

HOLDEN CONSERVATION LTD

Kensal Green Cemetery

Conservation Report on the monument to Emma and Alexis Benoît Soyer

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1 Soyer Memorial, Kensal Green Cemetery – before conservation.

Introduction

The Grade II* listed monument is situated in a prominent position on the Northern Avenue, opposite the central gateway (now disused) onto the Harrow Road.

The monument to Emma and Alexis Soyer and was built in 1844 to a design conceived by Alexis Soyer and the figures carved by the Belgian sculptor Pierre Puyenbroeck.

The monument is mainly constructed of Portland stone. The portrait is carved in white marble. A sample of the stone from which the figures are carved was analysed by the geologist Robin Sanderson. The figure of Faith and the two cherubs were determined to have been carved in Beer stone.

There are two ornate letters 'E' and 'S' below the stone palette in bronze. Below this on the plinth remains the outline and fixing holes of where the bronze letters 'TO HER' were fixed.

The bronze cross the figure Faith was holding no longer remains but the bronze fixing on which the cross rested is still visible.

The empty oval recess on the back of the plinth was where the artist's palette and a wreath were placed behind glass.

Extensive remains of paint layers were visible on the sculptures. Samples were analysed by Catherine Hassell. This determined that the red lead paint that could be seen was a red lead primer and that the monument had mainly been painted with stone coloured schemes.

Treatment

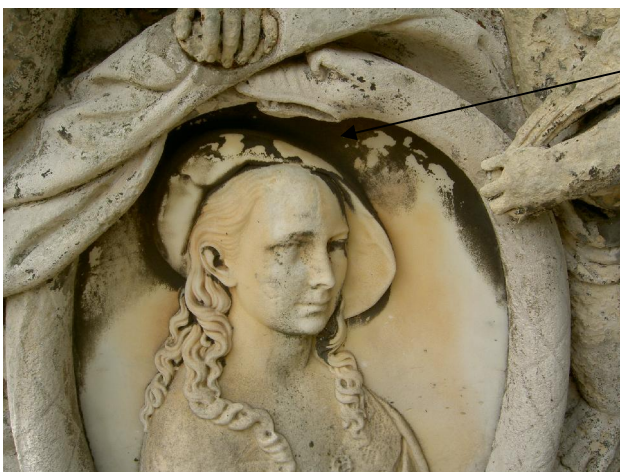
The moss and lichen on the monument were removed by hand using spatulas and soft bristle brushes. The monument was then cleaned with steam at low pressure.

Loose paint flakes were brushed from the surface of the stone.

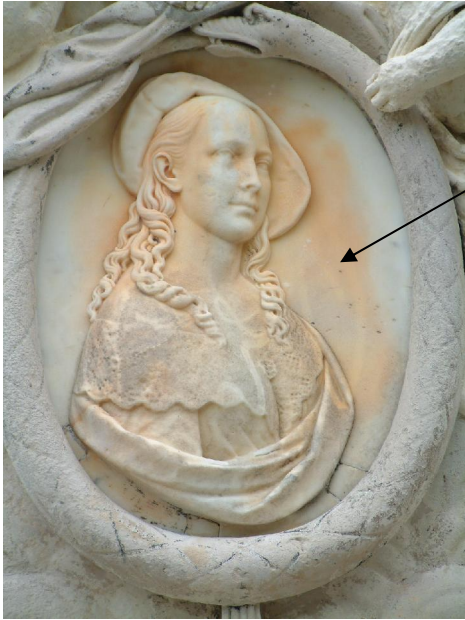


1. The loose paint layers on the stone work.

Three clay poultices of 'Sepiolite' and water with 10% ammonium carbonate were applied to the marble portrait and left over night. The sulphation was removed with bristle and bronze brushes.



2. The sulphation on the marble portrait before poulticing.



3. The marble portrait after poulticing.

The orange staining was not reduced by the ammonium carbonate poultice.

The loose and failed pointing was removed using hand tools and the Portland stone re-pointed in a hydraulic lime mortar to match the stone.

