

# Graffiti at St Paul's: the cleaning and repair of the west end of the cathedral, 2003–5

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This article is about archaeological monitoring of several cleaning and refurbishment recording projects at St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London during 2003 and 2004, finishing in early 2005: cleaning of the exterior of the west end, and the taking up and relaying of the west steps, with some repairs. There was also a small amount of monitoring of repairs to the towers and cleaning of the Geometric Stair in the south-west tower. Individually they were small pieces of work and all share the Museum of London site code SWG03.



Fig. 1: the west end of St Paul's from the south side, by T Malton, 1798 (from *Wren Society* vol XVI (1939), plate XVII). This shows the curved west steps and the cast iron railing (not Wren's original design, but the second imposed by the Commissioners) around the statue of Queen Anne (both railing and statue since replaced)

Wren's St Paul's began construction in 1675 and was finished around 1714. The foundations of the west end were dug and constructed in 1688, but the main work on the west front followed the inauguration of the almost-finished cathedral in 1697 (Fig. 1). The construction of the west front was divided between Samuel Fulkes and John Tompson. They each sawed half the marble blocks for the great west door in March 1699, and both set up and polished the marble case of the door in early 1700. Fulkes was paid for much of the work on the west front, including carving 'three whole capitals' at £60 each in June 1704; he was working on the 'great upper portico' in June 1706. A third mason, William Kempster, worked on the portico from 1705. Fulkes did the mason's work laying the keystone for the great west window, and Kempster carved a cherubim's head with wing on the keystone.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1706 Francis Bird was paid for carving the large panel over the west door. This was '16ft broad and 14ft high & the principal figures 18in imboast [in relief]' and had a large Italian moulding round it. He also carved the smaller

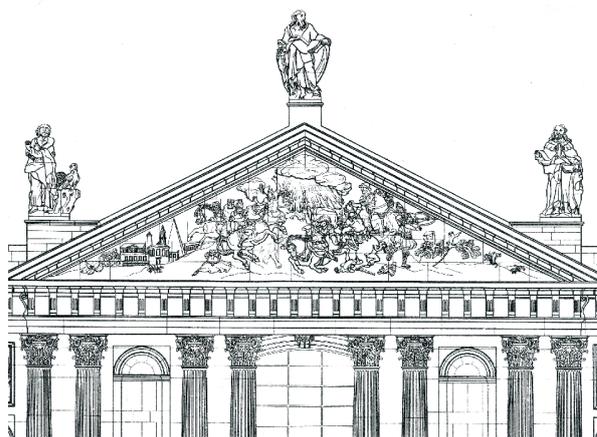


Fig. 2: extract from F E Poley's elevation of the west end, showing Bird's sculpture in the pediment (1927). Examination in 2003 showed that Bird signed the sculpture 'FB' on the pyramid towards the left

panels on either side. In December 1706 Bird was paid £650 for ‘carving the great pediment of the west portico, in length 64ft and in height 17ft, being the history of St Paul’s Conversion, and containing 8 large figures, 6 whereof on horseback, and several of them 2½ft imboast’ (shown as drawn by F E Poley in 1927, Fig. 2). In the present project, the pediment was cleaned but no repairs were necessary. No archaeological recording took place, but the opportunity of taking some photographs close up was taken.

The construction of the towers was initially divided, with Fulkes constructing the north-west tower and Kempster the south-west tower (he took over after the death of Tompson in 1700). Fulkes was paid for the masonry of the north-west tower ‘from the top of the Upper Capitals to the top of the Upper Entablature’ and for vaulting the tower in September 1701, The stage around and above the ‘dyalls’ may have been later, since Fulkes was only paid for it in June 1707. Fulkes was paid for finishing the tower in December



Fig. 3: extract from the photogrammetric survey by Purcell Miller Tritton, showing the main west elevation and sides of the west towers. Such drawings are now produced for all the phases of cleaning at the cathedral, so in time there will be an accurate survey of all its exterior (courtesy Martin Stancliffe and Jane Kennedy of PMT Architects)



Fig. 4: Graffito 2: I Leuch, 1791

1708. The south-west tower has a similar chronology.



Fig. 5: Graffito 5 group: the date seems to be September 19, the year certainly 1776

### The cleaning process in 2003–5

The cleaning of the west front was managed by architects Purcell Miller Tritton under the supervision of the Surveyor, Martin Stancliffe. The cleaning of the west front, which was to include all faces of the two west towers, was preceded by a photogrammetric survey of all the exterior faces (e.g. Fig. 3).

The statues were recorded and conserved; although one or two were weathered, they did not require any substantial treatment.

