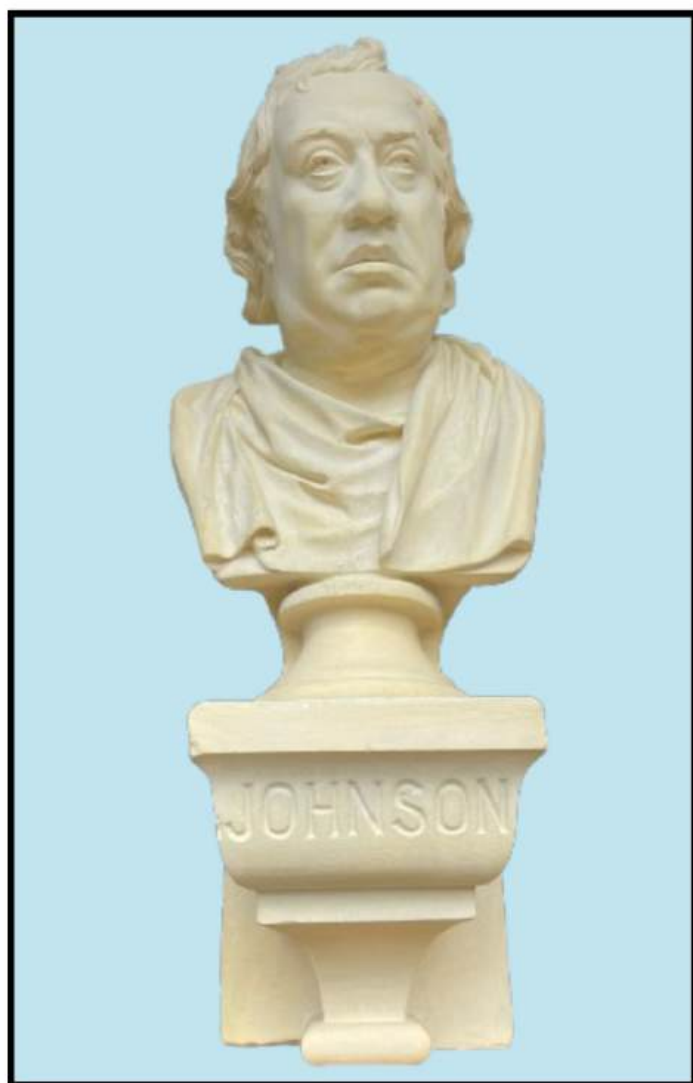


'THE JOHNSON'S HEAD': UNVEILING CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2024



'THE JOHNSON'S HEAD'

John Winterton

Today we celebrate the return to Lichfield of a tribute to Samuel Johnson still remembered by many, and long known as 'The Johnson's Head'; but what is its story?

In 1810, a bookselling and printing business was established on Tamworth Street, Lichfield, by Thomas George Lomax (1783-1873); shortly afterwards, it moved to the corner of Bird Street and Market Street. Lomax had a strong interest in Samuel Johnson; in around 1821, he placed on the front of his shop a bust of Johnson, and subsequently described it as being 'at the sign of The Johnson's Head'.

Thomas Lomax's business flourished, and he himself became an important local figure; in 1832, he was elected Lichfield's Senior Bailiff (equivalent to the modern position of Mayor). After his death, the firm passed to his youngest son, Alfred Charles Lomax, who, like his father, was a great admirer of Samuel Johnson. In December 1884, to mark the centenary of Johnson's death, Alfred Lomax held a Johnson exhibition in his shop, and on the front of the building installed a new bust of Johnson to replace the old one, which may have become damaged.

In 1901, Alfred Lomax retired from the business; it was continued by others, under the name of 'Lomax's Successors', until 1969. When the shop closed, the 1884 bust of Johnson was removed from its front, leaving a ghostly silhouette on the brickwork as a reminder of its former presence.



