

RUINED OR RESTORED?

HERITAGE IRONWORK IS AT REAL RISK
DUE TO WELL-INTENTIONED BUT INAPPROPRIATE WORK



It does not take an expert to detect the difference between the scroll on the left, fabricated and arc-welded by an unqualified worker, and the scroll on the right, forged and fire-welded by an expert blacksmith.

Unfortunately it is not as simple as asking three different metalwork contractors to give a quote!

Some metalworkers lack the right skills or knowledge to carry out good conservation, and inappropriate modern workshop techniques can destroy heritage value. By contrast, sensitive skilful craftsmanship and a knowledge of best conservation practice will enhance and bring heritage ironwork back to life. Here is some guidance on how historic ironwork can be restored, not ruined.

SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications are essential in any project to define the scope and standard of work required from contractors. Without a detailed specification and schedule of works, contractors are free to choose their own standards and to decide what to include in their quote. This means that tenders will not be comparable, historic ironwork will be at risk of poor standards of work, and contract conflict may arise. For further information see NHIG Conservation Principles for Heritage Forged & Cast Ironwork*.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Heritage ironwork was made by craftsmen so you need to understand the methods and techniques that were used originally. Traditionally made ironwork is most commonly the product of the blacksmith whose skills and techniques are different from those used by other types of metal fabricators. If you are looking for information on how to tell if ironwork has been traditionally made or fabricated then see NHIG Forged vs Fabricated*.

Heritage ironwork is a skilled and specialist area of conservation which requires a conservation blacksmith. If you want to know if your blacksmith is qualified to do conservation work then see NHIG Commissioning Conservation Work from Blacksmiths*.

CONSERVATION

It is the duty of all professionals and practitioners to promote and adopt good conservation practice. Conservation principles are well-established in heritage conservation generally, and NHIG has prepared guidance specifically for historic metalwork, see NHIG Conservation Principles for Heritage Forged & Cast Ironwork*.

Still in doubt about how to ensure your ironwork is restored rather than ruined? Then simply get in touch with our office: info@nhig.org.uk or phone 07503 764 712.

Acknowledgements:

Author: Bethan Griffiths

Photos: The Ironwork Studio

The National Heritage Ironwork Group (NHIG) was established in 2009 to raise awareness and understanding of heritage ironwork in the historic environment. We promote high standards of care, offer advice, run courses, and aim to inspire a new generation to develop specialist conservation skills. All heritage ironwork, forged and cast, is an integral part of the historic environment, both in terms of functional parts and decorative elements. We aim to help you recognise the importance of and care for your ironwork to safeguard it for future generations.

* Documents available as downloads from <https://nhig.org.uk/resources/>