

Here is a quick report on the external works to the outside of The Bell, now that the scaffold is down.

Sally Strachey's team did a wonderful job on the re-pointing of the gable-end, hacking out the crumbling cement mortar and replacing it with carefully mixed lime mortar. There was a little piecing-in to do on the garden side, and a small area was reinforced with stainless-steel ties before the re-pointing.

The exposed stonework on the main facade was cleaned with super-heated, high-pressure steam, then repointed in parts before being given three coats of lime-based shelter-coat, which is a bit like a thick limewash. Sally arrived on site to help adjust the final colour of it, and this was mixed to give a warmish and welcoming feel, but avoiding being what Sally described as 'gingerbread house'. Shelter-coating is an extremely efficient and simple way to protect and enhance exposed stonework, and it's maintenance is very cheap and simple too, with a fresh application every five or so years if needed.

The black-painted plinth that runs along the extension was also steam-cleaned by S.S.H.C. and then it was comprehensively re-pointed by Columba Strachey whilst he acted as banksman for work being carried out on the temporary tower.

Matthew White came back to restore the paintwork he did around twenty years ago, but this time he used nothing but Farrow and Ball paint on the woodwork and masonry, and ordinary masonry paint on the black plinth with black Hammerite on all of the metalwork.

The colour chosen for the woodwork has been a little contentious, with half of the comments being negative and the other half positive. What Farrow and Ball paint call 'Eating Room Red' is in fact an old Victorian recipe which was commonly used for urban public houses, along with the similar 'Ox Blood', which is a little browner. I like it, but then I chose it.

After the woodwork was painted, I noticed - for the first time - that there are traces of very early paint behind the down-pipe beside the front door, and this paint is *exactly* the same colour as the Eating Room Red. In the early to mid-19th century, the whole of the lower facade was painted this colour, which must have been very striking indeed!

A new sign was commissioned by me for the gable end, and this is made of vinyl lettering and backing on a sheet of laminated aluminium, so should be pretty tough with low to no maintenance.

The hanging bell sign on the front which was made by me and Caspar Taylor almost a year ago, was taken down, re-polished, re-sealed and repositioned to be closer to the front door.

Both signs are now illuminated with custom LED spots and down-lights, and the total wattage for these is 12, making them extremely cheap to run, but giving out as much light as tungsten equivalents. They are said to have a running life of 50,000 hours, so maintenance should be very light as well.

Other work carried out directly by The Bell but under S.S.H.C.'s auspices included the renewal of the bargeboard and restoration of the gutter to the extension, the renovation of eight windows to the main facade and some minor repairs to the roof and chimney-stacks.

The main roof appears to be in very good condition from the outside, but the stacks will need some re-building in a year or two. This could be done when the rear of the pub is scaffolded in what may be phase two of the external works, but the re-pointing and flaunching done by Kerry should keep them in one piece until then.

The old chimney stack to the building which is now Bath Aqua Glass, butts up right against the one belonging to The Bell. This is all that remains of the 18th century building which was 'The New Cornwell Brewery' (The Bell's original address was '1 Cornwell') after it received a direct hit in WW2 (?). You can still see the fire-places in the stack where the house was built up against what used to be the free-standing inn of the present pub.

Technically, any work to this stack should really be done by the owner, so when it is time to re-point and repair The Bell's stacks, it should be done with the cooperation of the landlord of next door.

A lot of very interesting historical things have cropped up during these works - not least the uncovering of a very old painted sign relating to the stabling facilities and brewery that was once run by The Bell Inn, when it received coaches, horses and travelers.

It also seems that the existing frontage to the building was simply tacked onto the front of a much older structure as a skin, sometime around 1740. This explains the thickness of the front wall, and how the facade does not correspond to the dating of the small casement windows to the rear and side, which look to be from the turn of the 17th century. It is quite possible that there

has been an inn catering for travelers on this site for much longer than the earliest records of 1704 would suggest.

I have borrowed some specialist endoscopic cameras from a Bell regular, and I have taken some footage of the cavity between the old front and the new, as well as up both chimneys. I am currently waiting for this footage to 'come back from the chemist', but when it does I will try to analyse it as far as possible to see if any sense can be made of it.

I will put all of this and other photos (including maps and documents) on a disc for The Bell, and maybe we could use it for some more historical research on this wonderful old pub - the only surviving dedicated coaching-inn in Bath, and one which successfully competed with and out-lived over 50 other pubs in Walcot Street over a period of 300 years! Here's to another 300.

Stephen Bushell.