

Tijou Screen Conservation and Holding Repairs

NHIG Bursary student placement at Hampton Court Palace

By Bethan Griffiths & Tracy Simmons

‘An inspired start to the course’ was how student Alex Coode described the first work placement at Hampton Court Palace on the NHIG Heritage Blacksmiths Bursary programme and given the stature of the ironwork within this notable heritage environment who would argue? Taking into account the sensitivity of the site it is a mark of the enthusiasm of its custodians, Historic Royal Palaces, that they are positively exploring the potential for doing the same for our second, and last, year of students in 2012.

HRP have been involved with the bursary programme since early on in the planning and funding application stages and Adrian Phillips, their Surveyor of the Fabric, said:

‘As custodians of an extensive portfolio of historic ironwork, including Jean Tijou’s magnificent screen for William and Mary’s gardens at Hampton Court Palace, Historic Royal Palaces are delighted to be in a position of being able to help and support the NHIG’s Heritage Blacksmith Bursary with the Heritage Lottery Fund Skills for the Future programme.

We are very much aware of the skills gap and the lack of formal standards and we fully support the specific aims of the programme to enable access to advanced education and training for blacksmiths. We are committed to a long term programme of conservation and restoration work to both the large quantity of park and garden railings at Hampton Court. These are extraordinary heritage assets which we have long recognised can provide a unique opportunity for learning and advancing skills development in this craft and so the aims and objectives of NHIG and Historic Royal Palaces are very well aligned. With a long term programme and investment in our heritage ironwork planned, we anticipate that our partnership in this initiative will develop with further support in a variety of ways over the coming years.’



The fixings holding this leafwork overthrow were failing and were removed for safety and repair by Alex Coode.



By working together NHIG and HRP were able to establish a work placement for the entire group of eight Bursary students on the Tijou Screen as part of their advanced learning curriculum. They worked under the supervision of Hall Conservation Ltd, the appointed conservators to the Tijou Screen, at a ratio of 1:4 for four weeks as part of the overall eight week conservation work programme.

Under the strict guidance of Hall Conservation our students learned about the first and most essential requirement on any conservation project, to carefully inspect and record the object, in this case, twelve large and very complex screens. Surveying and recording something of the scale and complexity of the Tijou Screens is painstaking and demanding, so it was a new and rigid discipline to most of the students who were more used to hands on practical work.

As part of the recording process the screens were photographed in detail, here David Johnston holds up an information sheet that identifies the image.

A key objective of this project was to involve all the students in the process of working out the practical methodology of the work required. As with any conservation survey there is a general rule to guide the work but, as each project is different, no precise instructions. This project gave the students the opportunity to work as a team and contribute to creating an individual system that would be effective and consistent. Having worked together to devise a strategy, it then had to be put in practice, reviewed as a team and revised slightly on occasion.

As the first phase of the conservation of the Screens the survey took almost the whole of the placement time, but has given the students a thorough grounding in observation, recording and research. However, it wasn't all passive inspection and recording, many elements had to be removed, tagged and stored so that hidden sections could be cleaned and condition assessed for appropriate treatment. There was time for all the students to be involved in some reconstructive repair, but unfortunately, not enough time for them to follow through on all the different aspects of treatment and reassembly.....maybe something for next years students!



Simon Doyle removes one of the crowns with failing fixings.

Project Background

The twelve panels of elaborate wrought iron were designed by Jean Tijou in 1690 probably to stand in the Great Fountain Garden. On the completion of William III's Privy Garden in 1702, the panels were taken from Tijou's workshop on Hampton Court Green and erected where they stand today. In 1731 the panels were removed to the Pavilion Terrace, further away from the palace and along the Barge Walk. In 1861 they were removed to the new Victoria and Albert Museum, where they underwent extensive repair and probably replacement. They were returned to this position in 1901

Our current programme of conservation and restoration is only the latest of many undertaken over the three centuries to preserve this unique and important ironwork. Even though many components have been replaced over generations, each element is removed, recorded, cleaned and restored before being replaced.. In 1702 the panels and rails were painted grey and were later seen to have been gilded. This finish has been reproduced as faithfully as possible in previous restoration projects.



Jo Adkins removing paint to expose hidden corrosion.

Why this project?

The Tijou Screen appears to be in a period of accelerating decay with much rust spotting, plinth scaling and rust streaking. Whilst this is certainly true, a significant factor in its recent unsatisfactory appearance was the collection of water mobilised dust and dirt, where dust having settled and washed through from the adjacent gravel paths had left unsightly streaking. The thorough programme of cleaning, oiling, waxing and spot painting, which followed the survey work the NHIG students assisted with, has significantly enhanced the appearance and should improve the longevity of the ironwork. The first phase of a prioritised programme of repair and stabilisation has also been implemented. This regime will be repeated on an annual basis prior to the onset of winter to help to prolong the period between major repair and redecoration cycles.

MORE INFORMATION on the programme set up and course visit the bursaries page at www.nhig.org.uk

2012:13 Bursary Application deadline 31st January 2012