

Martin Gwilliams  
Progress update April 2021

## Spiderman

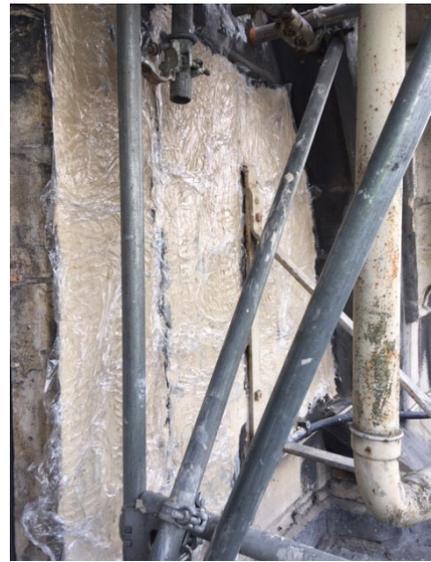
It has been a good month for developing my conservation skills and furthering my interest in the architecture and archaeology of the Cathedral.



Over a few weeks spread during the past few months, along with my colleagues, I have been cleaning the sulphation from the stonework of the window at the base of the west face of the tower. Our initial focus was the tracery of the window as this needed to be cleaned before the stained glass, which had been taken out and restored as part of the project, could be put back. Those of you familiar with my blog will remember that we use a poultice, an ammonium carbonate-based paste which also contains a blend of sepiolite and paper pulp.

With the stained glass and outer glazing protection installed at the beginning of the month, my colleagues and I were able to begin cleaning the sulphation from the stones to the left and right and above the window: the ashlar and hoodmould. Thanks to some advice from one of my fellow CWFers at another cathedral, we have added a scarily named product called Tarantula paper to our arsenal for cleaning the sulphation from the stone. The Tarantula paper is delicate and soft looking paper with a web-like structure, and it has remarkably, great tensile strength – web-like too!

Our first task was to tear the paper, which came on a roll, into pieces roughly an inch wide a few inches long. This we then applied in a collage building like way to the surfaces of the stone and sulphation which had been lightly sprayed with water to help the paper adhere to the sulphation and stone. The usual poultice paste was applied on top of the paper, with the poultice being covered with cling film to stop the paste from drying too quickly and reducing the efficacy of the process.

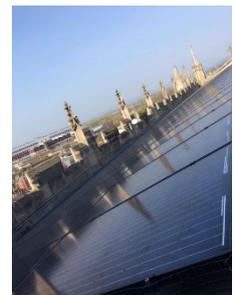


From our trials so far, the benefit of the paper is its ability to soften the sulphation and gently lift it as it is peeled away after the poultice has dried. We have experimented with trying some stones where sulphation has remained with a second coat of paper and the poultice and some with poultice paste only – no paper underneath. The results are a little mixed as the surface and amount of sulphation which remained after the first pass varied. The Tarantula paper appears to be more successful than simply applying the poultice to the directly to the surface for the first coat. The job is near completion. The removal of the sulphation will help the stones to breathe and therefor last longer. It also helps to improve the cosmetic look of the window and stonework.

It is important and good for me to be learning skills and techniques about the conservation of the stonework. Part of the Cathedral's philosophy regarding the conservation of the stones is to retain as much of the medieval stones as possible, so it is key for me to have the ability to conserve the stones in this way rather than simply replace them with new ones.

### **I spy with my little eye**

In early April, in was time for the twice-yearly cleaning of the gutters that run along the roof ancillary buildings. Fortunately, the weather was very favourable for what can be a grim task if it should decide to rain instead. The task of clearing the gutters is straight forward and not particularly onerous, but a bonus is that it does allow me and my colleagues to see some parts of the Cathedral that are inaccessible and unseen by most people. There is plenty of intriguing and beautiful stonework which is difficult to see and appreciate from the ground, like stones that have been reused, and carved heads and bodies of beasts, creatures and abbots protruding from towers, pinnacles and walls; there are splendid views of the City and surrounding countryside, some beautiful framed by the architecture of the Cathedral; if you're a



train enthusiast, like me, then it's a great place to view the activity along the line north of the Cathedral, which a good mix of passenger and freight traffic. God's Wonderful Railway viewed from God's Wonderful Cathedral!

### **Apse-olutely fabulous!**

This month I gave my ten-minute computer-based presentation to my CWF tutors, titled: Investigate Research for Historic Building Research: Chapels and Ambulatories at Gloucester Cathedral. I had been researching and reading for this since the end of January. The project was to find at least two areas or places in the Cathedral, which I would pitch to the tutors. Between us we would choose one of the spaces for a further detailed investigation for an assignment about architecture and archaeology that will follow later in the year.

My final choice was the three chapels which make up the south-east apse. My reasons for choosing them was a mixture of fitting the desired timeline 1066-1538 for the assignment to come; being spaces that interested me as I will spend a lot of time studying, recording and researching them; emotive reasoning too as the chapels of the crypt and tribune gallery are intriguing because of their sparseness which provoked lots of questions and thoughts about their architectural and archaeological history.



The research for my presentation was very enjoyable and addictive. It involved lots of reading and research via variety resources: books, papers, journals and websites. I discovered things about the design and evolution of side chapels in medieval England; what a tribune gallery is; and the possible influences on abbot Serlo's plan and design for the Abbey church. I had excellent sessions with the Cathedral Archaeologist and the Cathedral Archivist who managed to further my knowledge and interest in my spaces.

My budding interest in the archaeology and reading the stones of the Cathedral has helped me to be on the look-out for things when working on the Cathedral. As I mentioned above, one the upsides of cleaning the gutters is getting to see areas and bits of the Cathedral that most people don't. Now with my heart and mind being fed by architecture and archaeology of historic buildings, I am now seeing all sorts of things which grab my attention and make me begin to wonder at the stories and life in the stones.

When cleaning the sulphation from the stonework mentioned above, my colleagues and I have been able to see some scribes lines left on the stones by our medieval predecessors; lots of masons' marks, one puzzling one in particular as it appears on two sections of the church which we know to have been built 100 years apart; and a number of stones which have been touched by the flames from the number of fires at the abbey over the years, reused as the Cathedral's architecture has been restored.



It is a nice feeling when what I am learning really captures my spirit and pushes me on to discover more and more.