

VALENTINE WALSH ACR FIIC FSA

REPORT ON THE CONSERVATION TREATMENT OF  
CULPEPPER TOMB EFFIGIES

ST MARY'S GOUDHURST SEPTEMBER 2025



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The two effigies, in polychrome carved wood, were first examined in 2018 by Valentine Walsh to assess their condition. (See condition report) They were found to be flaking and in a poor location under a window with no ultra-violet filtration and suspected damp on the outer wall of the bay in which they were located. They were also very dirty.

Cross-sections were taken of the paint layers on both figures and these results are in a separate report.

It was advised that the plain window be replaced with stained and ultra-violet inhibiting glass prior to any conservation work on the figures. This was funded by the Friends of St Mary's. The resulting window was made by Cathedral Studios to great affect.

The figures were moved from their stone plinth in order to work on them. It was found that they had been secured with two fixings each, comprising a threaded stainless steel bar set in plaster of Paris both in the stone and in the bottom of the effigies, with a lead pad separating the effigies from direct contact with the stone. They had to be cut in order to lift the effigies and the remainder of the threaded fixings were then removed from the bases of the figures.

The figures were then superficially cleaned of dust and dirt. Further cleaning was then carried out with water with a slightly raised pH. It became clear that there is a thick layer of grey dirt overall but this was deemed not sensible to remove as it was not the intention of the work to 'restore' the figures.

Two of the feet of the dog on the effigy of Lady Constance were loose. These were removed, the old glue also removed and then re-adhered in place with polyvinyl alcohol glue (Evostick). A curl in the armour at the right knee of Sir Alexander was also consolidated with PVA.

The paint was consolidated wherever it was found to be unstable. This was particularly found on the figure of Lady Constance Culpepper. She was more affected by light ingress and had a very different layer structure to that of Sir Alexander.

Consolidation was carried out using sturgeon glue (isinglass) with added fungicide. Where the paint was particularly dried out and the wood underneath was also very dry a small amount of BEVA was applied to consolidate the paint. This was mostly in the interior of Sir Alexander's helmet.

The most visually disturbing areas of loss were given a watercolour wash in order in order that they should not disturb the overall integrity of the figures.

The figures were then finally given a thin protective coating of microcrystalline wax polish (Renaissance polish)

## OBSERVATIONS

The two figures do not appear to have been carried out in the same hand. The preparation and paint layers on the female figure are very thin with little ground or gesso layer. The bright red-lead layer found in many of the cross-sections appeared to be a base layer on much of the male figure and only in small part on the female figure.

It is assumed that the figures are carved in lime wood, however there are areas of the figure of Constance which are clearly in pine.

The cuffs of the female figure, when compared to the edge of her cloak, show a notable difference. The cuffs are more sharply carved and there is clearly a join in the left arm of the figure. It appears that this is a pine insert and given that the cuff of the other hand is similarly carved, it is suspected that both arms and the hands are not original. Furthermore, the gold of her jewellery and the gold on her gabled hood are markedly different. There is some suspicion that her head is also a later carving. There is a further wood insert in the inner skirt of her dress and in several parts of her dog however these may be part of the original sculpture.

The cushions under the head of Constance are also very slightly prepared as they show no gesso layer at all. See photos below to illustrate these points as well as illustrating other observations.



This image shows the lead and plaster which were between the stone base and the figures holding them in place. Note that the screw thread is modern.



This and the following images show splits in the wood caused by drying of the figures as well as joins where pieces were added.





These two images illustrate areas where new wood has been inserted.





The sword on the figure of Alexander Culpepper is not original and has been added,



This foot was clearly not part of the same body of carving but appears to be original. It had come adrift from the sculpture and was re-attached.

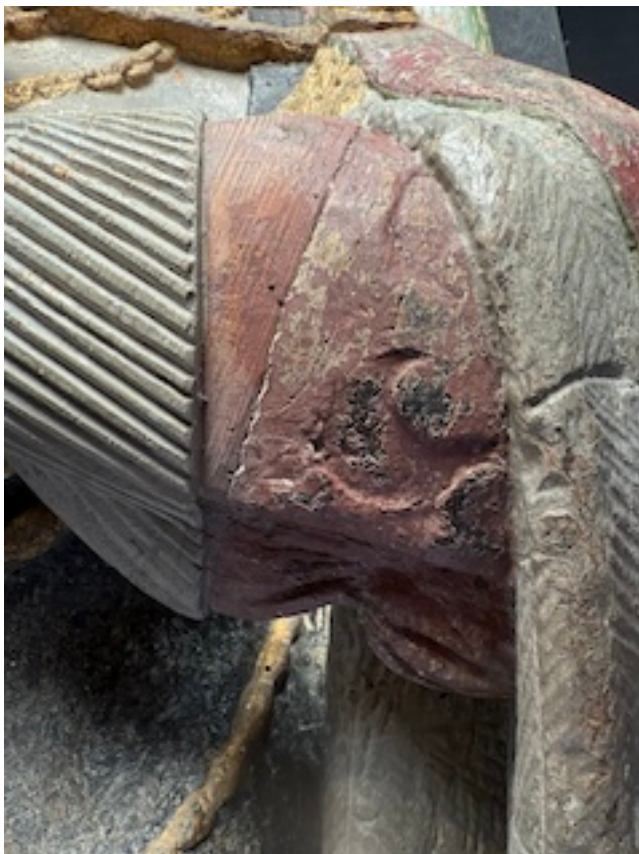


This is an example of a drying split in the wood as well as a piece which was added. The piece was loose and was re-adhered.





