

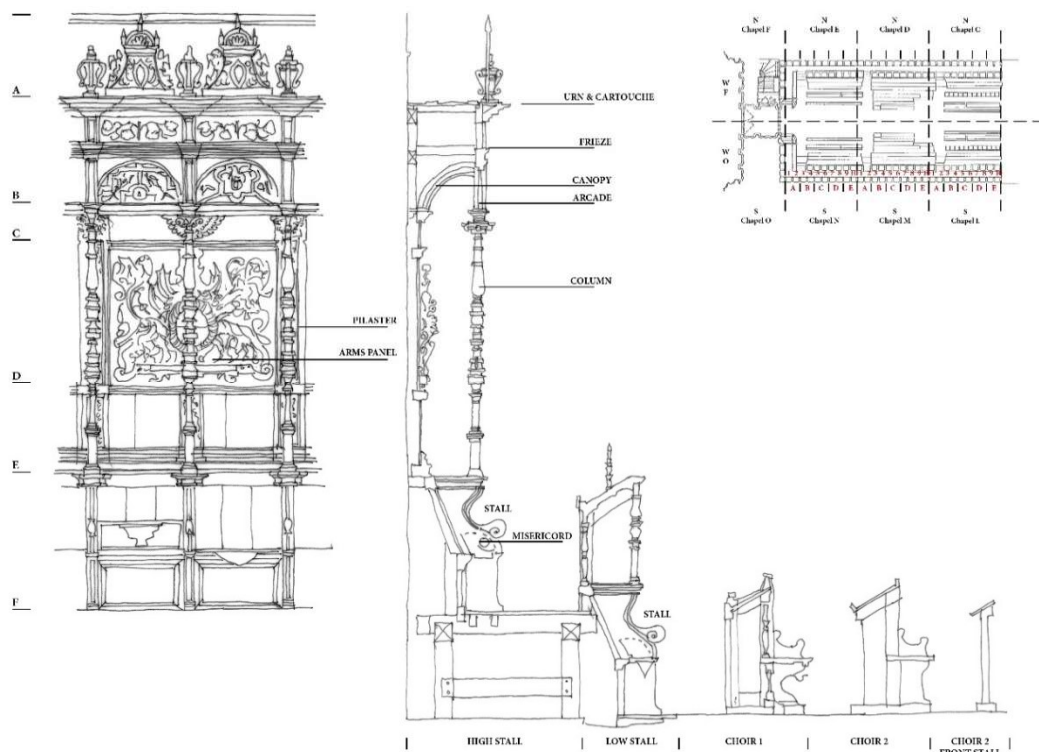
099 KINGS COLLEGE CHAPEL ORGAN SCREEN AND QUIRE JOINERY REPAIRS – PHASE 2 COVERING PAPER TO FACULTY APPLICATION

This paper supports an application for further conservator-led treatments and repairs to the Chapel Joinery under the Faculty Jurisdiction 2015 Rules (as amended). DAC members may recall that the initial programme of work was conceived of as a ‘proving’ exercise, working at a relatively modest scope on the most urgent conservation issues, which would then inform a continuing programme. This application follows an initial phase of investigation accompanied by a series of small-scale urgent works to the Organ Screen and Quire joinery (Faculty ref: 2022-070135), which are documented in the appended Treatment Report by Bainbridge Conservation. The report supports a further Faculty application for wider repair and conservation based on the findings made during the initial round of work.

This submission encompasses the full scope of proposed repair with a request for a special dispensation and recommendation for the Faculty to be granted for works over a four-year period. The timescale recognises that in this intensely busy place of worship, works of this nature within the sacred heart of the Chapel, need to be integrated into the Chapel calendar in a way which minimises disruption whilst ensuring for implementation of the necessary conservation work and repairs over the course of the next three to four years, working to a consistent methodology.

To assist the DAC in evaluating the committee’s recommendations, please read with:

- Treatment Report, King’s College Chapel Joinery by Bainbridge Conservation, dated 1 June 2023.
- Report and Proposal, King’s College Chapel Joinery by Bainbridge Conservation, dated 7 June 2023.



QIR Reference diagrams and key plan for quire stalls.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

(A very concise history and description)

The Chapel was the major building of the College founded by King Henry VI who laid the first stone in 1446. Its building history, which was marked by long periods of inactivity, reflects a politically turbulent era around the War of the Roses. For this reason, the Chapel went through three phases of construction, under four separate master masons, and was not completed until 1515. Subsequently the college Front Court developed to the South. The ensemble now comprises the C18th classical Gibbs building, the C19th Wilkins building and later C19 screen to Kings Parade, both in a gothic revival stylistic idiom.

