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St Peter's, Titchfield, Hampshire

Wriothesley monument 1594

Condition Assessment and Proposal

August 2016

1. Introduction

This report follows a visit made on 5 June 2016 at the request of Mr David Baker of the Heritage Centre Project of St Peter's. The brief was to inspect the Wriothesley monument in the south chapel and produce a condition assessment detailing any necessary conservation measures. During the visit I met Mr Baker and discussed the situation with him.

The report briefly describes the monument, its materials and design, then considers its condition and puts forward recommendations for limited conservation measures to ensure its future stability.

2. St Peter's church – general comments

St Peter's Titchfield, Grade I listed, is an ancient building that has been much altered over the centuries. According to the listing description, it has Anglo Saxon origins and Saxon fabric in the tower walls. The building was significantly altered in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth century, when the south chapel was added. A further restoration of 1866 removed many of the eighteenth century fittings.

The building has a west tower with spire, a distinctive and attractive feature, nave, chancel and north and south aisles. It is a large and impressive building that speaks of a varied and sometimes illustrious history.

From 1231 until the Dissolution, the church was attached to St Mary's Abbey; Henry VIII then gave it to Sir Thomas Wriothesley, who was made Earl of Southampton, and the south chapel became his mausoleum.

The church is built of coursed local rubble with ashlar dressings and roofed in slate and tile. Internal walls are plastered (much of the plaster is recent and cementitious). The floor of the south chapel is of large limestone flags.

3. Sir Thomas Wriothesley

The Wriothesley monument commemorates Sir Thomas Wriothesley, 1st Earl of Southampton, together with his wife Lady Jane and his son and heir Sir Henry Wriothesley. Sir Thomas Wriothesley (1505-1550) was a prominent courtier under Henry VIII, a protégé of both Thomas Cromwell and Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester. He was made Clerk of the Signet, and later Lord Chancellor of England and undertook a number of crucial offices for the regime; he was known for his intelligence, tenacity and acumen, but also for ruthlessness and unscrupulous egoism. He survived both Cromwell and Henry VIII, testifying to his political adroitness, and was made Earl of Southampton in Henry's will.

He married Jane Cheyney, the daughter and heiress of William Cheney of Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire. Their eldest surviving son Henry became 2nd Earl of Southampton, whose godfathers were Henry VIII himself and the Duke of Suffolk. Remarkably, Henry Wriothesley remained throughout his life a fervent Catholic, and led a somewhat turbulent life in the England of Queen Elizabeth I, sometimes in favour and sometimes languishing in the Tower under suspicion of involvement in Catholic conspiracies.

Henry, 3rd Earl of Southampton, the only son of Henry 2nd earl, may be assumed to be depicted as the male weeper kneeling on the north side of the monument. He was a patron of Shakespeare, who dedicated the poems Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece to him; he is also sometimes identified as the “fair youth” of Shakespeare’s sonnets.

4. The Wriothesley monument – general comments

The Wriothesley monument stands alone in the centre of the south chapel and is a magnificent sight, completely dominating the space. It was commissioned by Henry the 2nd Earl and was originally to have been one of a pair of monuments. Designed and made by the mason Gerard Johnson, a refugee from Flanders, the monument was not made until 1594, thirteen years after Henry’s death.

The monument apparently covers the family vault, containing the remains of the first four Earls of Southampton and is the centrepiece of the chapel as the Wriothesley mausoleum.

Every aspect of the monument exudes status, power and opulence; the materials - alabaster and marble, the scale, the positioning and the design.

An interesting aspect of the design is the prominence of the female effigy, larger than the two male effigies to either side and set on high. This possibly reflects the great influence that Henry Wriothesley’s mother had over him, including the inculcation of her Catholic faith. He of course barely knew his father, who was dead by the time Henry was five.

5. The Wriothesley monument – Description

5.1 Location

Centre of the south chapel – architecturally the east end of the south aisle

5.2 Design

Dimensions (mm): H: 2960 L: 3800 W: 2760

The monument is a two tiered structure with four tall obelisks at the corners. The effigy of Jane, Countess of Southampton lies recumbent on the upper tier, supported on an arcade of three arches, with two small crowned harts’ heads by her head and a brachet and crowned bullocks (?) at her feet. To either side of her lie the effigies of her Husband (south) shown in lawyer’s robes and her son (north), depicted in plate armour. At Sir Henry’s feet is a bull, whilst Sir Thomas has a heifer(?) Each of them lies on a tomb chest with gadrooning and square pilasters dividing them into two panels. A weeper kneels at a prie-dieu in each of the four panels thus created. These represent the children of Sir Henry.

The structure thus described is supported on a large plinth of alabaster, itself standing on steps of Purbeck marble

5.3 Materials and Construction

The effigies, tomb chests and arcade, weepers and plinth are of alabaster, from the Midlands.

Obelisks and corner pilasters are of a red veined marble, probably Italian. Central pilasters are of black, possibly Belgian marble (it could be Touch from Derbyshire)

The effigies, elements of heraldry, beasts and other areas of detailed ornament are polychromed with oil-based paints and gilding. The weepers are unpainted.

The steps are of Purbeck marble.

Sir Henry has a timber sword.

Structurally, the monument is supported on the floor beneath which there is a vault. The tomb chests no doubt have some kind of internal support structure of brick or rubble stone; decorative elements are generally constructed in “manhandlable” sections, with the exception of particular features such as the effigies.

Iron elements have certainly been used in some areas of the structure, but much of it seems to have been built without such fixings.