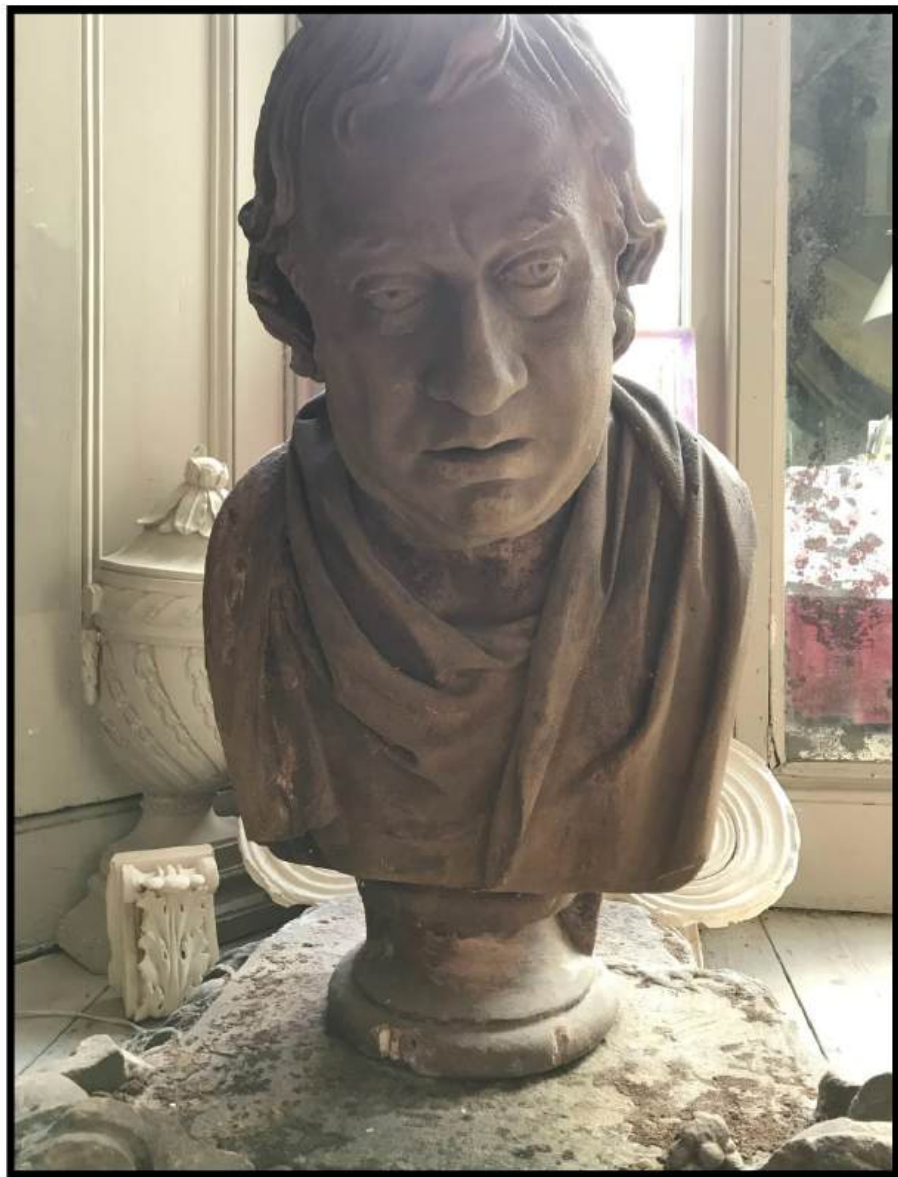
The Lomax building and 'The Johnson's Head' in the 1890s.

The 1884 bust was sold at auction in 2017; it was purchased by Peter Hone, who offered to donate it to Lichfield. The Johnson Society corresponded with Mr Hone to finalise the details of his offer; Lichfield City Council then took the lead on the practical arrangements, such as securing the necessary permissions for the bust's reinstatement on the old Lomax building (currently owned by The George Hotel, and tenanted by Viking E-Cigs).

