

What's the difference between conservation and restoration?

Conservation aims to use the minimum, often reversible, treatments to maintain an item in its current state and to prevent it degrading further, this can mean that conservators, for instance, work on an item's surroundings or environment rather than an item itself. Our Conservators' work will be documented as a reference point so conservators of the future can repeat a treatment if it becomes necessary.

Restoration aims to bring something back to how it was when it was new and so can be very much more 'intrusive' and will involve work only on the item itself.

In the final stages of a Major Repair Area our Conservators will apply a shelter coat to the stones, which protects them from damage due to weather conditions; if water gets into the stone and then freezes it will expand and can start to break the stone apart. The shelter coat also acts as a barrier from air pollution, for example exhaust fumes, and can consolidate areas that may already be damaged, which will extend the life of a stone.

Where the two disciplines come closer together at the Cathedral for the Works Department is in the conservation of monuments that very often have iron pins in them, or are fixed to the wall using iron fixings. Unfortunately iron rusts, not only weakening it, but also making it expand and, sometimes, cracking and/or staining the stone. There is a rolling programme of monument conservation and as work continues, if the iron is failing and causing damage, it is replaced with stainless steel and cracks are filled. Since heating was fitted in the Cathedral the atmosphere has stabilised internally, so many of the wall monuments inside still have iron in them as we only replace it if or when it causes damage.

