

PEOPLE'S HISTORY MUSEUM
TEXTILE CONSERVATION STUDIO
CONSERVATION REPORT



OWNING INSTITUTION NAME: St Leonards Church Downham

OBJECT NAME / IDENTIFICATION: Benevolent Society Banner

DATE OF TREATMENT: 21/04/2017

CONSERVATOR: Jenny van Enckevort

CONSERVATION NUMBER: TCSOC119

MAKER: Skerrett, Bury

DIMENSIONS: H 289 cm x W 212 cm

DESCRIPTION:



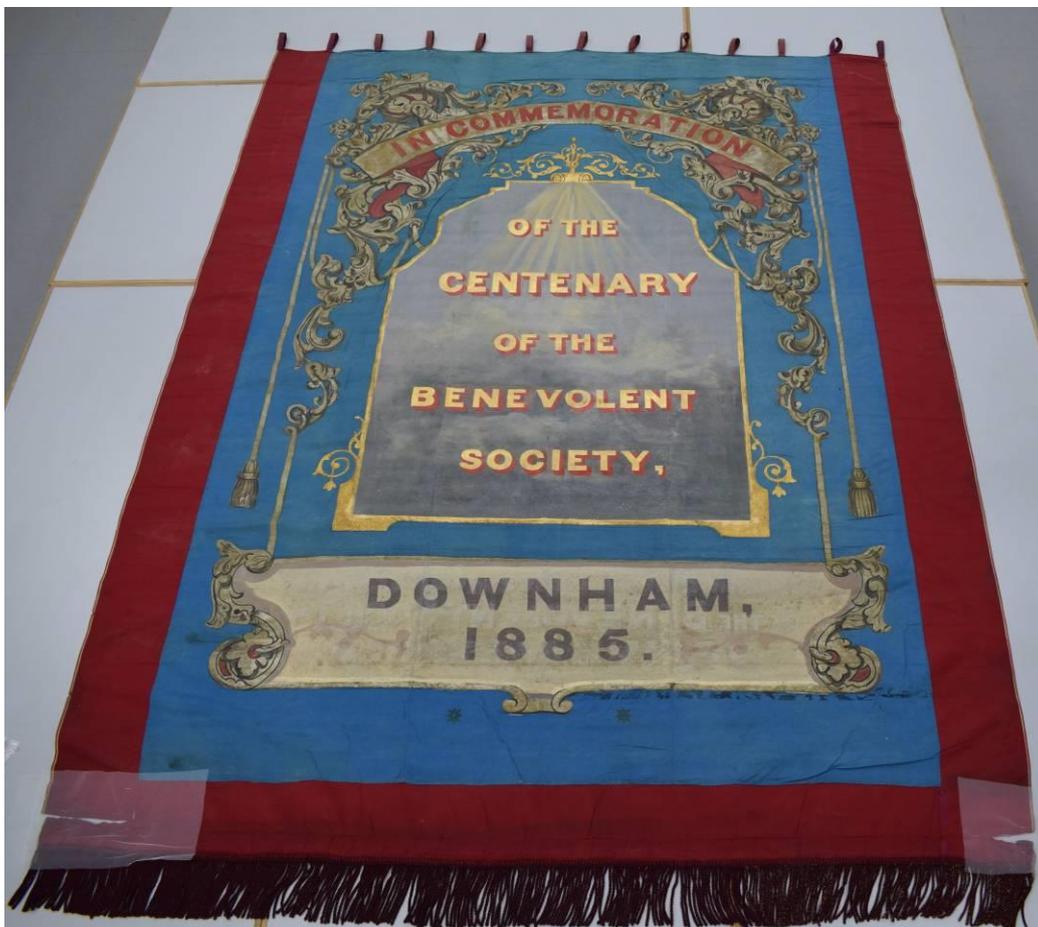
Benevolent Society banner face side before conservation

Double sided painted banner constructed from a single layer of blue rep-woven silk with red rep-woven silk borders. All stitching is done by hand. The central piece of silk is made from three vertical panels, each a loom width with selvages at both sides, approximately 58cm wide. The panels are overlapped at the join and seamed together with two lines of running stitch in blue silk

thread (approximately 3 stitches per cm). The banner is suspended from 13 red wool pole loops each measuring 2cm wide. They are stitched to the banner quite roughly with two lines of running stitch in brown linen thread and threaded through a silver painted wooden pole (4.4cm diameter) with brass end caps and screw eyes through which a length of pale red cotton cord is threaded. Seven of the pole loops are nailed onto the pole to secure the banner.