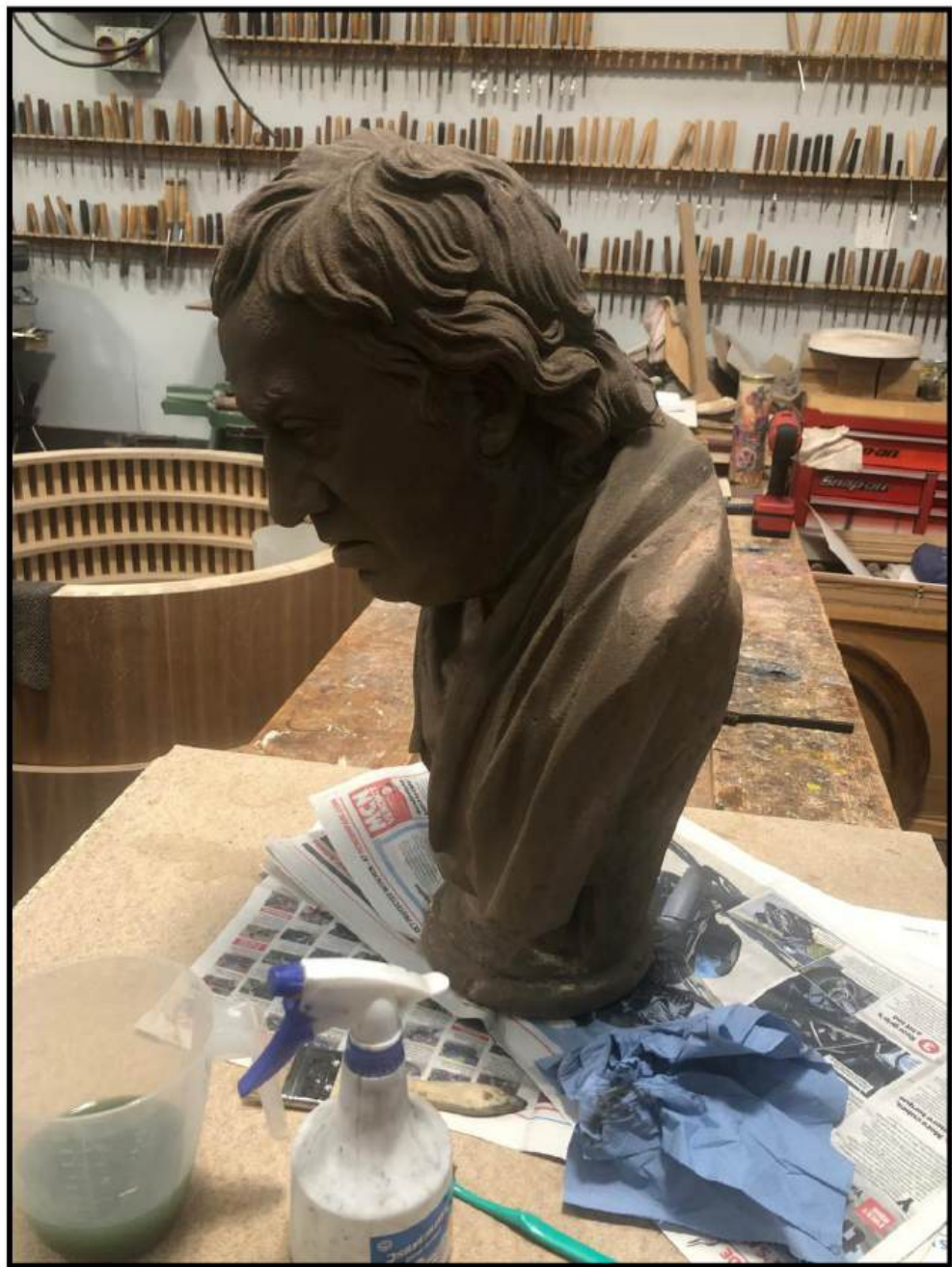
The bust required extensive restoration and specialist installation, which was carried out by Jones Carving, Messenger BCR, Brownhill Hayward Brown Chartered Architects, Hibberd Consulting Engineers (of Lichfield), and Green Power Plant Hire – all of whom donated their time to the project, which was supported by Lichfield City Council.

To help cover the costs of reinstalling the bust, Jono Oates (of Jono's Tourism) launched a crowdfunding campaign, which received donations from The Johnson Society, Viking E-Cigs and members of the public; Mr Oates himself also made a separate contribution.

