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Progress update January 2021

Carry on carving



Back in the workshop in the new year, 2021 picked up seamlessly where 2020 had ended as I continued to work on my clay modelling and stone carving skills. To be honest, I didn't really much enjoy the process and practice of the modelling for the first croquette I produced before the Christmas break. I felt a little frustrated that I couldn't quite get the contours - the high and low points - in quite the right places and I carved a little too much stone off in some places; I wasn't entirely sure I understood the need to create the clay model and why I couldn't simply crack on with the carving. Reflecting on the process a little over the Christmas holiday and after reading up and looking at some tuition regarding modelling online I came back in the new year fired up and determined to use what I had seen and learnt to make the experience more enjoyable.

As a way of gaining some confidence Pascal suggested it would be good to have another go, but this time scale up the croquette as this would help me get a better understanding of the shape and contours of the leaves and to see better how the scale and proportions of the elements relate to one another. As with the first model I set to work building up the layers of clay until it reached the given length, depth and height. Then using various clay modelling tools, I set about creating the ripples, curves and peaks which form the shapes of the leaves, adding clay where needed



and taking it away in certain places to emphasise the volume and structure. Working more slowly, using my time to meticulously look at the examples of croquettes that are in the workshop, taking various reference points with callipers and other measuring devices helped me to get the various elements of the leaves in the right places and at the right heights and depths, which all improved the experience this time. I loved this second attempt so much that I have purchased myself a set of modelling tools, a bag of clay, and some books for inspiration and now I intend to work on some other designs which I'll get round to carving to as a part of my own learning and interest. Like a lot of learning, practise and perseverance often pays off.

When I'm cleaning windows

In the middle of this month, I was able to put some of my CWF conservation learning into practice.

The exterior masonry of west window at the base of the tower was coated in sulphate, ranging from 0.5mm to 10mm in the face of the stones. Sulphur dioxide was a major by-product of electricity production and domestic heating using coal. Up to the 1950s domestic use of coal for heating produced a very concentrated and confined blanket of sulphur dioxide and smoke over areas like

Gloucester. One of the effects of this was sulphation, a chemical reaction between the masonry surface and the atmospheric sulphur dioxide, is evident as a black crust of dirt, which in the worst cases causes the surface of the stone to peel away as moisture gets trapped behind forcing it out through other areas of the stone.



The solution we used for restoring the stone was an ammonium carbonate poultice, a paste. My first task was to create some modest test patches on an area of the stone to see which version of the poultice (with and without the addition of clay) would work best. The clay free poultice looks a little like crushed Kendal Mint Cake, but doesn't smell like it!; the versions with the clay in them look like and have consistency of hummus – maybe I was hungry at the time! Once the paste had been applied to the surface of each stone, cling film was laid over the top of the poultice to stop it from drying out to quickly and ruining the process. Trying to use cling film can be tricky at the best of times but imagine being up on the roof and scaffolding with a good south westerly breeze – what fun! The poultice needed a dwell time on the stone of up to 24 hours, during which it softened and loosened the sulphur, helping it to come away when the poultice was peeled off. The poultice with

the addition of 10% clay worked the best. This one we used to coat and restore the whole stonework of the window, giving it a chance to breathe once more and prolong its life.

Virtual York

This month Level 5 of the CWF Foundation Degree kicked off with three days of lectures, tuition and study time delivered via Zoom. York, with its fine minster was our virtual host and we were treated to an excellent pre-recorded tour of the splendid church. This fed nicely into our main topic: architecture and archaeology, with a focus on ecclesiastical architecture from 1066-1530. Over the three days we got to know better the styles, details and elements which make up the Norman, Transitional, Early English and Decorated periods with some excellent examples of each. Perpendicular up to more recent times follows at our next session in February.

Inspired by what I had seen and learnt, the following Saturday I went out on a walk around my local town and saw among other things, Saxon and Norman church towers, lots of good and some less good (terrible) flint work and masonry, as well as plenty of churches built in 1800s that borrowed various elements from their medieval cousins. I will return to see the insides of these same churches when the current restrictions are lifted.

Say it with stone



One of the good things about letter carving is being able to make gifts from family and friends, either to mark special occasion or simply to say thank you. The first two days of my Christmas break afforded me some time to make some suitably seasonal-worded gifts for some dear friends. I wanted to create designs which reflected the fest season - joy, hope and light - but hopefully my friends will also use them at other times during the year. I'd had the ideas for the gifts in my head to a few of weeks, however, I hadn't been able to commit them to stone before this. Making each piece was a nice opportunity to think of said friends and give thanks for our continued friendship.