The mortar used was:

- 1 part - St Astier hydraulic lime NHL 3.5
- 1.5 parts – silver sand
- 1.5 parts – Portland stone dust

The failed cement repair to the base of the Faith sculpture was removed using hand tools and re-built in a hydraulic lime mortar. The repair was built up with a coarse backing mortar before a fine top layer of mortar was applied, to match the Beer stone.



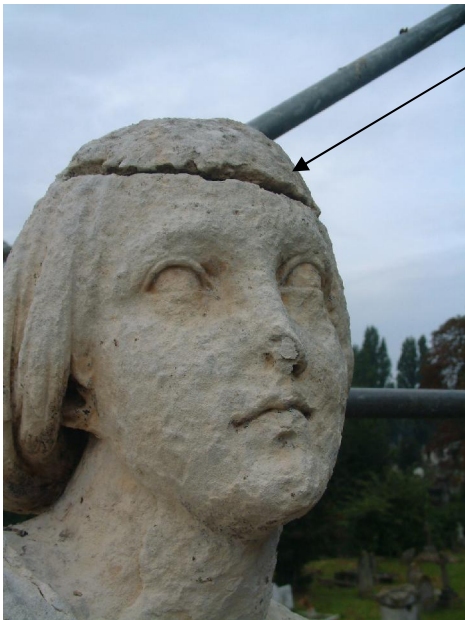
4. The failed cement repair to the base of Faith, before removal.

The loose section on Faith's head was repaired. The old adhesive was cleaned off both sides of the break edges and the piece re-adhered with a 6mm threaded stainless steel stud and Steinkitt polyester resin.

The joint was then filled with a hydraulic lime mortar to match the Beer stone.

The mortar used was:

- 1 part – St Astier hydraulic lime NHL 3.5
- 2 parts – silver sand
- $\frac{3}{4}$ part - Portland stone dust
- $\frac{1}{4}$ part - Bath stone dust

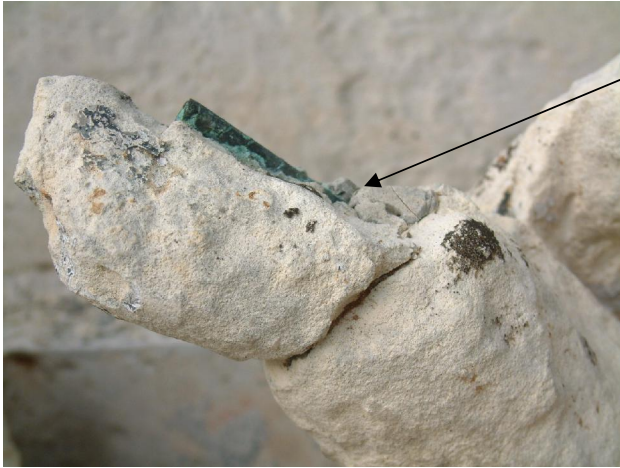


6. The loose section of Faith's head before repair.



7. The finished repair to Faith's head, after two coats of lime wash (lime wash still wet).

The broken pieces of the right side cherub's right hand proper were re-adhered in position. First the remaining bronze dowel and cement were removed using hand tools and a drill.



8. The right side cherub's right hand proper before the bronze dowel and cement were removed.

The sections of the hand were re-adhered using a 6mm threaded stainless steel dowel and Steinkitt polyester resin.

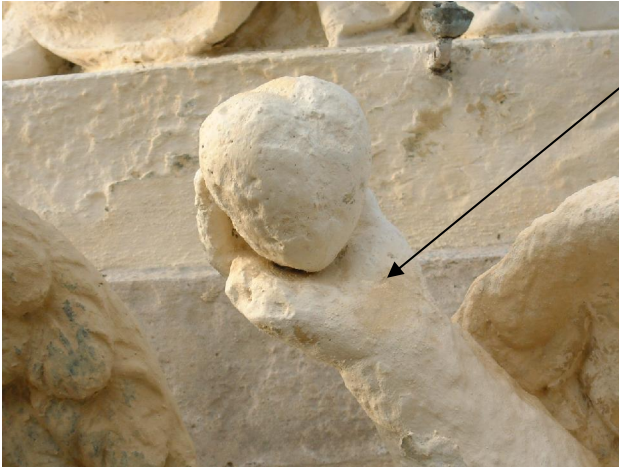


9. The pieces of the right side cherub's right hand proper re-adhered in position.

The missing part of the hand, except for the fingers was built up in hydraulic lime mortar to match the Beer stone.

