

ELIZABETHAN GARDEN OBELISKS, KENILWORTH CASTLE, WARWICKSHIRE

Chroma Conservation Ltd. are happy to present our recently completed project for English Heritage in the beautifully reimagined Elizabethan Gardens at Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire.

The castle was founded in the 1120's during the Norman conquest of England and was one of the most formidable Medieval Lake fortresses in the country.

We were extremely lucky with the weather in August through to September 2023 whilst we carried out the restoration of the recreated obelisks in the shadow of the magnificent red sandstone castle ruins.

The over five-metre-high obelisks are made of green oak but were painted to simulate the precious stone Egyptian Porphyry, as written testament from 1575 states,

and they formed part of the Italianate gardens which were the first of their kind in England, created by Sir Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, to impress Queen Elizabeth I.

He had also turned the Castle into a fashionable Renaissance palace where the Queen had an extended visit.





As the obelisks stood in their exposed quadrantal position within the recreated gardens of 2009 they had suffered from the ravages of strong UV light and other elemental damage causing some rot in the wood and making the original paint fade and flake back to bare wood in places. The Chroma Conservation team have attended to wood replacement and repairs; extensive decorative preparation; base painting and the specialist faux porphyry paint finish and varnish. This was achieved by hand mixing a rich red underglaze which, when dry, had off white, red and reddish black glazes applied by using the decorative technique known as Spattering.

By using a short stick to strike the loaded paint brush against we created the diffused speckled Porphyry effect. Once these layers had dried, we applied a satin UV light resistant varnish to provide a long lasting protective sacrificial layer.

It was an enormously enjoyable project made even more so by the input from head gardener Phillip Corral, his enthusiastic team and interesting engagement with members of the visiting public.

The unique and rich history of this incredible monument is completely captivating and well worth a visit.

'Live here, good Queen, live here; you are amongst your friends.

Their comfort comes when you approach, and when you part it ends.'

Farewell to Elizabeth I at the end of her visit to Kenilworth Castle in 1575, by George Gascoigne

Ryan-John Wilson, MFA
Chroma Conservation Ltd



CONSERVING OUR GARDENS

We're restoring Kenilworth's wooden obelisks.

The Elizabethan garden at Kenilworth is a recreation of the garden built by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, for Elizabeth I's visit in 1575. It's based on a contemporary description of the garden written by Robert Langham, a court official. This is how he described the obelisks:

'A square pilaster rising pyramidically fifteen feet high. Symmetrically pierced through from a foot beneath to two feet of the top; whereupon, for a capital, an orb of ten inches thick... hewn out of hard porphyry'

Porphyry is a rare and valuable purple marble from Egypt. It's more likely that the obelisks were made of wood and painted to look like porphyry, as the obelisks in the garden are today.

We now need to fill the wood where it has split and repaint the porphyry effect to make sure this illusion can be enjoyed for years to come.





Images: The obelisks before restoration.

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