

Martin Gwilliams
Progress update June 2020

A happy return

Martin writes: Going back to work on Monday 8 June felt a little like returning to school after an extra-long summer break. It had been nine long weeks since I had last done my job, would I remember how to do things... ?

The first week back I was eased back into life at the Cathedral by joining my colleagues in the marathon task of cutting out the large, remaining portions of cement mortar which line the exterior of the east face of the north transept and the small section of the north ambulatory. Cement mortar was a kind of



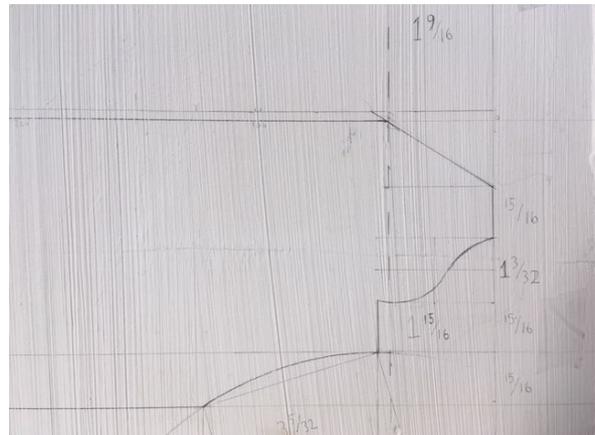
‘wonder drug’ for the Victorian restorers of Cathedrals. It was used for repointing and at one time it would probably have been found somewhere in the joints of most of England’s Cathedrals. Cement mortar is impermeable so when it rains or there’s frost, moisture is drawn into the stones but then it can’t escape through the joints. Over time this will usually cause damage to the stone, rather than damage to the mortar and joints. Cement mortar is also incredibly hard. To remove it requires hardy chisels and a decent hammer although if the joints are wide enough a grinder might be used to make an initial cut which makes the removal of the cement using chisel and hammer a little easier. The common height of joints between the stone components became increasingly smaller as the centuries evolved. Early medieval joints can be around 10mm whilst late medieval and Victorian joints can be 4mm or even smaller, making the removal of the cement a delicate operation.

Cutting out the mortar is dirty work even though we are all fully kitted out in PPE for our health and protection. A good first week cutting out a large portion of the cement meant that by week two I was able to get back into the workshop to pick-up the projects I was working on back in March.

Stone detectives

Being on furlough meant that Martin’s CWF modules were on pause. Martin writes: Sadly, some of the CWF Foundation degree sessions have not taken place because of lockdown. In particular, I was disappointed not to be able to go to Lincoln because that is where, in 2013, my journey to become a stonemason began. Lincoln has a special place in my heart.

Despite modules being cancelled we have been encouraged by the Course Director to carry on with our Setting Out and Fixing projects as far as possible.



I returned to the notes and drawings made nine weeks previously and reminded myself of the project and tasks. Setting Out projects require a stonemason to become a little bit like Hercule Poirot, although without the murder. Being archaeological detectives requires stonemasons to develop Hercule-like 'little grey cells' in order to devise the most appropriate repair. Before lockdown I had begun the work to restore a hood mould over a 14th century window. I studied two sections of moulding in order to take the measurements to set out my drawing. Pascal encouraged me to look at a third section where the new Forest of Dean Miner gargoyle has recently been installed. There is a section of the moulding which is in really good condition suffering very little erosion. Taking a full set of fresh measurements of this moulding I found that certain parts of these stones were 3 - 5mm larger than the other sections I had measured back in March. That might not seem significant but even 1 or 2mm difference causes problems for masons when it comes to fixing the stone. Although there are tricks of the trade to work around when stones don't line up either side it's far better to avoid that with careful measuring.

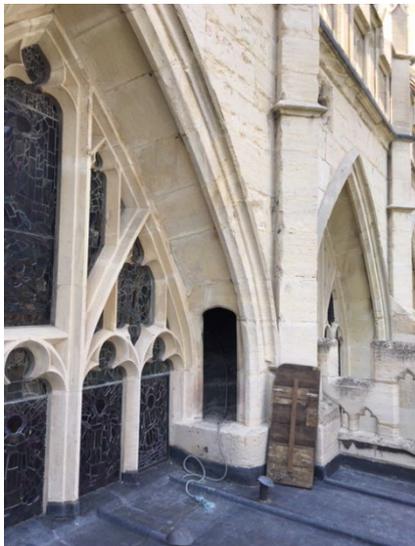
With my new set of measurements, I returned to the workshop and made a full-size drawing of the profile of the hood and mould. I used a beam compass (a compass able to produce large radii) to set out the radius of the arch which is required to complete the set of drawings. I will then create templates in order to start working the stone. This will happen over the next few weeks. Once this is complete, I can then start on my next practical module which is fixing these stones in place.



High maintenance



The last week of June gave Martin opportunity to get back to working stone. Martin writes: I had the pleasure of working a finial. These are top portions of the pinnacles which sit proudly on the parapet of the north ambulatory. It is the most intricate piece of stone I have carved to date and I can see how the tasks Pascal has set me so far have led to me being able to work pieces like this. If I had been given this to produce in week one back in September I would have been completely out of my depth. I now can draw upon all that I have learnt to date and I channelled this into creating the best finial I can. I am really enjoying learning more skills and gaining more knowledge and understanding in the process. I also know that there will always be room for improvement.



June ended on a high for Martin. He writes: Where better to spend a sunny June day than clearing out the gutters all along all the roof tops of Gloucester Cathedral? Maintenance of the gutters is essential so that they and the gargoyles can work effectively. Heavy rain in June along with high winds brought down moss from the roofs and sills to collect in the gutters alongside the animal bones and carcasses left by birds. Although messy and, at times, unpleasant this also brought the pleasure of seeing the high spaces and places of the Cathedral close-up, not to mention the views of the surrounding area. Accessing some of the gutters requires squeezing through some tiny gaps and doors using all the flexibility my old snake-like hips will allow!

It is good to be back.