The mortar used was:

1 part – St Astier hydraulic lime NHL 3.5
2 parts – silver sand
 $\frac{3}{4}$ part - Portland stone dust
 $\frac{1}{4}$ part - Bath stone dust



10. The finished repair to the right side cherub's right hand proper, after 2 coats of lime wash.

Dentistry hydraulic lime mortar repairs were carried out on all water traps, cracks, blistering surfaces and break edges.

The mortar used was:

1 part – St Astier hydraulic lime NHL 3.5
2 parts – silver sand
 $\frac{3}{4}$ part - Portland stone dust
 $\frac{1}{4}$ part - Bath stone dust



11. Detail of a section of Faith's drapery showing the cracked and flaking stone before dentistry mortar repairs were carried out.



12. Detail of a section of Faith's drapery after dentistry mortar repairs and 2 coats of lime wash.

Mortar repairs were also undertaken to partially restore details to the heads of Faith and the cherubs.

The mortar used was:

1 part – St Astier hydraulic lime NHL 3.5
2 parts – silver sand
 $\frac{3}{4}$ part - Portland stone dust
 $\frac{1}{4}$ part - Bath stone dust



13. The deteriorated carved detail on the head of the left side cherub before mortar repairs were carried out.



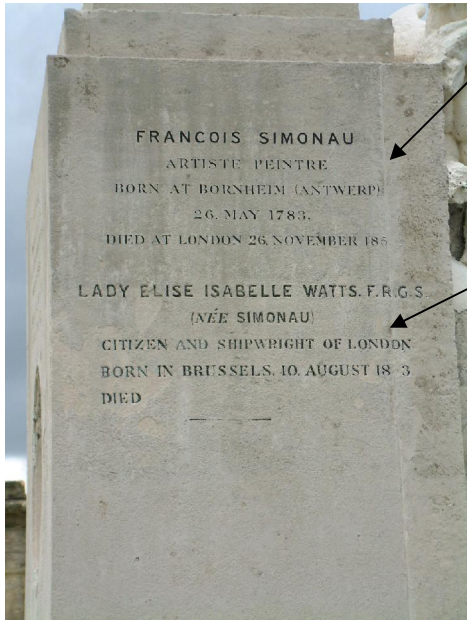
14. The head of the left side cherub after mortar repairs were carried out. The lime wash coat is still wet.



15. Mortar repairs being carried out on the deteriorated carved detail of the right side cherub.

The incised lettering on the upper half of the East side and South (rear) side of the plinth was re-painted in a matt, black oil paint.

Some of the more worn incised letters on the lower half of the East side of the plinth were re-cut with a chisel to enable them to be re-painted. The lettering on the lower half of the East side of the plinth was partially re-painted in a matt, black oil paint to enable the lettering to be legible.



17. The re-painted lettering on the upper half of the East side plinth.

The partially re-painted lettering on the lower half of the East side plinth.

The old paint on the bronze letters 'E' and 'S' was removed with Nitomors and bristle brushes. A coat of microcrystalline wax was then applied to the letters.



18. The bronze letters 'E' and 'S' before the removal of the old paint layers.



19. The bronze letters after paint removal and waxing had been carried out.

Any of the former fixings that would have hindered the attachment of the new Richmond stone limbs were carefully removed with hand tools. The remainder of the former fixings were left in situ so as not to further damage the stonework.

All the missing limbs of the figures were re-carved in Richmond stone as this was found to be the closest available match to the original Beer stone that the figures had been carved from.

The sections re-carved were;

Faith – right hand proper and left arm proper.

Cherub, right side – left wing proper and left leg proper.

Cherub, left side – right wing proper, left leg proper and right arm proper.

The sculptor Simon Smith made up Plasticine models of the limbs before carving them in the Richmond stone.

