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Progress update February 2021

Shaft (Who's the cat who won't cop out...)

It has been another great month for honing and developing my masonry and carving skills.

At the beginning of February, I worked another shaft for the north ambulatory parapet. The last time I worked one of these was about a year ago, so it was nice to return to something familiar, but now (hopefully) with my skills and techniques having come on. The main difference this time around was not using a saw to remove the large areas of stone from each face. Pascal was keen for me to work these elements using a combination of different types of hammers, mallets and chisels.



The process started with checking the stone was square. I then marked out the outlines of the shaft, scribing on the lines to show me where I needed work the stone down to. I then cut in a safety line where the body of the shaft meets the modest moulding and base. This should stop the stone from plucking in this area, which would potentially damage the moulding section. I then placed edge of the face of my pitcher against the stone, a little above the line I had scribed and then used a hammer to strike the pitcher, which in turn removed decent size chunks of the surface. I repeated this method a few times along each side. Then I used a one-inch chisel to make a draft around three sides of the body of the stone. This left a raised area of around 20mm of stone in the middle. I then worked down this excess stone using a punch, and then a claw, working the surface down to around 1-2mm before making passes on each surface with a bolster. Then finally the last pass was made with my tooling tool to create the required surface finish. With the main body worked, I then moved on to the modest moulding, which consists of a tiny chamfer and a slightly large but shallow cavetto.

From time-to-time Pascal gave me some tips and advice about how to use some of the tools more effectively. It still a very enjoyable process and nice to see some improvement on my previous efforts.

The Generation Game!

My next job was to finally carve the croquettes on the finial I have been working on. If you're a regular reader of my blog, you'll remember I have been practicing the techniques and learning the process for carving the croquettes.

The finial, sometimes referred to as a poppyhead, has a central body of masonry from which spring four 'arms' or 'wings'. These are the croquettes which are carved with leaf-like decoration. The composition and styling of the leaves differs on all the poppyheads which have been made for the north ambulatory parapet. Having prepared my final clay model of the style and composition of leaves I wanted on mine, I set about sketching out the outline of the main volume and shapes of the croquette on both faces the four wings.



Pascal said that the best way for me to work at this stage was to work the same area on each of the arms before moving onto the next stage. Essentially repeat the same process on each wing while it is fresh in my mind and muscle memory. First I carved the surface of the top of each wing, carefully peeling away areas of stone using a variety of small headed chisels – claws, bullnoses and gouges and some rasps – to perfect the curves and ripples of the leaves. The finial is around 300mm x 200mm so the elements of the carving are quite small, compared with carving something like a full size human figure. I began to see how little carving was needed in order to produce the shape and contour I was after. I essentially worked from the top of each wing, down the left and right sides, before finishing near base of the finial. From the swan and cobra-like neck of the front each arm; to the cheeks of the main leaves; the smaller leaves further down the body of the finial. A key part of the process is carving and then redrawing the outline of that bit, so I knew where and what to carve next and whether I had removed enough stone. At regular intervals I would reference my clay model to check the rough proportion, heights, depths, widths and lengths of the various parts of the croquettes. They don't have to be exactly the same as the model, it's there as a guide to help elements stay in proportion to each other.

One of the tricky elements is that, as much as it is possible, the top and the left and right hand faces of the wings need to be symmetrical. Anyone who has ever tried masonry or carving will have noticed that it's fairly straight-forward for a right-handed person to carve from left to right (the

opposite for a left-handed person), however, it is more challenging to carve and work right to left, but with practice and perseverance it gets a little better and easier.

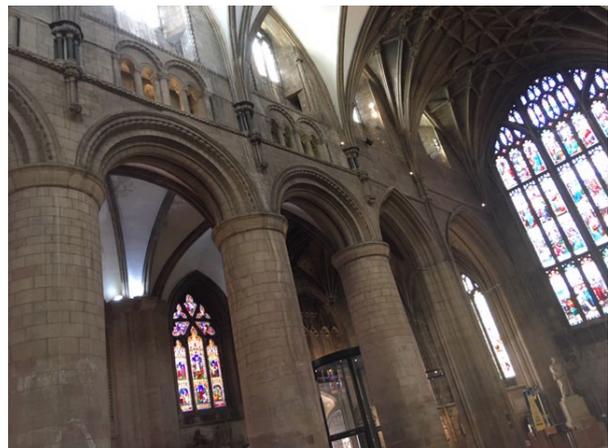
Reflecting on the process, I would compare it to a little like being snooker player. I frequently moved around my banker and the finial looking for the best position to be in to work the elements of the leaves, selecting the chisel or tool best suited to helping me achieve what was needed. I also needed to be a bit of contortionist to get into some of the nook and crannies and work away the stone.

Of the whole experience, to anyone of you who is familiar with the Generation Game, I would say it was a little like that. Remember the section of the programme where contestants were challenged to have go and producing or doing something having seen a professional produce or do that same thing? At the end of the task there would feedback, a score, and a: 'didn't they do well from Bruce!' Well. There were some elements I was more pleased with than others. There is certainly plenty of room for improvement the next time these skills are called upon. So, I'll say, fair to middling and five out of 10.

I'm really grateful to Pascal for giving me the opportunity to have a go at carving as it's the thing I have done the least so far in my career. However, it has definitely given me an appetite to do more modelling and carving. I'm also indebted to my other colleagues for their coaching and encouragement as I was going along.

The Cathedral Candy Shop

Imagine having to choose an area or a slice of the Cathedral for an architectural and archaeological investigation. It is like the proverbial child in a sweet shop moment – all that choice! What would you choose? That is the essence of the first module for my CWF Foundation degree for this year. The title is: Investigative Skills for Historic Building Research. The brief is to pick two areas of the Cathedral and apply primary research techniques and evaluation to each area to see which one will be the topic for further, detailed research as part of another module and assignment later this year. The architectural period to be covered in the assignment later on is between 1066 and 1538.



The assignment is in its early stages, meaning lots of research, skim reading books, journal, papers, plus walks around the Cathedral and also looking at old images, drawings, plans, diagrams as well as talking to the archivist and archaeologist about what information and resources are available (or not) to make either of the areas the focus for the following assignment. The two areas I'm beginning to home in on are the four bays of the west end of the nave, because there is plenty of architectural styles and developments in that area to investigate and to compare and contrast, which fits within the given dates. My other area, and I think my preferred choice at this stage, are the three chapels

which form the south east polygonal apse. The apse has three levels: crypt, ambulatory and tribune gallery. Imagine one of those lovely DK cutaway illustrations. Viewed like this these chapels make a good case study of the development of medieval architecture and archaeology. I'll let you know in April what's has been selected.

Part of my research for this module as taken me down to the crypt. What a lovely space to be in and to look at. All being well, when restrictions are lifted and you can visit the Cathedral again, and when it's possible, go down to the crypt for a good look around and simply enjoy the lovely space and chapels.