

Title Partial Conservation of a Stone Head of Edward III
from Waltham Abbey, Essex AM 776982

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Date 2 March 1979

Abstract The treatment of the painted head of a stone statue provisionally identified as Edward III. The object was found during excavations by A Havercroft in 1977 in the Chapter House of the Abbey of the Holy Cross (Waltham Abbey) at Waltham Abbey, Essex.

Keywords Stone, statue, paint, polychrome, gilding mediaeval, conservation, photographs, drawings, Laboratory Report 2781.

THIS REPORT IS LEVEL III

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Introduction

The head was discovered in 1977 in the course of excavations carried out by Adrian Havercroft in the Chapter House the Abbey of the Holy Cross (Waltham Abbey) at Waltham Abbey in Essex. It was found with a number of other stone fragments, including painted carved toes probably from another statue, in a sarcophagus under the floor of the Chapter House, its site number is CH 110. It has been provisionally identified by Mr S Rigold as having individual traits associated with portraits of Edward III and was probably carved c. 1370.

1. Description

The head is approximately 342 mm high and 280 mm wide. It is carved from Reigate Stone, a calcareous greensand commonly used at Waltham Abbey. The face has suffered considerable damage on its right side but even so it is evident that the surface was originally entirely covered with paint. The skin is painted pink, the hair moustache, beard and crown gold, and the cap inside the crown red. Samples of paint have been taken and await analysis. There is probably more than one layer of paint and it is adhering very lightly in places. The stone appears to be salty.

2. Examination and Treatment

No attempt was made to clean the head on site; it was wrapped in polythene and sent in to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. When it was unwrapped it was photographed [Plate I] and preliminary examination carried out. There was a great amount of earth adhering to the left side of the face and considerable damage to its right side, the eyes and the nose. There was a great deal of paint left but this was covered with a fine network of roots which were lying on the surface of the paint. Each groove in the surface had its own root and these were adhering to the paint very strongly. It was initially thought best to keep the head damp during treatment both to prevent the earth/mud from setting like concrete and also to prevent the paint from flaking off for it was considered likely that the medium used with the pigments might have been animal glue which could shrink severely on drying out. In the event it was not possible to keep it damp. The area of surface exposed for cleaning dried out rapidly and any attempt to spray the surface resulted in small particles of soil flowing onto patches already cleaned, especially the grooves. Also, salts started to appear on the surface if an area did dry out. After the bulk of the earth had been removed, the stone was allowed to dry out slowly while a careful watch was kept on it. Even though the paint was found to be very soluble in warm water it proved necessary to use IMS and warm water to remove as much mud as possible. It was not possible to remove all the mud as it appears to have entered into the surface of the paint, and both paint and mud come off together sometimes exposing a brighter layer of paint underneath. There is a patch on top of the red cap where this has happened. It had been proposed to use a dilute solution of polyvinyl acetate in acetone to consolidate the paint but it was then decided that the head would be going to the British Museum. Mr H Barker (Keeper of Conservation) and Mr S Baker (Chief Conservation Officer - Stone) inspected the head and said that they had facilities for impregnating the stone with polyethylene glycol 6000 (PEG 6000). As a result of this a 15% solution of PEG 6000 in distilled water was used to consolidate the paint; optimistically, it would also fill any gaps between the paint and the stone. No attempt was made to remove excess PEG 6000 from the surface as the British Museum treatment will only cover the surface with PEG 6000 again. For this reason also no final finishing touches were attempted.

3. Conclusion

The head has been cleaned enough to permit it to be photographed [Plate II] and, drawn, [Plate III]. It is a pity that more surface dirt could not be removed but each method tried, including gentle scraping, removed paint as well. It is possible that there may be a superficial layer of varnish, put on to protect the paint, to which the dirt is sticking. If this is so, the varnish is now part of the top layer of paint and it was thought best to leave it alone.

Appendix I

Photographic Record

	<u>Before Treatment</u>	<u>After Treatment</u>
B/W Photographs	WA 38, 39, 40	WA 54, 58
Colour Photographs	WA(c) 1,2,3	WA (c) 6
Colour Transparencies (35 mm)	5342 - 5346	5810, 5819

Appendix II

Photographs and Illustrations.