5.4 Previous Interventions

It seems that the monument has been “restored” somewhat in the fairly recent past. David Baker confirmed that some work had been undertaken within the last 50 years. There may also have been earlier restoration attempts, which have left the monument looking very clean and the polychrome unusually complete. One suspects that most of the currently extant polychrome is nineteenth century.

There are also areas of later repair to the stone, and some of the inscription lettering has clearly been renewed.

6. Condition Assessment

6.1 Environment

There are signs of dampness in the wall of the south chapel, causing paint surfaces to peel and salt efflorescence to appear on the walls on the south wall. However, so far as the future of the Wriothsley monument is concerned, the internal environment of the church appears to be relatively stable and benign, with no sign of significant condensation on the monument’s surfaces. Rising dampness is unlikely to affect the monument, given that there is a vault immediately beneath.

6.2 Structure

There has been some movement and settlement in the monument, which now leans noticeably to the south. Mr Baker has confirmed that there had been an investigation in the past into the stability of the vault below, and there seems to be no cause for undue concern as the vault is apparently now stable. It would be advisable, however, to monitor the monument for signs of any further movement, and this has been mentioned in “Conservation Recommendations” below.

There are no signs of significant structural disturbance within the monument’s structure, or of the characteristic movement and damage caused by internal iron or mild steel fixings. It may be that there are few such fixings in the structure, and that those that exist are stable.

Such structural issues that exist are mainly local areas of instability or failure in the mortars and are listed below. There are also minor losses and some breakages and detachment of small elements. These are listed below area by area.

Steps

There are some losses characteristic of Purbeck marble, but they are otherwise stable. The deterioration does not seem to be ongoing, or if so is very slow.

Alabaster Plinth

The central projecting panel on the south side is loose and needs re-fixing. Otherwise there are some cracked stones but the damage appears to be old and they are stable.

Obelisks

All the obelisks are stable; the south east one has been fairly recently re-set and leans slightly. There is a small loss on the south west corner moulding.

Tomb chest structure

The tomb chest has some minor isolated losses and damage. The crowns at the west end have lost some points and the north west (male) weeper has lost a wheel spur. A button ornament on the west end of the gadrooning is lost and there is minor fissuring on the south side central pilaster.

There is some flaking polychrome on the south side shield.

An orange iron stain at the south east end of the tomb chest indicates a ferrous fixing beneath the surface of the stone, but there is no sign of movement or damage. This should be monitored for any signs of change but may well cause no problems.

Effigy of Sir Thomas Wriothesley (south)

The supporting animal is loose and slightly displaced on its plaster bed. This is not in itself a problem, but should someone manhandle it for some reason it might sustain damage and could be vulnerable to theft. It would be advisable to re-set this animal, and investigate under the plaster bed at the same time to establish if there is some reason for the displacement.

The effigy itself is sound.

Effigy of Sir Henry Wriothesley (north)

The northern effigy has a loose section to the collar. His feet have been repaired but area stable now.

Effigy of Jane, Countess of Southampton and arcade

The arcade that carries the central female effigy is apparently stable.

The female effigy itself is stable; there is evidence of renewed polychrome at the base of her supporting animal (brachet) but no problems were identified.

Several small fragments of alabaster are lying by the effigy's head; these appear to be pieces of the small animals at each corner of her bier. The south west animal in particular has lost several small elements and these should be re-fixed.

6.3 Surface condition

The surface condition of the monument is generally sound and stable. Ledges carry some dust and dirt although they do seem to have been cleaned periodically. There are cobwebs and some bat droppings. Isolated areas of flaking polychrome have been identified in the sections above.

7. Conservation Recommendations

The monument is essentially stable and requires no urgent interventions. Small areas of repair and re-fixing of detached elements are required, a couple of small areas of flaking polychrome could be usefully stabilised and the monument would benefit from a light clean with soft brushes and vacuum cleaner carried out by a suitably qualified conservator. It must be said that this cleaning will have only a minor effect on the overall appearance of the Wriothlesley monument.

The main issue with regard to cleaning the monument is of achieving access to the more remote sections without touching the outer areas. A small access scaffold will be needed to allow cleaning of the female effigy and her arcade. This access will also allow fuller inspection of these areas in case anything has been missed from ground level. Clearly this scaffold will have to be erected by scaffold contractors with suitable sensitivity to the needs of fragile and important historic fabric.

The following programme of cleaning and minor repairs is proposed:

- Erect access scaffold to give good access to all areas of the monument.
- Undertake cleaning of all surfaces of the monument with soft brushes and a vacuum cleaner, making a close inspection of all surfaces to ensure that stone and polychrome are sound.
- Re-attach several areas of detached stone, using polyester resin or Paraloid B72 acrylic as appropriate.
- Re-set the south effigy supporting animal and the south side plinth pilaster section after inspecting behind/beneath them in case there are reasons for the current instability.
- Strike scaffold and clear away.

8. Estimate

To undertake work as described above	£1500
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Scaffold	£500
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Estimates exclude VAT, which is chargeable but include other expenses and disbursements.

Photographs

1. The Wriothlesley monument: general view from west side
2. The monument: general view from north side
3. The monument: general view from south side
4. Fragments of stone lying by the female effigy
5. The loose south side panel
6. The loose supporting animal
7. The brachet supporting animal

The Wriothsesley monument: general view from west side



The monument: general view from north side



The monument: general view from south side





Fragments of stone lying by the female effigy

The loose south side
panel





The loose supporting animal

The brachet supporting animal