The new stone limbs were fixed in position with threaded stainless steel dowels and Steinkitt polyester resin. The joints were filled with a hydraulic lime mortar to match the Beer stone.

The mortar used was:

- 1 part – St Astier hydraulic lime NHL 3.5
- 2 parts – silver sand
- $\frac{3}{4}$ part - Portland stone dust
- $\frac{1}{4}$ part - Bath stone dust

A final coat of lime wash was then applied to all of the figures.



20 The completed sculpture of Faith after the final lime wash coating.

The new right arm proper and left hand proper.



21 The completed cherubs after the final lime wash coating.

The new left wing proper and left leg proper.

The new right wing proper, right arm proper and left leg proper.

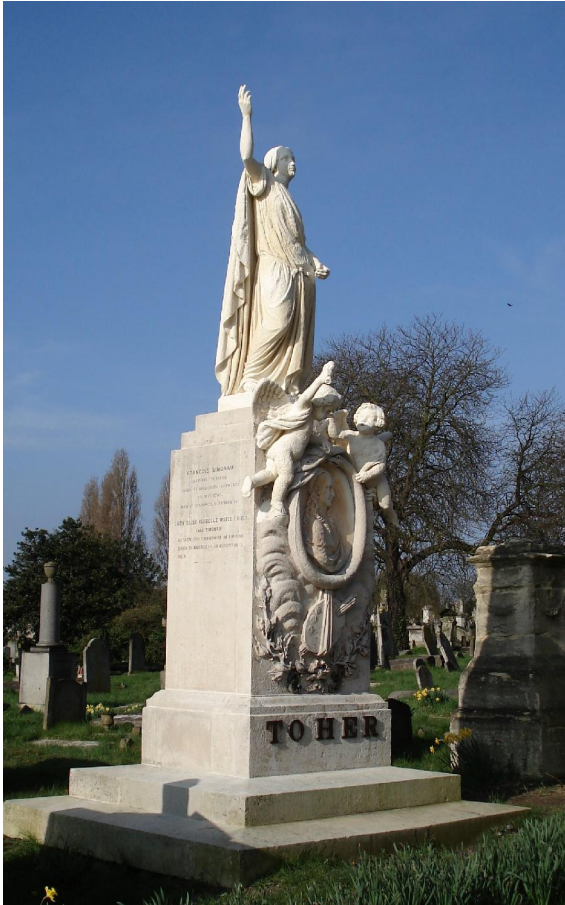
A tracing of the outline of the original position of the missing bronze letters 'TO HER' was taken and from that a new set of bronze letters were cast. The bronze letters were supplied by David Odgers. The new letters were attached in position with stainless steel studs secretly located in the rear of each letter and set into new drilled holes using Steinkitt polyester resin.



22 The outline of the original bronze letters 'TO HER'.



23 The new bronze letters 'TO HER' in position.



24 The completed Soyer Memorial

Maintenance recommendations.

The Memorial will require inspection and maintenance to be carried out.

The good maintenance of the lime coating is crucial to the long term preservation of the carvings.

An on site inspection by a conservator should be made annually for up to the next five years following which a decision on the time required before another inspection should be agreed.

The intention would be to monitor the monument closely for the next five years in order to establish the appropriate time after which the lime coating would need to be re-applied and any other maintenance could be carried out. It is likely that this maintenance will be required in between 3 and 5 years.

The inspection should include;

- Checking the integrity of lime coating;
- Checking the repairs and new sections of carving (listed above) to ensure stability;
- Checking the bronze for corrosion and applying new wax coatings when necessary;
- Checking the marble portrait for further signs of erosion and friability of the surface;
- Checking the pointing for general signs of failure;
- Checking the painted lettering for signs of continuing loss.

The vegetation in close proximity to the memorial should be kept cut back and at least once a year, preferably in autumn before the winter starts, all surfaces of the memorial should be checked to ensure that soil and organic matter is not accumulating as this will provide an environment for plants to colonise the memorial again.

It may be agreed later that a periodic treatment with a biocide will be required to control organic growths (algae, lichen and moss) on the memorial.

Each inspection by a conservator should include a written update on the condition.