The borders run down each side and a section the width of the blue silk is inserted at the lower edge. The vertical borders have a white/cream selvedge stripe on the outer edge; this is not present on the lower border. The borders are joined to the blue silk with two lines of running stitch, one in blue thread to make the join and another in purple thread to secure the outer selvedge on the reverse side. The lower border is stitched in the same way but with an additional line of running stitch 4.5cm from the hem to make a channel to accommodate the lower wooden pole which is 3cm diameter untreated wood with brass cuffs and screw in eyes at either end. Beneath the lower pole sits a heavy dark red fringe made from a cotton core wrapped in silk, the lengths of fringe measure 13.5cm. A length of pale red cotton cord is knotted through both eyes on the pole ends; these were probably used as a form of guide tape.

The paint appears to be oil-based with an unknown binder, the painted area sounds slightly crackly when moved and is very thinly applied. The gold areas are still very bright and the silver areas are quite tarnished but still sparkle under magnification. It is likely that a high percentage of metal was used for both.



Benevolent Society banner reverse side before conservation with temporary net patches to support the splits at the lower border

Image face:

The main panel forms a rectangular shape with a stepped arch at the top edge and is framed in gold with gold scroll detail at the centre top and lower corners. The image depicts the story of The Good Samaritan from the New Testament Luke 10:23-37 and reflects the message the Benevolent Society wanted to portray, of compassion and generosity regardless of social class. The painting

bears an uncanny resemblance to a print by German artist Siegfried Detlev Bendixen in a bible printed by Edward Glover in the 1870's. During examination a ghost image was discovered behind the head of the good Samaritan which looks very similar to the poles of the camels saddle in Bendixens work (see detail below), it is possible that Skerrett originally drew from this image and then altered the composition later to remove the camel and replace it with a donkey.



Print by Siegfried Detlev Bendixen on the left and the image from the Downham banner on the right

The painting is well executed with particular attention paid to the folds in the garments of both figures. As with the Bendixen work, the landscape is worked quite softly so it recedes into the background. Above the main panel, decorative silver mantling fills the top section of the banner and curls from the silver upper text scroll which reads 'Go thou and do likewise', worked in red uppercase letters. A text panel of red, edged with silver bears the inscription 'In commemoration of the Centenary of the Benevolent Society Downham 1885' this is worked in uppercase gold letters with subtle dark red shadows. Two gold stars are painted either side of the central curl beneath the lower text scroll. The banner makers name is painted in the lower right of the main panel.



Details showing the artists signature left and the ghost of under-painting right

Image reverse:

The reverse side features almost identical silver mantling as on the face side, the text scroll in this case reads 'In commemoration' the central panel is made out in blue and grey depicting a cloudy sky with rays of light extending down from the centre of the top edge. The panel is framed with

gold and bears the inscription 'On Commemoration of the Benevolent Society' in gold uppercase lettering with red shadows. Below on a separate panel is 'Downham 1885' worked in brown lettering on a cream ground and subtle fawn vines curling in from the sides. Silver mantling similar to the opposite side drapes from the panel.