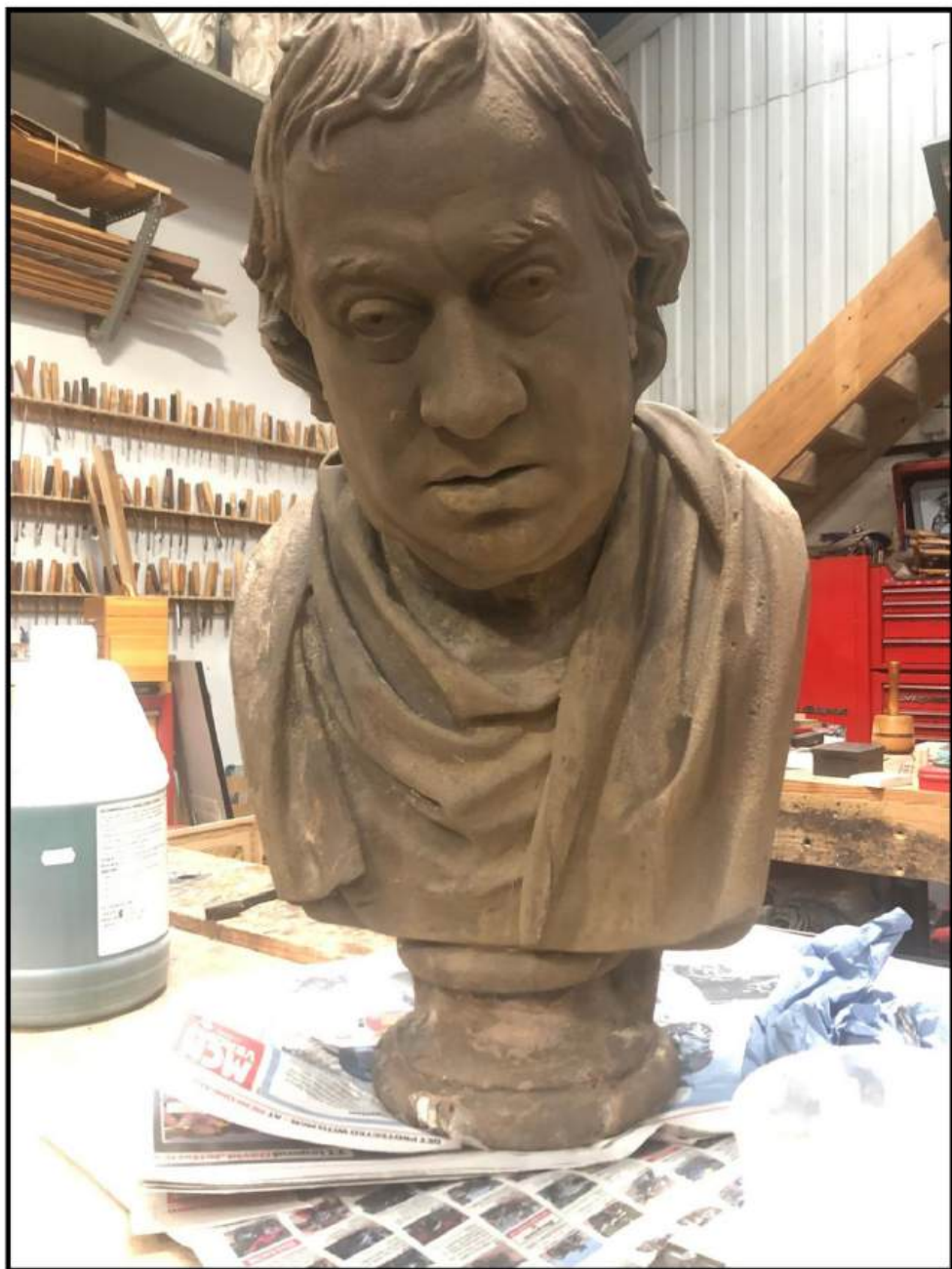
As can be seen, the bust's return has involved many people, who have generously given their time and resources to accomplish this. Thanks are due to all whose efforts have culminated in today's unveiling of 'The Johnson's Head', now restored to its rightful place after an absence of 55 years.



The bust before restoration.



The following restoration photography is courtesy of Jones Carving.



Initial washdown and assessment.



Removal of sand-based mortar to reveal the extent of the original repairs and damage.





