

Winchester Great Hall – Stonework Conservation

Property Services



Location:
Winchester, Hampshire

Client:
Hampshire County Council

Value: £157,500

Completed: June 2012

Specialist teams:
HCC Property Services
Conservation Architects
HCC Property Services Building and Management Surveyors;
Main Contractor: John Hobden Ltd
Stonemasons: Chichester Cathedral Works

Winchester Castle dates from the reign of William the Conqueror (1066-1087). By the end of King John's reign in 1216 the castle and its royal palace needed extensive repair. Between 1222 and 1235 the Castle's hall was replaced by the building which stands today. During the English Civil War the Castle was held by the Royalists until its capture by the Parliamentary Forces in 1646. Oliver Cromwell ordered the demolition of the Castle, but the Great Hall was kept as a venue for assemblies and the County Assizes. The Hall was restored in the 1870s, and was used last as a court between 1938 and 1974.

The walls of the Great Hall are constructed in flint and malmstone with Caen stone dressings. Originally these would have been pointed in a lime mortar to allow the walls to 'breathe' - moisture entering the wall can escape through the soft lime mortar joints. During the 1960-70s the elevations were re-pointed with very hard sand and cement mortar. Cement mortars are not porous, shrink as they set and thermally move at a different rate to the soft stones used on the Great Hall. This results in moisture becoming trapped within the walls, which eventually migrates either to the inner face of the walls or out through the masonry leading to accelerated decay of the stonework.

A trial repair was undertaken to test how successfully the cement mortar could be removed without damaging the surrounding stones and to determine the quantity of flintwork that had become covered in mortar. The trials revealed around 40% more flints than previously visible. Mortar samples were prepared and agreed with English Heritage. The entire south elevation was re-pointed and missing flints and stonework were replaced. Damaged and worn stones to the tracery windows were individually replaced and all loose debris removed. All rusty mild steel fixings were removed from the stonework to prevent further damage caused by rust expansion and the stonework was lightly cleaned to remove pollution. The cast iron hoppers and downpipes were carefully repaired by fabricating strengthening members prior to redecorating.

Key Benefits

- Enable the wall to "breathe" to prevent further decay to structural and decorative stonework
- Consolidate loose and damaged stonework to prevent falling masonry
- Prevent water ingress to the inside of the Great Hall damaging decorative plaster
- To make the façade safe and replace all loose flints
- To repair the downpipes to prevent water ingress to the building

Winchester Great Hall is the first and finest of all 13th century halls, with the greatest symbol of medieval mythology, King Arthur's Round Table.

The Great Hall is designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Grade 1 listed building.



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