

REPAIRS TO STONEMWORK

by BERNARD DOWLAND, A.R.I B.A., 1969

The restoration of the external masonry now being carried out by the Church Commissioners has reached the East end of the Choir, where the two great pinnacles have been completely rebuilt in their upper parts. A start on the south side of the choir will be made this year, 1969.

Restoration of this sort is a long, slow job. It all has to be done by hand and there are few short cuts. The policy being adopted is to replace as little as possible of the original stone to avoid altering the character of the building. Only when a stone is in a very bad state of decay is it cut out to a depth of about 4-in. and a new piece of the same sort of stone put in.

The stone comes from a quarry at Mansfield, 12 miles away. The Normans used the same stone and it all had to be carted to Southwell by road. One can imagine the heavily laden wagons trundling over the ill-made roads, as familiar a sight then as the sugar beet lorries are today.

A great deal of the restoration work is unspectacular and consists of cutting out and replacing defective masonry and cleaning the walls of moss and lichens. Where ornamental detail requires renewal great care must be taken to reproduce the same profiles and mouldings that are there. It is more difficult to do this with carved foliage such as crockets and finials which are invariably in exposed places and become worn away beyond recognition. A certain amount of new invention has to be resorted to after careful study of other examples of the period in the locality.

What usually attracts attention, however, are the carved heads. There are a great many of these already at Southwell. At the top of the two western towers are some superb 12th century corbels and at the top of each side of the Chapter house is a row of 14th century heads of people and animals. The dripstone terminations of the perpendicular windows to the Nave aisles are late 15th century work. There are also many fine heads inside the building in the Chapter house and Pulpitum, and in many other places.

A few words on the new heads which have been added recently might not be out of place. The first ones to be tackled were at the top of the Airmen's Chapel, %here there are two small pinnacles. The stumps of the old carvings were taken out and set up in the Song School workshop and the missing features of a Bishop, a King and two Angels were built up in clay. The mason then took pieces of new stone the same size as the old and copied the four subjects which were later built into position at the top of the Airmen's chapel. The press got to hear about this and photographs appeared in the paper.

Then, in 1956, a professional sculptor, Mr. David Hardy, offered his services and at the Provost's suggestion it was decided to get him to do portraits of people associated with the Minster. There were four heads in the spandrels of the arcade on the North wall of the Airmen's chapel, which were ready for renewal and it was here that he set to work. The result was a very good likeness of Messrs. Clulow, Wragg, Malcolm Fisher (9-years-old) and Paling.

The scaffolding was then moved round to the end of the Chapter house passage where there were various unrecognisable lumps of carved stone. It was quite impossible to see what the subjects were, so one could not build up the missing parts. However, they were taken out and set up in the workshop and with the help of wire and clay new figures took shape. The ones at the top of the buttress represent Eve tasting of the forbidden fruit, St.

Michael, the Archangel, Satan clutching Eve's soul, and at the same time cowering away from the fearsome aspect of St. Michael. Finally, the fourth figure represents an angel carrying Eve's soul up to heaven symbolising the everlasting mercy of God.

At the lower level are four figures representing the foods of man—Beef, Pork, Mutton and Fish. These evolved in the same way as the last by building up in clay and then copying the result in new stone. There is a fifth figure, an ugly little dragon in the corner. This is a 19th century work and was moved to its present position. We could call him 'indigestion'.

The next part of the building to receive attention was the Chapter house. This beautiful and unique structure was found, on close examination from the scaffolding, to be in a serious condition. So much of the fine detail had eroded away, so that it was necessary to renew most of the parapet, the tops of all the buttresses and all the projecting gargoyles except one. This work seemed as if it would never end, but it is now completed and a new lease of life has been given to the building. The pairs of projecting gargoyles at the top of each buttress were broken and unrecognisable, so it was decided to make new ones. To do this the heavy decorated pinnacles had to be dismantled and the stumps of the stones withdrawn. It was agreed with the Provost that the new figures should follow a theme and we decided on fabulous beasts. These are in pairs and the subjects are as follows:—

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| 1 and 2. | Cockatrice and Crowing Cock. |
| 3 and 4. | Sphinx and Centaur. |
| 5 and 6. | Mermaid and Satyr. |
| 7 and 8. | Angel (St. Matthew) and Lion (St. Mark). |
| 9 and 10. | Ox (St. Luke) and Eagle (St. John). |
| 11 and 12. | Samson and Lion, Jonah and Whale. |

Below these are also pairs of small heads. These are in the same order as those above:—

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| 1 and 2. | Sheep and Goat. |
| 3 and 4. | An incident from Gideon's victory over Midianites. |
| 5 and 6. | A Layman and a Cleric (the Provost). |
| 7 and 8. | A Cherub and Seraph. |
| 9 and 10. | Nil. |
| 11 and 12. | Angel Gabriel and Virgin Mary. |

The area behind the Chapter house over the vestries required a lot of attention also, but this was mostly rebuilding the parapets to the North choir aisle. The scaffolding was then moved to the North face of the choir where the corbel table to the main roof was in a terrible state of decay. There had been here a row of original 13th century heads, 43 in number, which, due to neglect of roof guttering over the centuries, had become saturated with wet and just disintegrated. A similar row exists on the South side of the choir, which is in better repair and will be left. There was no alternative, however, but to remove the worn stones and carve a new set of heads.

It was agreed with the Provost that these were to be saints taken from the Calendar of Saints Days in the Book of Common Prayer.

In conclusion, it should be recorded that Mr. Len Potts has been responsible for most of the masons' work plus a small amount of carving. Mr. Peter Hand did most of the gargoyles on the Chapter house and Mr. T. Murphy did all the saints' heads on the North wall of the choir.