or primed before painting, they are more prone to deterioration. The board shows less damage than the second, possibly because, despite being in the same room, they are mounted on different walls.

5.2.1 Condition of Commandment Board 1

The board is generally structurally sound, but the surface has some areas that need attention. Please refer to the detailed description below.



Figure 26 There are knots with sap pockets all over the surface, they all have a large ring of dry sap around them. The dry sap shrunk over the years which caused damage to the paint layer. This type of damage is not due to environmental factors but is related to



Figure 27 A knot showing the damage made by a sap pocket.



Figure 28 White paint drops and dust layer appear all over the surface.



Figure 29 There are woodworm signs all over the surface of the boards but for some reason the bottom sides of the frame are the most damaged.



Figure 30 Woodworm exit holes are dotted around the surface of the board.

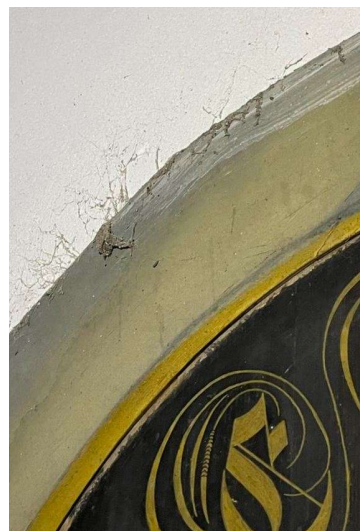


Figure 31 The top frame is covered by a thick layer of dust, cobwebs and paint layers.

5.2.2 Condition of Commandments Board 2

The board is structurally stable, but there are cracks extending from the top to the bottom, which may indicate that its structure is compromised. The surface shows more wear than board number 1, possibly due to its location on the church's outer wall.



Figure 32 Loss of mainly the black surface paint on the top part of the board.



Figure 33 Natural wood knots are located all over the surface, they appear like a large crusty lumps.



Figure 34 Shrinkage of the wood is causing gaps to the board from top to bottom. There is also a shrinkage of mainly the black paint layer area.

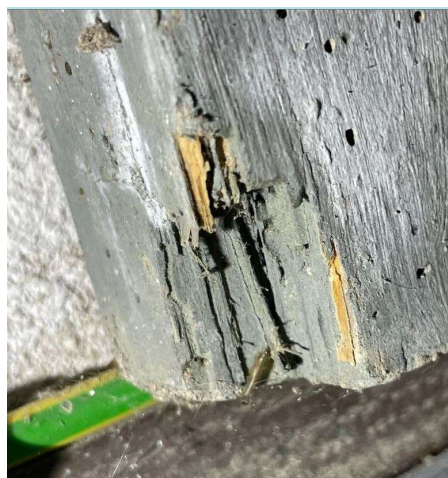


Figure 35 Woodworm damage on the proper bottom left of the frame. This area seems to have been over painted in the past. Woodworm damage is irreversible.

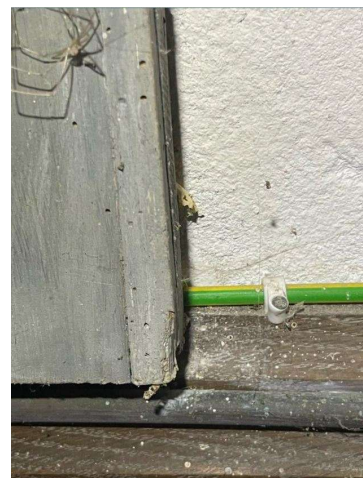


Figure 36 Woodworm exit holes on the proper right bottom side of the frame.

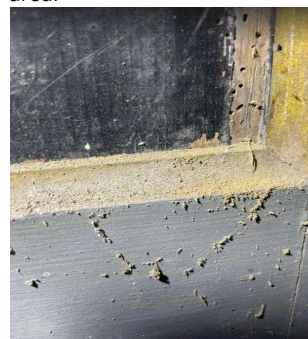


Figure 37 Woodworm residue called frass, it appears on the surface as fine sawdust. It may suggest that woodworm may still be active.

6.0 Treatment Proposals

This treatment proposal will be tailored for each item individually, including treatment recommendations and storage tips.

6.1 Wooden War Memorials

6.1.1 First World War Memorial Treatment Proposal

- The frame around the black-painted memorial board is layered with dust, cobwebs, and splatters of white paint. Cleaning the surface would be advantageous to prevent dirt from embedding itself deeply.
- The black commemorative paint surface is quite delicate, with the black paint layer peeling away and the gold lettering suffering significant damage. It is advisable to secure the paint layers to the wood and restore any missing sections of paint and lettering.

6.1.2 Second World War Memorial Treatment Proposal

- While the memorial plaque is generally in good condition, a gentle surface cleaning could enhance its appearance. If not cleaned or dusted regularly, dirt, dust, paint stains, and mould layers can penetrate the wood surface, leading to a dull look and making future cleaning more challenging. Mould can cause permanent damage to wood and may require removal.

6.2 Commandment Boards

6.2.1 Commandments Board 1 Treatment Proposal

- The primary issue with the board is woodworm damage. The woodworm may still be active, so it's important to keep an eye on their activity. (Refer to Commandment Board 2 treatment proposal for details.)
- A gentle cleaning of the board may be beneficial. There are different types of dirt on the surface such as loose dust layers, cobwebs and white paint residue.
- The woodworm affected areas can be powdery, consolidate the woodworm affected areas can prevent further damage.

6.2.2 Commandments Board 2 Treatment Proposal

- The board has been infested with woodworm, the infestation could still be ongoing, potentially harming other wooden items and furniture in the church. It's advisable to keep an eye on woodworm activity. A simple method to monitor this is by removing any frass from the surface and checking periodically every few weeks for its return. If the woodworm remains active, consider fumigating the affected items.
- Cleaning of the surface should be done as it is important for the upkeep of the commandments board.
- Consolidation of areas damaged by woodworm is necessary to prevent further damage.

7.0 Future Display/Storage Recommendations

Church spaces often have high humidity, which can adversely affect wooden items and furniture. If these items show signs of damage, moisture is likely the main culprit.

Humidity can be present throughout the church environment, especially on outer walls. To prevent deterioration, it is best to avoid traditional display methods (see image 5) as old brackets can trap moisture by holding boards/memorials too close to the wall.

When humidity levels fluctuate, wood can swell or shrink, leading to cracks, splits, and warping which could also lead to flaky paint or gilded surfaces. Creating a gap with space brackets to allow air circulation can help keep moisture away from the boards/memorials.

Another option is to use a breathable partition or double backing between the wall and the board/memorial to contain moisture. It's also advisable to move them to drier areas or display them on inner walls where humidity levels are lower.

For storage, wrap the items in acid-free paper and place them in a wooden or conservation-grade plastic box lined with conservation-grade foam. Ensure they are stored in a dry environment with a relative humidity level between 45-65%.