



The Insurance Institute of London
Visit to Plowden & Smith Limited

June 2014

Introduction and overview of the company given by Kevin Smith – Managing Director

Plowden & Smith Limited are the largest fine art and antique conservation and restoration company in the United Kingdom. Established in 1966 by Anna Plowden and Peter Smith, the company has expanded over the years to incorporate a wealth of specialisations.

The company is a member of the Institute of Conservation (ICON) and employs a number of specialist ICON accredited conservators. Due to the ongoing developments in the field of conservation and restoration, our staff are committed to continued professional development to keep abreast with the latest research, ensuring high quality conservation and restoration treatments and service to our customers.

Our all-encompassing service has established our reputation as an internationally recognised company, leading in the field of conservation and restoration and mount making and exhibition installation.

Tour of the Workshop given by Sarah Giles – Associate Director and Luke Paton – Client Services

Object Highlights

Anglo-Indian Ivory Cabinet on stand

The cabinet came into Plowden & Smith for restoration. It was in relatively good condition; however it was rather dirty, there were some areas of missing decoration and there were loose and cracked elements.

The cabinet was cleaned overall, vulnerable areas were consolidated and new sections were made using camel bone to replace the missing ivory areas. Camel bone has a similar appearance to ivory and is available in long lengths. The company has a stock of old ivory, but the client decided to use bone to avoid complications if the piece were to be exported after sale.



Once new bone sections had been cut and shaped to fit the losses, the detail had to be engraved in the surface to match the original decoration.

The ivory panels on the doors were quite badly cracked and a decision was made to replace the carcass of the doors so the ivory could be laid onto the new doors and the splits closed up which would give a better aesthetic result. The doors had previously suffered poor restoration and therefore this action was deemed most appropriate.

The treatment took approximately 400 hours of painstaking work in order to complete the cabinet to a showroom condition.



After restoration with new door carcasses coloured to match original



After Restoration



Queen Anne Gilded Wood Mirror

The mirror had localised losses caused by friable gilding. Areas of bare wood were visible. Delegates were shown how the gilding process is carried out using gold in loose leaf form. The fragile areas of gilding were consolidated to make the surface safe, large losses were filled, small losses were toned in and the fills were gilded and toned to blend in with the overall finish.



Studio Pottery Terracotta Vessel - Before

This relatively contemporary terracotta artwork had recently been damaged during transit. Four pieces had broken off the main body of the vessel.

The break edges were consolidated to add stability, the broken sections were then bonded back into position and the repair lines were filled and retouched using acrylic paints to disguise the restoration.

The restoration is barely visible to the naked eye. The materials used are reversible and if required at some point in the future, they can be removed with little or no detrimental effect to the artwork.

Many objects pass through the workshop, that have damaged as a result of poor handling during transportation. It is important to use trained professionals to pack and ship objects.



After



Malachite base – Before



Malachite base – After

This important object was used for years as a prop in Hollywood films. The metal base covered in malachite had numerous losses and poor repairs. The piece had cosmetic repairs that whilst acceptable from a distance did not stand up to close scrutiny.

In order to carry out a repair to a high standard, the old repairs were removed, the surface cleaned and new malachite was cut and thinned down and adhered into position. The cutting and polishing of the malachite was extremely time consuming. Small sections of malachite were cut to fit and polished before being put into position to preserve the finish of the original stone. The stone and metals department worked together on the project to create a very satisfactory end result.

In Summary

The above items give a glimpse into the variety of work undertaken by Plowden & Smith. The staff have expertise in many areas including furniture, metalwork, stonework, ceramics, paintings, paper, contemporary art, decorative arts, textiles, conservation framing, mount making and exhibition work. This variety and breadth of knowledge of our staff means that we offer an invaluable service to insurance companies as we are able to deal with whole collections following water, fire and transit damage.