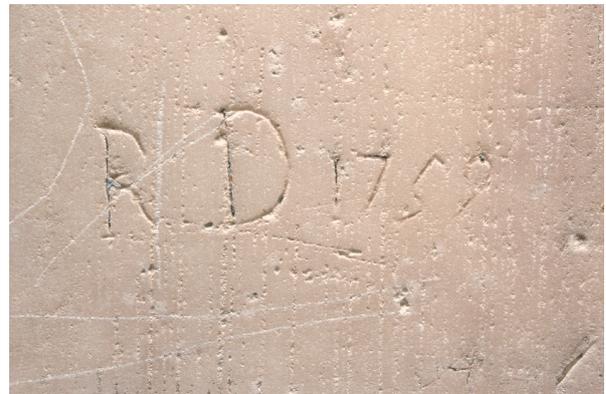


Fig. 6: Graffito 6: RD, 1759

### The graffiti

A significant part of the recording brief was to record by photography, before cleaning took place, a representative selection of the historic graffiti to be seen around the west doors. Naturally these were at a height where they could have been incised by people either standing or

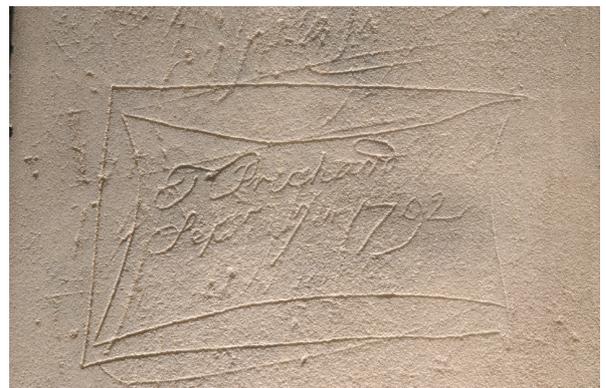


Fig. 7: Graffito 9 group: J Prichard, September 7, 1792

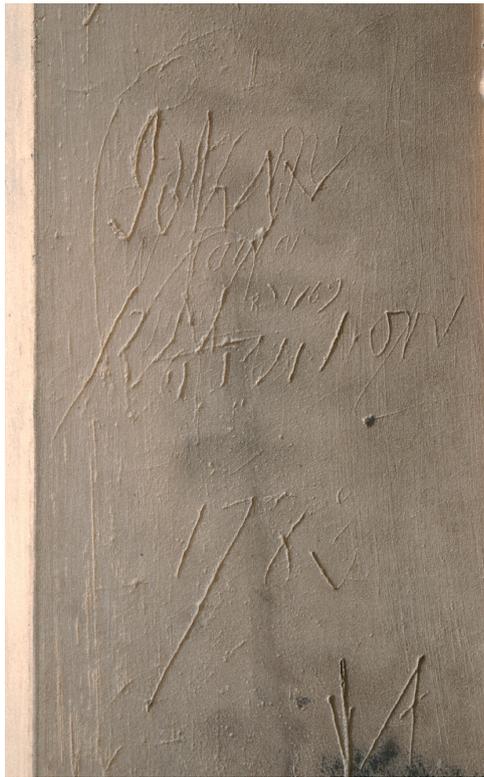


Fig. 8: Graffito 10 group: 1783



Fig. 9: Graffito 11 group: undated

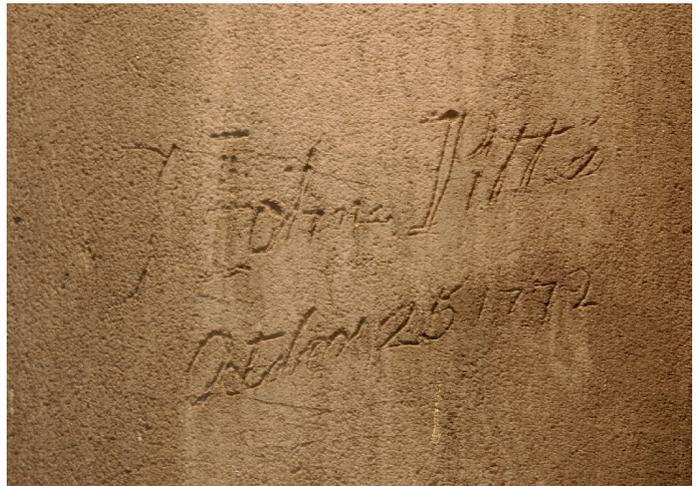


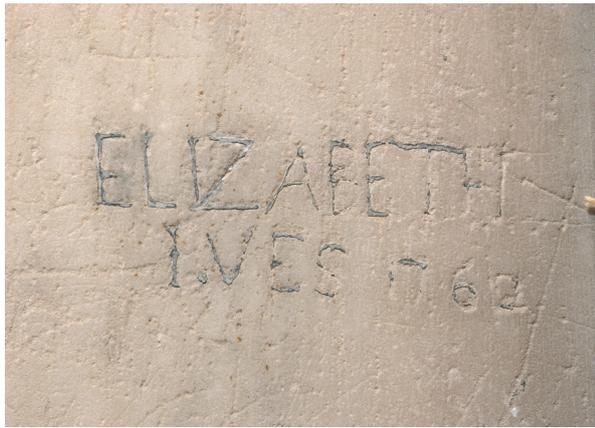
Fig. 10: Graffito 15: John Pitts, October 25, 1772



