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Progress update January 2022

The Long Goodbye

What do the 31 August, 10 December, 17 December 2021 and the 10 January 2022 all have in common, for me anyway? They were each supposed to be the last day of my apprenticeship and my time in Gloucester at some point in the last six months. The end finally came to pass on 14 January, 2022. The extensions were due to a combination of the effects of Covid on the CWF programme timetable and most recently, before Christmas, me self-isolating with Covid. Fortunately, Pascal kindly agreed that I could return in the New Year to spend the time on my final piece - a portion of a pinnacle that I had missed working on in the run up to Christmas.



It was a very nice piece of work to finish my time with as it involved using a lot of the masonry and carving skills I have picked up over the past two-and-a-bit years. Squaring up the stone. Marking out the axes and outline of the templates. Using the right tools to efficiently work the stone. Using callipers and other tools to accurately check measurements as I went along. I really enjoyed the challenge of the carving element - shaping the crockets and leaves - as I was able to recall some of the things I learnt from the poppyhead I carved around a year ago. Of course, there was still plenty for me to learn during the process with helpful and valuable input from Pascal and my work-based tutor, James, as I went along. Sadly, the 14 January came a little too soon for me to complete the carving of all the crockets and leaves, however, they are now in the more than capable hands of one of the newish apprenticeships.



My period of self-isolation before Christmas gave me ample time to reflect on my apprenticeship. Among other things, it afforded the excuse, if I needed one, to re-watch the many *Carry On* films on

TV over the period and to listen to *World Service* as my sleeping pattern became out of sync'. Besides the *Carry Ons*, one of my favourite TV shows is *Master Chef*, the professional and the amateur editions. Watching the series in the run up to Christmas, I realised this was the perfect illustration of my time in the workshop and onsite at Gloucester. There is a particular the point in the contest when the chefs spend time in the 'best kitchen's' learning from 'world renowned chefs'; that is how these last two and half year have felt. It has been a great privilege to work in much a prestigious workshop and help with the conservation and restoration of one of England's finest cathedrals. From day one to my very last, I have been fortunate to work and learn from a great master and also a team of excellent masons who have been shaped mainly by the same master. Pascal and the team have such integrity in their working methods and practices which makes it almost impossible not to be inspired and emulate them. I know my CWF fellows would probably each make this claim, but I think that Gloucester is a Michelin stared workshop of the masonry world – the very best.

Recently, I was reading an article in a journal I take which had the old adage that on their death beds people don't often say, I wish I had spent more time at work. (I'm not being called home to join the Great Congregation just yet, I hope!). The adage may well be true for some people, however, I have enjoyed my working career: the places, the people and the work. From self-designing (self-stacking) in a supermarket in my late teens, to designing in a studio in my early twenties, to assisting in a parish office at the beginning of the century, to designing in a cathedral office for 13 years, to the myriad of places that have been part of my second career as a stonemason, they are all places to which I would have happily gone to work more, with my apprenticeship being no exception. The workshop and work site have been great places to work, with kind and generous colleagues with boundless camaraderie.



Re-reading the work journal I kept and these monthly blog posts I have written, I can see I have been inspired, challenged and changed, and that I have developed through all the work I have been given and the experiences and opportunities I have had. I have been taught a vast amount from hearing about the life and work experiences of those I met via the CWF programme. I have learnt so much from seeing and hearing about their working practices and methods too. Many have influenced me in my daily work, and some have shaped my thinking about what I hope to do in the short and long term.



Banker masonry was a key attraction of the job for me when I applied for it back in 2019. My experience of working stone by hand since leaving college in 2017 had been minimal. After a couple of weeks of gentle induction following my arrival at the workshop, I was reminded of the various tools and techniques to make the blocks square, if they were not so already, before I applied templates and began working. At first, I found the pace I was working at quite slow, however, I was encouraged by my colleagues to take my time so I could learn and improve as I went along. Projects often required the same stone elements. Making the same component three or four times improved my skills, techniques and efficiency each time. As I progressed and gained more competence and confidence, under the supervision of my

colleagues, I was given the responsibility of working more complex stones and mouldings. I have been taught many lessons from my colleagues in Gloucester. For example, to carefully take measurements when restoring a piece of deteriorated stonework; be disciplined and patient when fixing stones well and true; keep the site and areas of work safe.

From the breadth of subjects that the apprenticeship and CWF programme covered and the experiences and opportunities I have been exposed to over the last two and a half years in the conservation of historic buildings, my knowledge has developed and I have achieved a broader and better understanding in this area of work that I love. One of my main aims during my time was to increase my knowledge and understanding of the differing architectural styles – the key features and time periods. I came with a good understanding of architectural details and the names of features and ornamentation from the Classical and the Medieval periods, those of the centuries that followed right up until the present day. What I was less certain of was knowing which features belonged to which medieval period in particular. The architectural and archaeology modules were really helpful and highlights of the two years and have given me exactly what I wanted, and more. The reading and research stages of the second-year modules lit a fire within me. I poured over copious books and other sources finding out more and more about the periods of development and their distinguishing features. Reading about monastic life in medieval Britain and Europe. Discovering beautiful written reflections on the life of cathedrals in England. I now find myself with greater confidence and an increased curiosity in looking at architecture in general.

Through the series of architecture modules and my research and reading I found a particular passion for the Saxon and Norman periods, not just the artwork and ornamentation but also how people lived, worked and worshipped and how things evolved and fused from these periods. I really enjoyed expanding my knowledge and have gained great confidence in my understanding of architectural styles and development. I also discovered a love for crypts in particular.



For the last three years I have been living on the road away from home, returning to my family most weekends. So first I will go home and enjoy some quality time with my family as I am called back to Guildford. In the short, and long term, I find myself wanting somehow to fuse the skills and creativity I have as a designer with the skills and knowledge I have as a stonemason and letter carver, and fledgling stone carver. In an ideal world I would love to work somewhere and somehow that affords me the time and opportunity to further develop my letter carving skills and historic building conservation skills. Another cathedral, perhaps?

The two years of my apprenticeship along with the CWF programme and my previous year with The Prince's Foundation and QEST have given me a massive number of opportunities and experiences and they have equipped me with a vast number of skills and a large amount of knowledge in a relatively short time. The CWF programme and my apprenticeship have pretty much coincided with my fourth and fifth year in stonemasonry. I have gained and maintained high standards, especially because I have been exposed to really high standards through quality teaching and learning at levels four and five. My confidence has grown from this exceptional teaching and learning and now into my sixth year I am ready for new challenges and I am well equipped for the future.

My sincere thanks to those who have taken the time to read my posts. My sincere thanks also to all those who have helped, encouraged and inspired me along the way, I am in your debt. And finally, thanks to anyone else who know me!