

Conservation

BRINGING THE SPARKLE BACK

Brighton Pavilion's Saloon is restored—just as George IV once styled it

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Turin's Chapel of the Holy Shroud reopens, 21 years after disastrous fire

State-of-the-art restoration project costing €30m brings masterpiece of Baroque architecture back to its former glory

17TH CENTURY

TURIN. The Chapel of the Holy Shroud in Turin was due to reopen on 27 September (as we went to press), 21 years after it was almost entirely destroyed by fire and 28 years after it was closed because a chunk of marble had fallen from a cornice.

A masterpiece of Baroque architecture, designed by the mathematician priest Guarino Guarini, it was commissioned in 1668 by the Savoy ducal family to house its most prestigious possession—the linen cloth believed to have wrapped the body of the dead Christ.

The chapel is raised up behind the high altar of Turin Cathedral and opens into the state rooms of the royal palace, emphasising the importance of the Holy Shroud to the history and

aspirations of the house of Savoy.

The origin of the fire that raged throughout the night of 11 April 1997 remains a mystery. It burned especially fiercely because the chapel, which had just been restored, was still full of wooden scaffolding. A dinner for the then secretary-general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, was being held next door in the palace while firemen struggled to break into the bulletproof case containing the relic, which was rescued undamaged.

The long delay in restoring the chapel began with a lengthy judicial seizure of the site while fruitless attempts were made to find out whom to blame for the fire.

In the absence of architectural drawings or other documents, this was followed by a detailed analysis of the daring

structure of the building, which boasts a self-supporting dome with interlocking marble blocks. There was then a lengthy period of disagreement over how much of the original material to reuse, because after the fire, the floor of the chapel was a metre deep in calcinated marble fragments and semi-molten bronze architectural mouldings.

The decision was finally made to replace 1,150 badly damaged elements and consolidate the remaining 4,000. The quarry at Frabosa in Piedmont, from which the black and grey marble

was originally extracted, was reopened for this purpose.

Further delays were caused by two public displays of the Holy Shroud (in 1998 and 2000) and a legal challenge to Corit, the firm that won the 2009 competition to carry out the work but was fired in 2011, to be replaced by Arcas in 2012.

The restoration work, led by the architect Marina Feroggio, has been a state-of-the-art project in which the damaged fragments have been incorporated and then patinated so that they blend in with the new marble. As Luisa Papotti, the superintendent for archaeology, fine arts and landscape in the Piedmont region, says: "This has not been a rebuilding, but a conservation project." The extraordinarily complex architecture of the chapel stands again without support, relying only on its

Guarino Guarini's dome is extraordinarily complex, standing without support

original engineering by Guarini.

The cost has been more than €30m, of which €28m has come from the ministry of culture and €2.7m from the foundation of the Compagnia di San Paolo.

Visitors will no longer climb up the stairs into the chapel from the cathedral, but will enter it from inside the royal palace, while the Holy Shroud will remain in the cathedral. Enrica Pagella, the director of the royal palace, says: "The reopening of the chapel is a challenge we have [conquered] due to the commitment of many, particularly the specialists in the superintendency, who have never wavered however great the problems they faced."

Barbara Antonetto

"The specialists have never wavered, however great the problems they faced"

Figureheads shipshape and ready to set sail

Warships' statues restored for opening of new Plymouth arts complex

19TH CENTURY

PLYMOUTH. Meet Royal William, also known as "King Billy". At more than four metres tall, he is the largest of five historic ships' figureheads undergoing treatment ahead of their installation at The Box, a new arts and heritage complex that is due to open in Plymouth in 2020. On loan from the city's National Museum of the Royal Navy, the 19th-century wooden statue of William IV, which once adorned the 1830s 120-gun warship HMS Royal William, is among a group of 14 figureheads that will be displayed at the centre.

All of the five statues that are being treated in the London studio of Orbis Conservation, with support of Plymouth City Council Arts and Heritage, require full conservation, consolidation and restoration work. In the 1950s and 1960s, they were coated with glass-reinforced

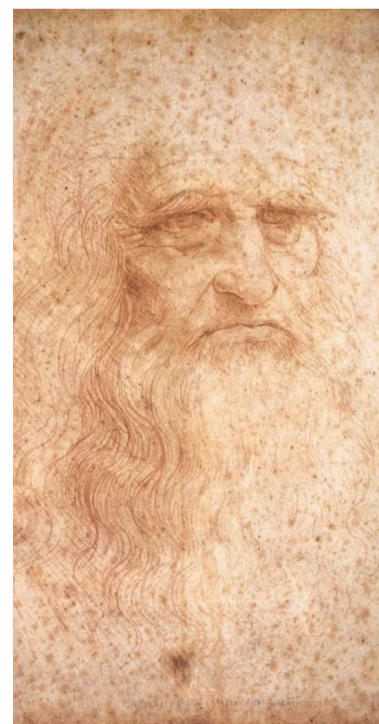


plastic, which not only masked original, finely carved details, but also trapped remaining water in the timber, causing it to shrink and deteriorate.

The team used sonic tomography—a non-invasive technique used to assess the internal structure of trees—to analyse the structural integrity of the timber in areas not easily accessed. The analysis revealed that Topaze, the figurehead from the 1850s warship HMS Topaze, which ferried two Easter Island statues now in London's British Museum to England, was in particularly bad shape as its wooden core was rotten. They were able to remove the rotten core while preserving the outermost timber shell with its original carved detail. Orbis is also working on a colour scheme based on historical research, paint analysis and expert opinions.

Emily Sharpe

A conservator works on "King Billy", the figurehead of the 1830s HMS Royal William



Milan pays homage to Leonardo, 500 years on

MILAN. The Sala delle Asse (Room of Wooden Boards) in Milan's Castello Sforzesco, which boasts an expansive murals scheme by Leonardo da Vinci, is due to reopen next May after a five-year restoration project. The reopening is just one of many events being staged in Milan and throughout Italy to mark the 500th anniversary of Leonardo's death in 2019. Conservators have treated the murals of mulberry trees and vegetation on the room's upper walls and ceiling that Leonardo painted in 1498 for his patron the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza. A multi-media display is being installed in the room, to give visitors a better understanding of the commission. Elsewhere in the castle, the show Leonardo and the Sala delle Asse: between Nature, Art and Science, is due to open in May (until August). And next spring, a pergola with a mulberry tree will be installed in the courtyard in a nod to Leonardo's murals. **E.S.**

A late self-portrait (around 1512) of the Italian master, who died in 1519