Another insert of wood is shown here in Constance Culpepper's gown.



The sleeve of her left hand illustrated here shows the join where a pine insert has been added. This is contiguous with the cuff and probably the hands as well. It is clear here that the carving of the cuff and the edge of her sleeve to the right are quite different and a cuff has very little preparation layer. The red of her sleeve to the right of the insert also has carved texture which has a preparation layer under the paint.



It is possible that the hands have also been replaced as they follow on from the carving seen on the cuffs, and they too have no preparation layers.



The carving style of the gold edging to her gable headdress and the lack of preparation layers is markedly different to the gold jewellery on her chest. Which has a softness similar to that of the cloak edging and which has a gesso layer. It is suspected that the two are not by the same hand. The carving of her hair and that of the tassles on the cushion beneath her head appear to be in the same style as the headdress and cuffs. Note also that, as with the hands, there is no preparation on her face.





See above.



The difference in carving and the softness of this with gesso layers is clear here.



The gesso on the male figure was, in places, particularly dried out. Treatment with Isinglass was necessary to ensure its adhesion, as well as to treat the flaking paint which can be clearly seen here.





This image of green paint on the male figure shows clearly that it has been overpainted at some stage. Also the blackish stripes, which lie in the hollows of the paint, are a significant layer of dirt. This was reduced in the cleaning.

Note here that the original paint appears to be remaining in islands and the over paint has covered this.



This is an area on the female figure where the paint islands remain and overpaint has not been applied as in the figure above. It also shows a lack of a ground layer



These three images show the extent of dirt that was on the surface of the sculptures. This has been reduced in the cleaning.







The above photo shows that, particularly after cleaning, paint losses were quite disturbing to the overall harmony of the sculptures. In order that this should not be visually distracting, a thin wash of watercolour was applied.





The image above shows, as with the previous two images, the disturbing nature of the areas of loss. This was also retouched with a thin wash of watercolour, as seen below .



N. B. All the photos can be found here:



Sir Alexander before conservation:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ouyk6fm1qlp0e33pt4h28/AMdyg69AdonPPKNRskCTnmI?rlkey=myuz9p99owp4ylttesau9sf8w&st=khwrkwl&dl=0>

Lady Constance Culpepper before conservation:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/t3mrl6k4bweqaabvguanp/AO-nE1QEM-jau-S-1etM2B4?rlkey=2s45qh1l1dd0xzqd7yc0plyfu&st=eq7xug0v&dl=0>

Culpepper figures during and after conservation:

[https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/pft1wqscyzc0xt4nmjx10/AFsF32dP\\_L1QPiYmWkUqd2Y?rlkey=y3cvwzty2vku4zaznkkpx639c&st=sg17z4ya&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/pft1wqscyzc0xt4nmjx10/AFsF32dP_L1QPiYmWkUqd2Y?rlkey=y3cvwzty2vku4zaznkkpx639c&st=sg17z4ya&dl=0)

It is recommended they be downloaded and stored on a hard drive for future reference.

## FURTHER CARE

As some of the wood is cracking and drying it is suggested that the relative humidity be monitored, particularly if significant changes to the heating be made and that any heating should be kept at a distance from the figures. Large fluctuations of RH should be avoided. It is suggested that Tobit Curteis might be consulted on this (I believe that he has already been consulted on the moisture in the wall of the bay housing the figures) A regular inspection should be carried out to ascertain if the cracking is increasing.

There are numerous *Anobium Punctatum* (woodworm) flight holes in the figures however none were fresh. The figures should be inspected as part of a cleaning/dusting regime. Should new ones appear (these will be lighter in colour when they are fresh) or any new frass (looks like sawdust) appear then a specialist should be contacted. The conservator can be asked to recommend specialists.

Regular cleaning should be carried out with soft dusting brushes and a vacuum to catch the dust as it is lifted. Recommended dusting brushes can be purchased from A.S.Handover. These brushes are made to order so not available on the website To order please give Gijs in customer service a call on 0207 2415877, he will put it on order for you and we will send it out just as soon as it is ready. The brush should be the pony hair fitch no: 14NT/16S.

The brief was not to fully restore the figures, removing all the dirt layer. This might be considered in the future.

Valentine Walsh  
September 2025