Replacement of the bust's plinth while retaining the original sleeve.

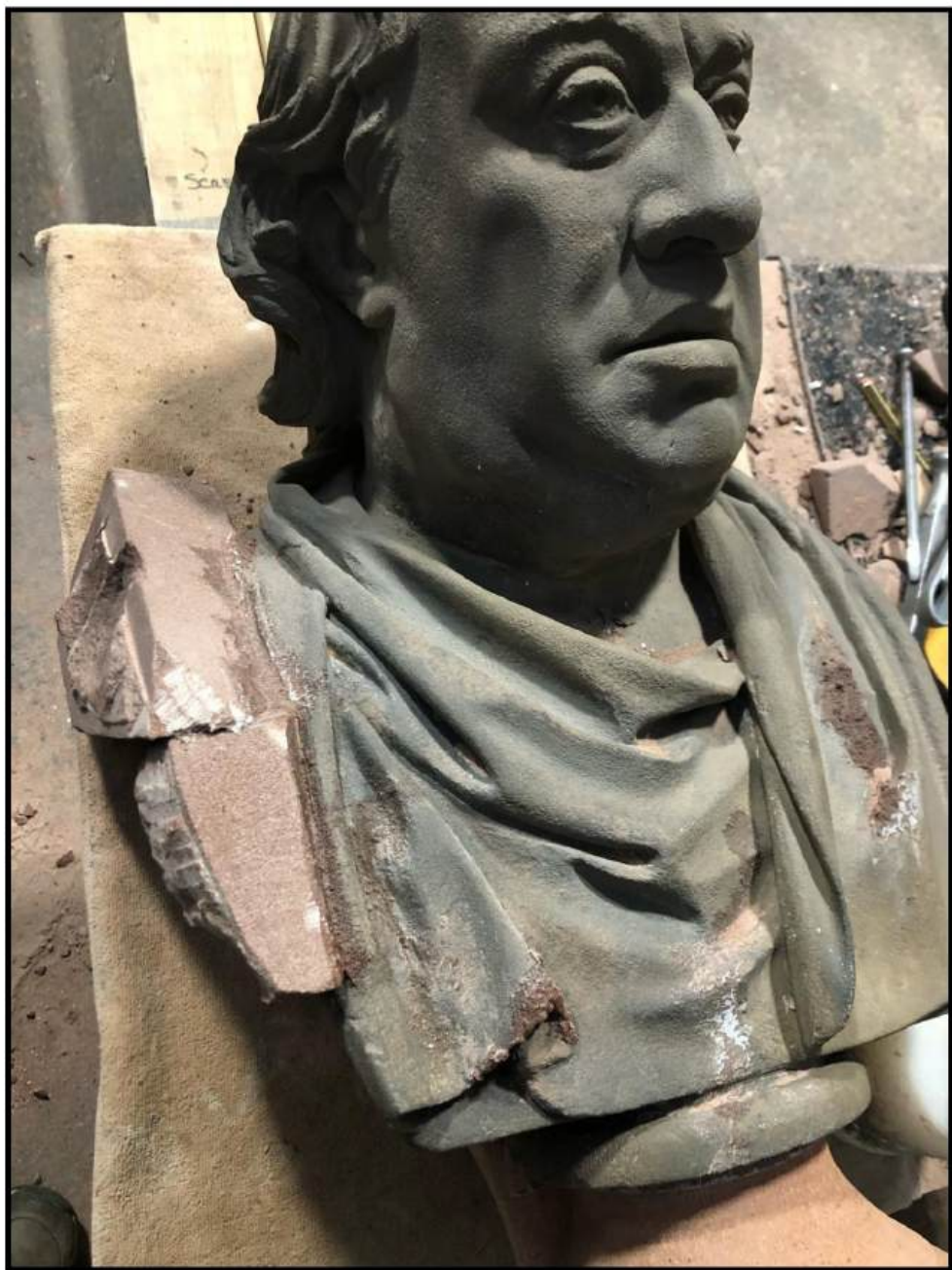


Replacement of the lower back section of stone and recarving.