Photographs - E Lawler, F Taylor.

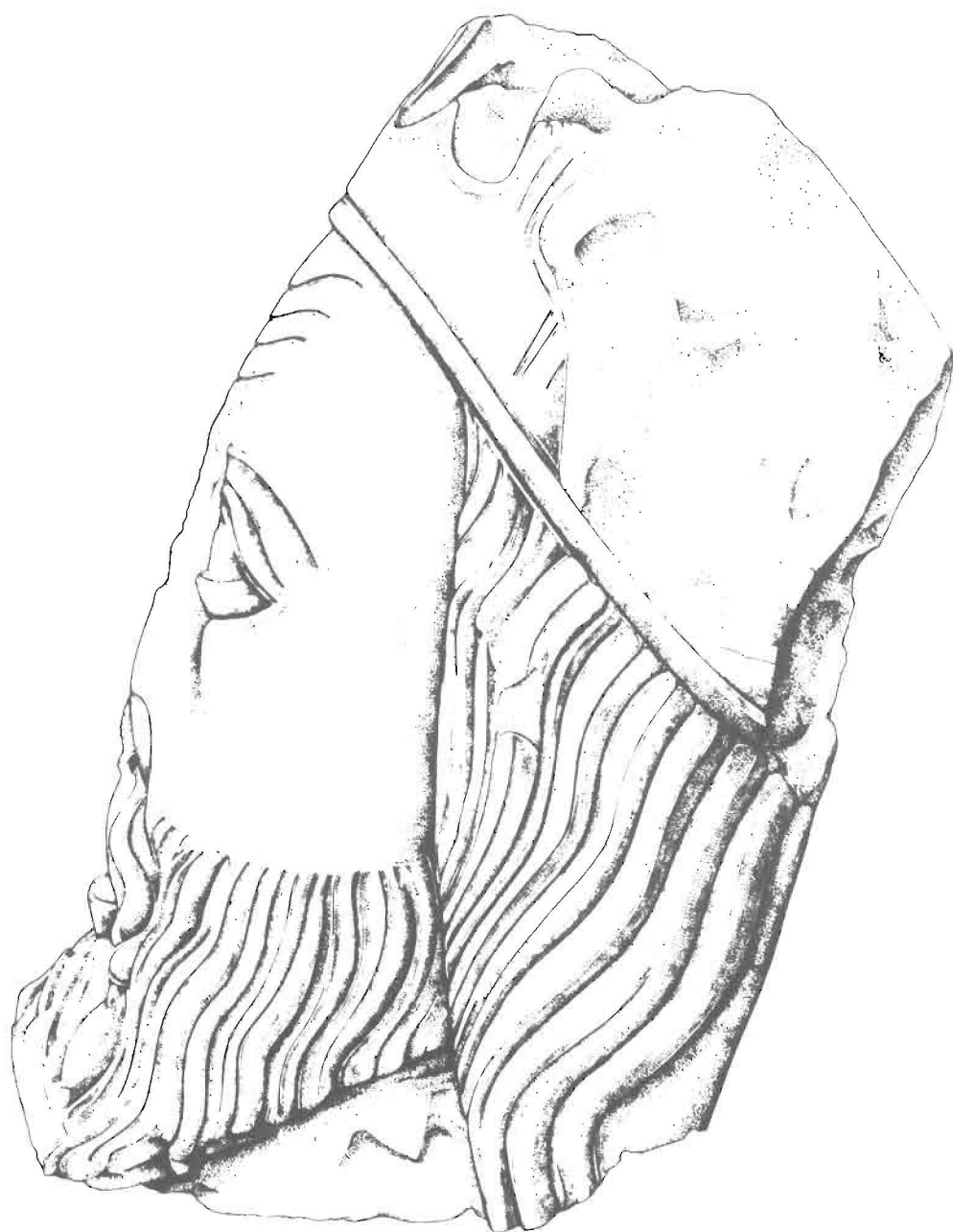
Illustrations - Margaret Tremayne.

Before Treatment



After Treatment





Waltham Abbey: Chapter House.

