

Conservation Treatment of Station Eight St Chads Cathedral

Birmingham

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Figure 1: Before Treatment



Figure 2: After Treatment

In June 2021, Hirst Conservation were commissioned by BHB architects (architects to the Cathedral) to undertake conservation treatment to *Station 8: The Women of Jerusalem Weep for Jesus*, located on the West wall, South side of Cathedral Church of St Chads, Birmingham. Only one station of the fourteen was chosen to be treated as this would create an opportunity to appreciate the visual impact of the treatment, allowing it to be viewed by members of the public before the remaining stations undergo conservation treatment in the future.

The overall aim of conservation is to preserve the object by means of stabilisation and to only recreate elements that have documented evidence of their original construction and how they previously appeared, so that no element is 'invented' but recreated to look like the original. Materials are chosen for treatment based on their suitability to the object's original materials, as well as adhering to the universal principle that any works undertaken have a re-treatability factor, allowing the potential to remove previous treatments in the future if required. Therefore this does not risk the longevity of the object by implementing a permanent treatment.

The treatment conducted included the removal of surface dirt and deposits, stabilising fracture points within the structure, filling and retouching losses, re-instating the Roman Soldier's lance which had previously been removed, and retouching losses within the paint layers on the figures.

Considerable testing was undertaken to establish an appropriate treatment methodology, and from this a cleaning solution was selected that would gently lift the dirt deposits on the surface of Station 8 without causing damage to the original material or risk of over cleaning. Once the loose dust and debris was removed using a brush and vacuum extraction, this wet cleaning treatment was achieved using damp cotton swab applied onto the surface, with any excess residue of the cleaning solution removed with distilled water on cotton swabs.



Figure 3: During the cleaning to remove surface dust and deposits

After cleaning was complete, areas of structural damage were repaired, including the fracture point on the upper part of the cross and plaster damage to the robe of Jesus. The upper cross had an original dowel through the centre of the structure and here, the surrounding plaster had detached slightly, causing the fracture point. As the upper part of the cross still maintained a level of structural strength, due to the central dowel, and only minimal movement was evident, it was decided that application of an adhesive within that fracture point would be most suitable for securing the upper part of the cross. Adhering the fracture would provide enough stability to secure the cross in-place whilst maintaining its structural integrity without need for a more intrusive treatment. Another aspect of structural damage to be addressed was the robe of Jesus. As the Station was originally created in plaster, using another form of soft plaster was chosen as it was the most suitable material. Equally, a fill material should always be slightly weaker than that of the original material, therefore in the event of any damage in that area, ideally the repair would fail, instead of the original material. The plaster damage to the robe was repaired with a soft plaster, sanded back to match the surrounding profile, and retouched to create a more harmonious appearance.



Figure 4: Side by side image of before and after treatment to Jesus's robe

The Roman Soldier's lance, which has been removed several years earlier, had incurred damage to the wooden shaft and the upper element of the weapon had been lost. This element was not reconstructed at this time, because if the upper part to the weapon be located in the future, it may be possible to reattach it. As part of the treatment, the lance was 'conserved as found', allowing for possible future interventions. It was doweled in place using the original dowel site on Jesus's robe.

The Roman Soldier's hand had also been damaged with the loss of fingers and knuckles. Additionally, a previous repair had been attempted which has since failed. Therefore, the missing areas of the hand were remodelled, replicating the style of the other hands depicted in Station 8. To recreate the hand, modelling clay was used to reconstruct the shape, for which a silicon mould was used to create a cast, and an epoxy putty was used as the casting material. The epoxy putty was selected as it provided a similar texture and colour to the original material. Once in place, it was left to harden and sanded back to ensure a unified join between repair and original material. This method allowed the newly moulded fingers to be reinstated with adhesive applied along the old repair site of the hand, which allows for future re-treatability as well as avoiding damage to the original material by adhering to old adhesive. Once secured, the fingers were retouched to replicate the appearance of other hands in the station.



Figure 5: Side by side view of the staged of treatment to the Roman Soldiers hand

Other areas of paint loss were retouched to match to their surrounding areas. Paints were not used over the original material, extending only to the break edge. The principle of retouching is to replicate the original visual appearance of the object, so that it cannot be detected until under close inspection. This is important so that future conservators can identify previous interventions, whilst not falsifying the extent of original material.

Overall, the treatment of Station 8 was considered to be very successful, achieving a high standard of cleaning, consolidation and replication of missing elements, and it is envisaged that the Station will remain for many years to come.



Figure 6: Before and after treatment of the in-painted area of paint loss