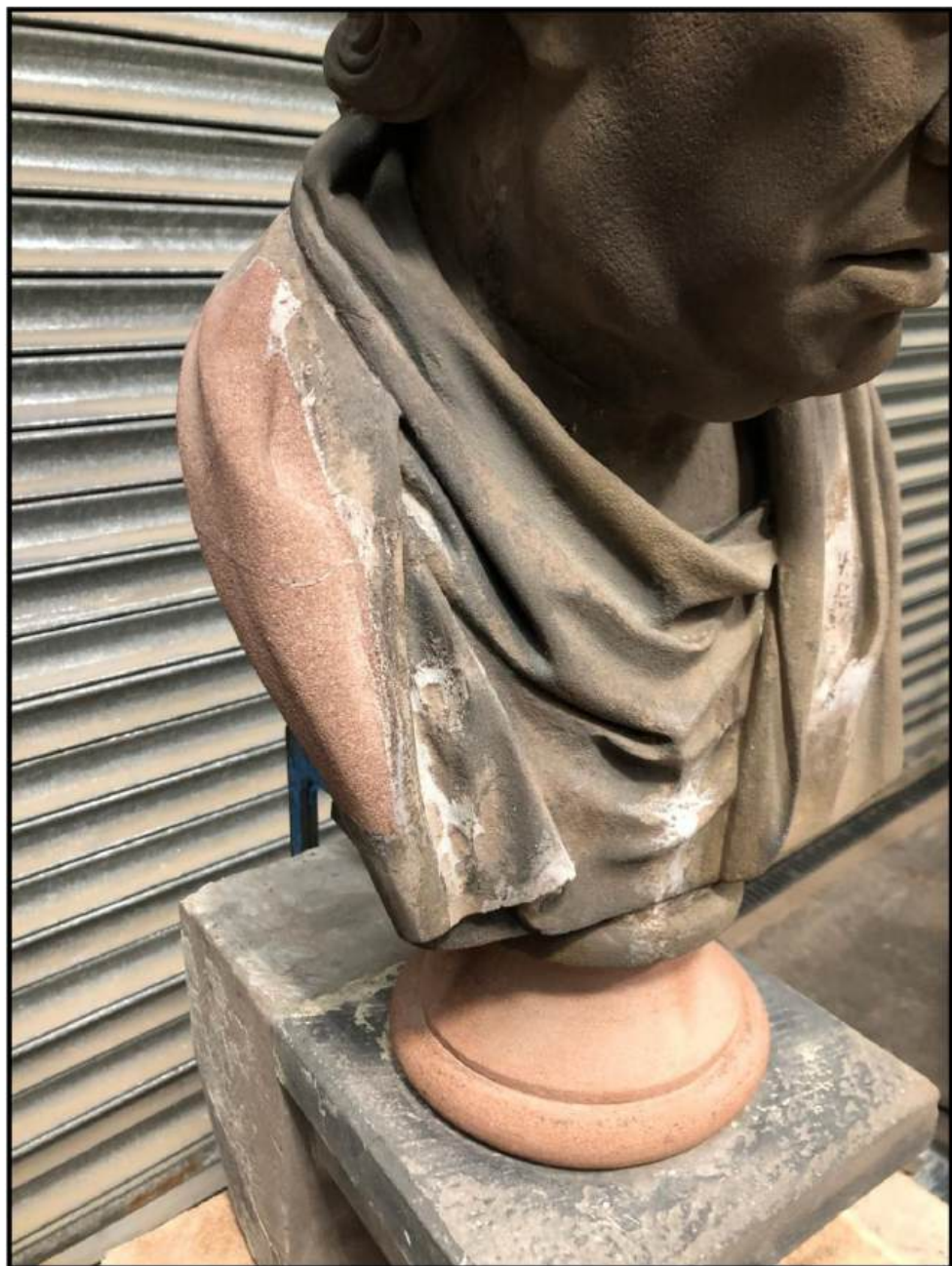


Assessment of damage to the shoulder section of the bust.



