

## Project Inspire

### Restoration and Reordering: Ledgerstones

1. We are planning a major restoration and reordering project to meet the current and future needs of the church community. One element of the project is to provide a new limestone paver floor above the existing Victorian tiled floor which is in poor condition. This will enable level access from the north porch to the communion rail, allow a new more effective heating system to be installed and route the cabling and other facilities under the floor.
2. Our archaeologist, Chiz Harward of Urban Archaeology, has reported on investigations<sup>1</sup> we have recently carried out to determine the condition, thickness and bedding of the ledgerstones in the church in order to assess the feasibility of moving the stones to the level of the new, higher, floor or leave in place either buried or providing a clear glass cover.
3. There are three ledgerstones in the existing floor:
  - (i) In the north aisle, there is a limestone (thought to be forest marble<sup>2</sup>) memorial slab commemorating John Townsend and his wife Ellen with their brasses. He died in 1458. On inspection, there may have been brass edgings although these were probably removed some time ago. Drawings suggest that this ledger has been relocated from the nave. Geophysics show no evidence of any burial underneath<sup>3</sup>. The stone is near where the grand piano is located, we try and reduce the risk of potential loading damage. The slab is about 140 mm thick and bedded on sandy gravel. See Photo 1.
  - (ii) In the south aisle, a similar limestone (similarly thought to be forest marble) memorial slab is to the memory of Robert Hitchman who died in 1510. His wife's brass is missing. Drawings show that this ledger has also been relocated from the nave and there is no evidence of any burial underneath. The slab is about 140 mm thick and also bedded on sandy gravel. There is a crack across this ledgerstone located about one third along the stone from the east end; excavation along the side of the crack suggests this is to the full depth of the slab. There is also evidence of repairs being made; this suggests that the crack may possibly have occurred when the slab was placed in this location. The stone is located near the side chapel and subject to light foot traffic (as it has been for many years). See photo 2.
  - (iii) The third, a 17<sup>th</sup> century, ledgerstone is at the west end of the north aisle and has been moved from its original location. An early photograph shows this had previously been set vertically in the sanctuary. This slab is in memory of Edward Bathurst. It is an inscribed polished black marble about 140 mm thick. There are no brasses. See photo 3.

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<sup>1</sup> An archaeological watching brief report, Urban Archaeology, February 2020

<sup>2</sup> Identified by Jeremy Wells. The Forest Marble attributable to the Forest of Wychwood with local quarries at North Leigh and Hanborough (Oxford Stone, W J Arkell 1947

<sup>3</sup> A report on a ground penetrating radar survey for St Lawrence Church, Archaeological Surveys Ltd, September 2018

4. We are looking at three options to place these ledgerstones within the restored floor.
  - Fill above the ledgerstones, with appropriate protection to the brasses and build the floor over the top. This is unlikely to be favoured by the community as these are significant artefacts of the church; There are also potentially significant conservation and monitoring issues from burial of the brasses;
  - Place a thick glass cover at the new floor level over the top of the slabs with appropriate ventilation;
  - Lift the ledgerstones and replace them within the new floor.
5. We sought the advice of Jeremy Wells of Wells Masonry Services who has carried out masonry repairs at St Lawrence over the last 20 years. He advised that it was feasible to remove pieces of stone above the Townsend and Hitchman ledgers to safely remove and relocate the ledgerstones in the proposed new floor.
6. The Townsend ledgerstone: this has been laid adjacent to and inset by about 80mm into a column in the north aisle. To lift this ledgerstone there is a need to remove a piece of stone at the base of the column to allow a vertical lift. The piece of stone can then be replaced. This method is based on the advice from our stonemason. The archaeological investigations show that the stone is bedded on sandy gravel and it would be feasible to excavate under the slab to install lifting straps. The relocation position has not been finalised but we envisage this to be nearby in the north aisle.
7. The Hitchman ledgerstone: this is laid in a similar way to the Townend stone being adjacent to and inset partially under a column in the south aisle. The methodology set out in 6 above applies equally to this ledgerstone. The difficulty here is that the existing stone is fractured, either when it was relocated to the existing position or after ground settlement. From one of the trial pits, it is likely that the crack extends to the full depth of the stone. There is evidence of repair work having been carried out. Our stonemason advised that it would be feasible to repair the ledgerstone, after removal using stainless steel dowels fixed into both halves of stone. While the detailed method needs to be set out and agreed, the stonemason's view is that the repair can be made without detriment to the ledgerstone. The relocation position has not been finalised but we envisage this to be nearby in the south aisle.
8. The Bathurst ledgerstone: this is located in the north west of the church where we are proposing to locate toilets so there is little option but to move the stone. This stone is also bedded on a sandy gravel and it is feasible to lift. The living descendants of Sir Edward Bathurst show an interest in the memorial. We are therefore considering relocation of the ledgerstone to a more prominent position within the north porch or the new entrance lobby.

9. For the Townsend and Hitchman ledgerstones, our initial view on the options set out in paragraph 4 above is that burying the stones loses the opportunity for the church community and visitors to view the ledgerstones and in particular the brasses. Providing a thick glass cover to the two stones will allow them to be seen although there is a concern about the need to prevent any deterioration to the brasses and the long-term sustainability of the solution. As both stones are not in their original positions within the church, we are coming to the view that these should be relocated in alternative positions within the new floor, bearing in mind the need to ensure that the brasses are not subject to foot traffic or loading.
  
10. We have established, on advice from our stonemason, that it is feasible to lift the Bathurst ledgerstone and there is clear space around the stone to do this. The location within the reordered church would be under the proposed toilets so there is little option but to relocate. Again, the stone is not in its original position within the church and there is no significance to its location. Indeed, we can make this a feature in the reordered layout in the north porch or entrance lobby.

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**The Townsend Ledgerstone**





**The Hitchman Ledgerstone**



**The Bathurst Ledgerstone**