The quire joinery of Kings College Chapel is arguably one of the most significant assemblages of Jacobean craftsmanship anywhere in Europe and certainly within the UK. The joinery therefore is of the very highest significance. Although every inch of embellished carving is worthy of breath-taking admiration, this carved assemblage seems to form a backdrop to divine worship in the chapel and perhaps does not get the fullest attention that it deserves. The Chapel is a working space and inevitably it is subject to the rigours of such continued use.

Significance of the whole: EXCEPTIONAL

“One of the major monuments of English Medieval architecture. Despite its long building history, the interior of Kings College chapel is a harmonious whole, a supreme achievement of a series of royal masons of the highest calibre” Pevsner: Buildings of England.

STATEMENT OF NEED

The QIR recorded quite a number of straightforward but regrettable losses and missing carved elements, some of which are particularly harmful to the meaning or aesthetic of the exceptional chapel fittings and joinery. There are various splits or damage to the joinery caused by natural shakes in the wood, or thermal movement, or just physical impact damage which need repair. There is also concern over unfixed or loose elements that are vulnerable and therefore should be carefully re-secured. These are superb features, which are in a fragile state and somewhat overlooked by the daily rhythms of Chapel life.

The conservation work of February 2023 has ensured the immediate future stability of around 50 elements; of which many were a high priority and at risk, in terms of potential future damage to both fabric and persons using the quire. Another element of this programme was to thoroughly assess the condition of all the woodwork, review all previous reporting and identify and report on elements that might require future work.

Thus the initial objectives of the QIR recommendations have been fulfilled, it is now shown, by reference to the reports on the very successful practical research undertaken, that there is a need to progressively continue with a programme of well-informed and proportionate conservative treatments and repairs.

SCOPE OF PROPOSED WORKS FOR FACULTY

The accompanying Report and Proposal document by Bainbridge Conservation identifies the conservation work proposed for implementation over the next four-year period, to ensure long-term stability, preserve authenticity and the aesthetic presentation of this internationally significant artefact.

The request for approval includes the following works, to be undertaken throughout the quire joinery. From a conservation risk perspective, the list is ranked in order of treatment priority (highest to lowest), although on the understanding that all would be addressed within the proposed 4-year period, the phasing would be coordinated to minimise disruption to the Chapel calendar and commitments and the need for scaffolding.

In accordance the overarching approach and proven methods, which is to safeguard the historic woodwork through a minimum-intervention approach, if it is found that any elements are in better condition than anticipated, intervention will be limited or omitted accordingly.

1. The cleaning and structural repair of high-level canopies, arcading and cartouches, requiring a temporary fixed scaffold to be erected.
2. Cleaning and structural repairs, with stabilisation to the 30 unfixed elm armorial panels.
3. And some limited re-carving and replacement of losses (some recent), to elements of the 16th century carving where this is relevant to the aesthetic significance of the context and especially to the legibility and meaning of the object.

There is no proposal for any re-finishing of the existing woodwork.

Note for clarity: Whilst there is reference to the potential re-instatement of the 17th century Cornelius Austin panelling (itself detailed in separate report), this relates only to feasibility discussions with regards to the alienated joinery and is not brought forward for consideration by this application.

PROCUREMENT

The selection of a suitable conservator was undertaken in advance of the previous phase of works, with the appointment of Bainbridge Conservation being made following a competitive tender from a shortlist of suitable craftspeople from the ICON Register, with demonstrated previous experience of similar projects of high sensitivity. Bainbridge Conservation will be retained for the further phase of repair to ensure continuity of skill and knowledge, directly overseen by Tristram Bainbridge ACR and the Chapel Architect.

HERITAGE IMPACT

Overall and without question, this programme of work will have no detrimental impact on the exceptional joinery. The works are focussed on removing detriment and risks and thus will have a positive impact.

Risks associated with a programme of this nature have also be recognised and mitigated in a number of ways:

1. The use of small-scale scaffolding, installed with the greatest of care.
2. The initial phase of work in 2023 has allowed understanding to be developed through a programme of practical research – which allows both the regulators (DAC) and the specialist conservator to demonstrate that methods are safe and proven.
3. Having proven these methods in a small-scale initial phase of work, the credentials and skills of the selected conservator have been demonstrated.
4. We have involved a peer-review approach with an external advisor Adrian Smith (Consultant to the Royal Collection Trust) to validate the conservation approach.

In some quarters it might be considered a risk that the modest programme and recommendations for reinstatement of lost features could veer the conservation work into a more 'restorative programme' which might be frowned upon on grounds of philosophy and/or approach. We have taken a very closely considered and rationalised approach to limited reinstatement, with a clear intent. This is not a large part of the proposed works, but we argue that it is justified as set out in the proposal, and will help to remedy the 'detriment' of some of the more disfiguring losses which have come about through accident or defects.

APPENDIX: SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Treatment Report, King's College Chapel Joinery by Bainbridge Conservation, dated 1 June 2023.
- Report and Proposal, King's College Chapel Joinery by Bainbridge Conservation, dated 7 June 2023.