**KING’S LYNN : WEST DOORS**

St. Nicholas’ Chapel dates from the mid-12th century and is the largest chapel of ease in England. Royal Arms of Richard II on the west face suggest a single re-build from 1380 – 1415, retaining the 13th century tower whose spire was added by G.G. Scott in 1869. Blending elements of Decorative and Perpendicular periods within their stepped surround, the west doors of carved and painted oak form an integral part of the eleven-light window. Their remarkable composition shows that Lynn was no provincial backwater, but a patron of the finest contemporary design in its position at the forefront of international trade and diplomacy.

The doors were monitored for over a decade to choose the best repair option. Analysis found mediaevalpaint under other layers but post-Reformation iconoclasm had damaged their carved elements, whilst trapped water had damaged the woodwork. Seventeen layers survived and though much of the first major colour scheme was lost, enough remained of the second to show a red background with mouldings and carved work in green. Later schemes included white lead, reddish browns and a tarry 20th century layer, so finally we chose to strip them down to a stable 18th C layer, then conserve and repaint using traditional materials.

The doors were cleaned and stabilised under high magnification using air-jet scalpels, de-ionised water, acetone or acrylic mixtures: loose flakes were ironed with hot spatulas. Historic layers are still apparent in the weathered finish, as vital evidence of their historic past. New finishes used lead-based artists’ oil paint and turpentine to prime old timbers, then craftsmen spliced in oak and chestnut timbers to strengthen and make weathertight the original decorative work. Carved oak base panels, inspired by other designs in the Chapel, replaced modern weatherboards that were causing decay. Finally, more tinted paint layers produced the finished work you see today.

Such a bold scheme was not chosen lightly, and many people have given advice and analysis over the years. These include delegates to a Trust conference in 2005, the Hamilton Kerr Institute, Perry Lithgow Partnership, the SPAB and Sally Woodcock ACR FIIC. Delicate paint repairs were done by a team under Tom Organ from Arte Conservation, whilst filigree timber repair and carving was done by experts working with Hugh Harrison. The whole project has been overseen by our appointed architect of long standing, Canon Julian Limentani, and supported throughout by Friends and civic groups from King’s Lynn.

Brian Clark, CCT Regional Conservation Manager 2013.

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