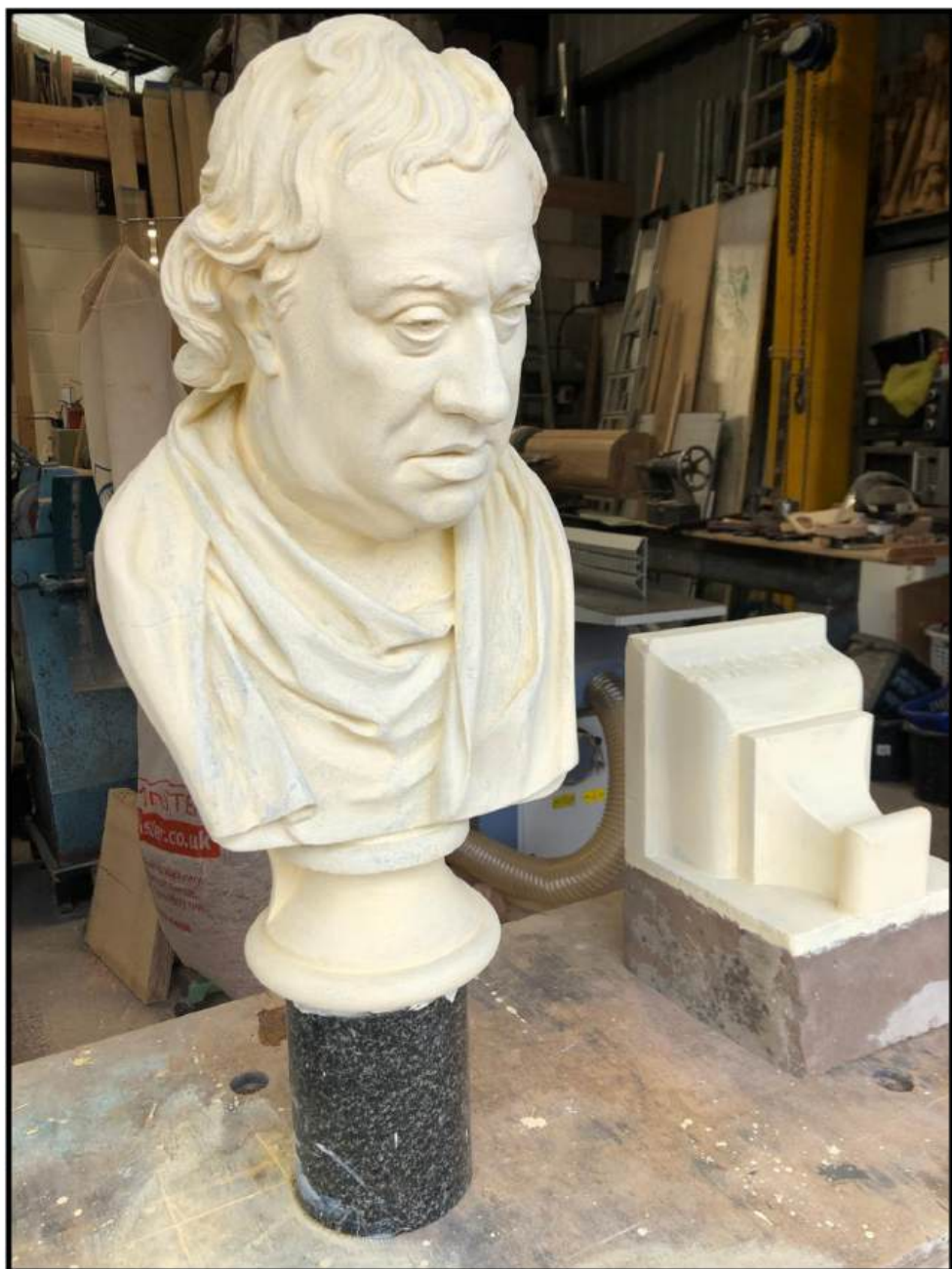


Fitting of new stone to the shoulder and recarving.





Repairs to the corbel stone.



Limewashing stage.



Completed works.





Lichfield City Council would like to thank Peter Hone, Jones Carving, Messenger BCR, Brownhill Hayward Brown Chartered Architects, Hibberd Consulting Engineers (of Lichfield), Green Power Plant Hire, The Johnson Society, Jono Oates, The George Hotel, Viking E-Cigs, Joanne Wilson, and everyone who donated and gave their support to reinstate the 'Johnson's Head' bust.

