

Martin Gwilliams
Progress update August 2020

Making and amends

In August Martin has been focusing mainly on the tasks he has been given to carry out around the 14th century window of the apsidal chapel of the north ambulatory.

He writes: I made steady progress and completed the working of the stone components for the hoodmould. Working these stones gave me the opportunity to continue practicing and developing my banker masonry skills, being particularly careful and true in the reproduction of the moulding of the hood. Thanks to some top tips and a master class from Pascal while making the two components, I feel I am making steady progress. For the first stone I only used hand tools: chisels, claws,



punches, hammers, and mallet; for the second I was shown how to, and used a large and smaller grinder to take away large areas of stone, before using the hand tools again to finish the piece off. Using the grinders certainly helped to speed up the process of working the stone as I completed the second stone in the half the time I took to produce the first one.

With the stones complete I was now in the position to start fixing the stone in place. Sadly, however, it was at the first attempt of 'dry fixing' - inserting the stone to the space in which it goes – that I encountered a modest but costly error. A mistake I had made without realising it when recording the measurements and angles of the old stones, which I then subsequently transferred when setting out the hoodmould now meant that the trajectory of the return - the portion of the moulding running horizontally - made it impossible to fix in the space as it was, because the curve was now running at too steep an angle to fit in its rightful place and maintain its rightful radius. So, plan B. I had to cut the stone in two. I made the cut quite close to the mitre and return so that the joint that now exists looks less obviously a mistake. It also helps the stones fit more correctly into the section that I had cut out for it.



I was mortified. I felt sad and ashamed at making such a costly error, especially given the time and effort that I had put into recording the information; diligently (clearly not enough!)

setting out and drawing up the stones at full size; then making the two stones components. However, as my colleagues said, and the old saying goes, *we learn more from our mistakes*. I certainly hope so! After a disturbed night's sleep, going over the error in my mind, the next day I began the task of making the best of the situation that I had created.

It is important when laying stones on a bed of mortar to make sure that the stone is wet, though just enough to stop the stone from sucking all the moisture out of the bed of mortar on which it will sit. However, fixing needs to be swift, otherwise the bed of mortar can end up being 'dead' - lifeless and purposeless - the whole process would need to be done again with a fresh bed of mortar. So with my stone wetted, I presented to the space and gently and swiftly slid it into position. I then used my straight edge and to check that the fillet – the nose of the stone – and the other elements of the moulding were in line with the same elements in the stone adjacent to it, when doing restoration work this a matter of careful judgement as the profiles of the stones will be slightly different in places due to the weathering a erosion of the older stone. I also used a spirit level to check the horizontal run of the top and bottom beds of the old and new stone. Two more stones to go...



Besides the working and fixing of the hoodmould, Martin has also done a few other things this month.

Martin writes: Other jobs this month have included making the templates for the corbel and for the 'piecings' for capital that need restoring. This has been a good opportunity to for me to sharpen my drawing and setting out skills, ever mindful now not to repeat the error I made with the hoodmould!

One morning in the penultimate week of August, I helped raise up the next one of the new gargoyles – the Cotswold Sheep Shearer – to be installed along the parapet of the north ambulatory. Raising the gargoyles from the ground to the top of the scaffold involved a good work out for my arms muscles. In a relay with one of the other members of the team, I pulled the very long chain, which ever so slowly winched the stone into the air and eventually up to the top. It



was then laid on a trolley and wheeled into position on the scaffold. Then using a combination of pulley chains and straps, it was slowly and steadily lowered into position. It is quite a sight to behold and a nice process to be a part of.



This same week, once again, along with the rest of the team of masons it was time to perform our regular ritual of clearing the debris and detritus from the roofs and gutters of the Cathedral buildings. On the day we did it, the weather was rather inclement, but dodging the frequent showers, and while doing my cleaning job I was able to enjoy the spectacular views from the Cathedral over the surrounding area and also able to marvel at some of the stonemasonry in the higher and the

lesser seen parts of the Cathedral – glorious!