Fig. 11: Graffito 20: John ?Garie, 1762



Fig. 12: Graffito 22: C Ives, [17]67



**Fig. 13: Graffito 27: Elizabeth Ives, 1762**

perhaps on small temporary supports such as boxes; they were nowhere higher than 2.3m from the floor. The graffiti were photographed in September 2003 just before the cleaning process reached them.

The graffiti were inscribed (and some of them must have taken hours) between 1759 and the 1790s. Besides those shown here, there are many more which are less legible. Perhaps they were left by visitors to the lower portico around the great west door, a questionable tradition which continues today. One can also imagine one or two being left by the crowd of people here for the Thanksgiving Service for the recovery of George III in April 1789, which was recreated for the film *The madness of King George*. So far the perpetrators have not otherwise been traced in documents; they do not seem to have been of the will-making class.

### **The inside of the dome of the south-west tower**

The cleaning and repair project also included inspection of the south-west tower, where one capital was to be renewed. This disclosed some more graffiti inside the cupola of the tower, which has always been exposed to the elements and London's atmosphere (Fig. 14).

Several initials, names and dates were inscribed with white paint on the soot-blackened ashlar of the inside of the dome (which has been left uncleaned again). The two dates are both 1788, indicating that some kind of inspection or repair

was undertaken on the south-west tower in that year, during the long Surveyorship of Robert Mylne (Surveyor 1766–1811). Mylne and successive Surveyors left this area alone; it is normally inaccessible.

### **Relaying and repair of the west steps**

The vault for the west steps began to be constructed in 1708 and continued throughout 1709. The brickwork beneath the steps was laid by Richard Billinghamurst (who also laid the bricks in the dome cone and the nave saucer domes); he was paid for the substructure of the steps in March 1709. Fulkes and Kempster each laid half of the Irish marble steps. The west steps were built with the lower portion having flared, curving sides, as shown in Malton's view (Fig. 1) and other illustrations of the west end after 1700. In 1872 the Surveyor Francis Penrose rebuilt and relaid the steps, changing the design of the lower flight to the present squared form, which he believed was Wren's original intention (it is true there are some drawings from Wren's office which shown the squared form).

By the 1990s the steps were in need of relaying, and handrails suitable for better access were required. The steps (all of Penrose's work) were taken up and relaid, with occasional repairs. This disclosed the brick vault beneath, heavily mortared, which was surveyed by MoLAS. As no further repairs were intended, this was the limit of the archaeological investigation, though brick samples were taken (various small repairs works at the cathedral are providing dated examples of bricks from the years 1675 to 1714). At both ends



**Fig. 14: Graffito 37, within the exposed (and sooted) cupola of the south-west tower, 1788**



**Fig. 15: original line of lower balustrade of west steps: the north-west corner, looking west. The original curved line of the stair branches out from its 19th-century replacement (scale 0.5m)**

of the west steps, the base of the original flared sides could be seen outside the line of the Penrose rebuilding (Fig. 15).

## Conclusions

These recording exercises on the Wren cathedral of 1675–1714 are not only required by modern planning practices, but make us think about the archaeology of a classical or Baroque building: in this case, a cathedral. A large report is in preparation which brings together, for the first time, all the observations and recently excavations in and around the cathedral and in its precinct (now totally obscured by building since 1666); but this will be principally of the archaeology and history of the cathedral and its surroundings up to the destruction of the medieval cathedral in the Great Fire of 1666.<sup>2</sup> In due course, when there is enough material, I hope to publish an archaeological report on the Wren building; both its construction and its use as a church, in the same general ways as one would study a medieval church. For the cathedral of 1714, there are few studies of the archaeology of major buildings of this period such as country houses which might be used as comparisons for the scale of the project. We need to discuss what constitutes the archaeology of a Baroque building. In the meantime, this is a small record of some otherwise anonymous people who spent some of their time standing, and scratching, in the lower portico of St Paul's.

## Acknowledgements

The recording was funded by the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral. The photography is by Andy Chopping and Maggie Cox of MoLAS. Fig. 6 appears by permission of Martin Stancliffe RIBA, the present Surveyor of the Fabric.

1. The Wren building accounts for St Paul's and much other Wren material was published by the Wren Society (WS) in 1922–43; these are from volume 15.

2. J Schofield, in prep *The archaeology of St Paul's Cathedral: survey and excavation up to 2006*.