

Detail of the text showing the outline of an individual gold leaf.

Raking light detail showing laying out lines.



Detail of Lady Margaret Dyer's jewelled belt.



Detail of the ornate decoration on the front of Lady Margaret Dyer's dress.

Detail of the jewelled headband on Lady Margaret Dyer.

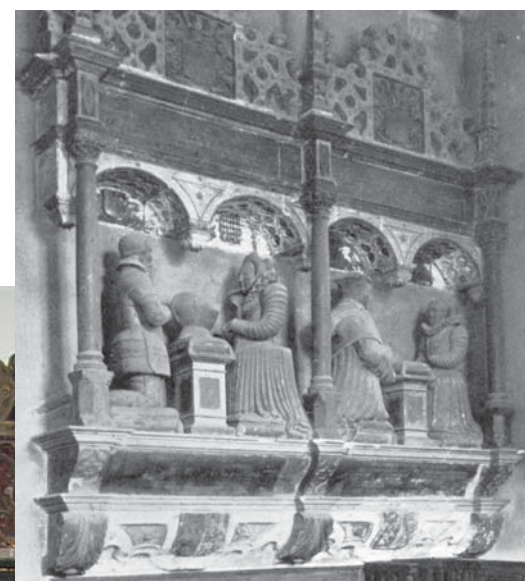


THE DYER MONUMENT AND ITS PAINTED DECORATION

The Dyer monument is an exquisite example of 17th century carving and polychromy of the highest standard. Most monuments of this kind have been subject to numerous restorations during the last two centuries and, as a result, it is rare for a monument to retain so much of its original paint surface.

The monument is constructed from a soft, fine grained limestone which allows intricate details to be carved on the both the figures and their costumes. The ornate collars of both women, the elaborate jewelled headdress of Lady Margaret and the Lord Chancellor's chain on Sir Richard Dyer are particularly impressive. The painted decoration is highly elaborate with finely grained fictive marble on the strapwork and columns and painted purbeck marble for the columns. Similarly, details such as the jewels on the belt and the bodice of the dress of Lady Margaret are beautifully executed. Technical analysis showed that the monument was first painted with a ground of white lead bound in oil. The wide range of pigments, including vermilion, red ochre, yellow and white lead, carbon black, copper resinat and red lake, were applied in multiple layers, with a liberal use of gold leaf. The range and quality of the painting materials, as well as the quality of the painting itself, further emphasises the wealth and importance of the patron.

General view of the Dyer Monument prior to conservation. Note that although the helm between the figures on the left is original, that on the right and the adjacent gauntlets are not.



The earliest known photographic record of the monument c.1926, shows that the significant losses are historic. Later photographs confirm that the deterioration did not continue to a great extent after this date. The wall must have dried out, and the deterioration stabilised prior to this date.

CONSERVATION OF THE MONUMENT

The deterioration of the monument, most evident in the damage to the ornately coffered arches and the lower section, was mainly caused by rainwater infiltration, from damage to the roof and gutters, which probably occurred prior to 1850. Repairs to the church in 1866 rectified the structural damage but also included re-rendering the interior walls with cement. The effect of the cement was to cause the moisture in the walls to evaporate through the more porous stonework of the monument, exacerbating the damage. Photographs taken throughout the 20th century demonstrate that by this period the deterioration had stabilised. By May 2002, when the conservation work was undertaken, the stone surface exposed by paint loss was powdering and the paint bordering these areas was flaking badly. A thick layer of dirt, as well as an historic restorer's varnish further obscured the surface.

The aim of the conservation treatment was to stabilise the damaged stonework and polychromy, and to reintegrate the paint losses, in order to reduce the visual disruption caused by the exposed white ground. Flaking paint was readhered using a weak acrylic dispersion and in areas where the exposed stone surface lacked cohesion, limited consolidation was undertaken with a very dilute acrylic resin. Surface cleaning was undertaken with crumbling conservation sponges and translucent watercolour washes were used to reintegrate the losses. The objective of the reintegration was not to recreate the original or disguise the losses but to reduce the visual impact of the exposed limestone. In conjunction with the work on the surface of the monument a number of minor structural repairs were also carried out. As a result of the conservation treatment, the structure and polychromy of the monument are now relatively stable. However, conservation is not a one off solution and the long term survival of this unusual and important monument depends on long term care and the continued good maintenance of the building. The conservation work was made possible by the generous financial assistance of the Council for the Care of Churches.

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Detail of the soffit above Lady Margaret Dyer, before conservation and after conservation.