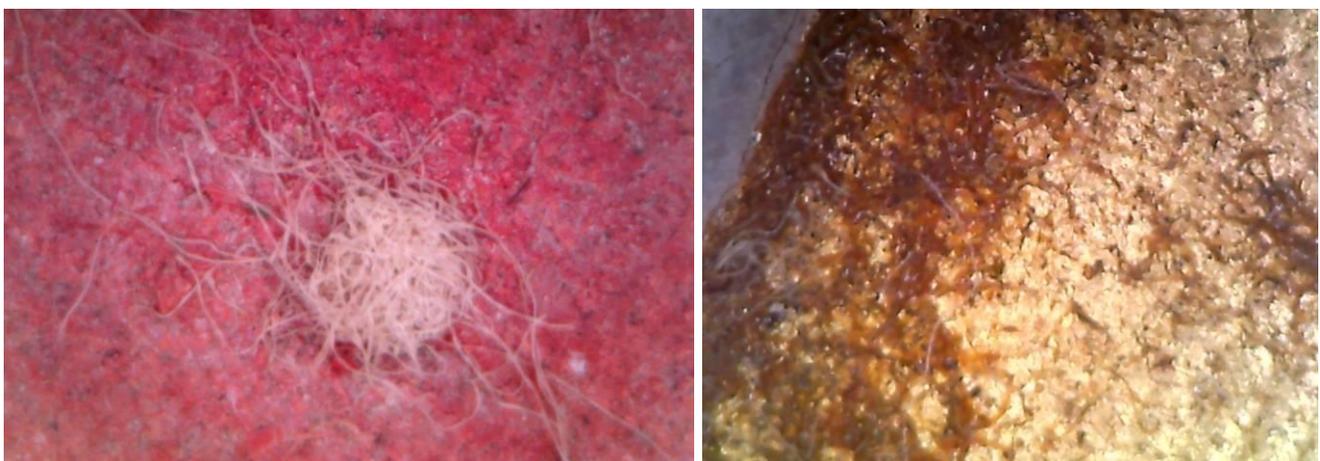
CONDITION:

- Generally intact and aside from some old repairs at the lower corners it looks like it has not been altered much since first made, the borders, pole loops and fringe appear to be original.
- The top pole is very worn with much of the silver paint abraded away at the ends and in places along the length, this is probably indicative of use. The brass end caps are tarnished to almost black and the metal eyes are tarnished and loosely fitted into the pole



Detail showing the original pole with loops still nailed on

- The lower pole was probably added to give extra weight and stability to the banner while on parade, the pole in this case is not painted so is more functional
- The whole banner is quite cockled and distorted from being rolled around its top pole, this is most noticeable across the painted areas when viewed at a raking angle
- The surface of the banner is very soiled with dust collected while on display in the church, this has settled in areas such as along the lower pole channel and across the pole loops. Closer inspection revealed a lot of white lint fibres on the surface which is likely to be deposited from the cotton sheet used to roll the banner for storage



The white fibres and surface bloom on the red paint left and dark flecks of 'varnish' on the gold paint right

- The blue silk is faded and exhibiting a yellowish hue in places which can be attributed to light damage. There are numerous black stains across the silk these are of unknown origin but may be mould growth, also present are areas of white coloured staining which could be bird

excrement from when the banner was paraded or displayed, a few pale coloured feathers were also noticed

- The silk threads are also quite faded, close examination of the stitches blue stitches onto the red silk revealed a dark purple colour in parts not exposed to the light, it may have been closer to red originally
- Small holes can be seen along the border selvages, there is also evidence of moth lava webbing so this is likely to be insect damage, more so on the right side, the silk is very weak and vulnerable in these areas. There are also small section of the inner edge which have not been caught with the stitching so the stick out from the border



Lower borders before conservation showing old repairs and extensive soiling

- There is an area of dye bleed on the lower left border, this corresponds with an area of staining and probably results from the banner being damp at some point
- The paint is generally in good condition aside from a few scratches on the central panel and on the lower text panel. It is well bonded and intact. There is however some physical damage in the form of tiny splits on the upper text scroll which are signs of stress at a load bearing point and six major splits at the silk/paint interface around the lower text scroll
- There is also surface bloom (whitish haze) on the paint, particularly in the red areas across the lower text scroll and the robes of the wounded man, further tests will need to be done to ascertain the cause and constituents of this bloom before it can be treated



Details of the splits beneath the lower text scroll and below the pole loops

- The metallic paints have tarnished, the silver has darkened in colour and the gold is pitted with small flecks of dark brown which look organic under magnification, it could be that the metallic areas have been varnished to protect them from tarnishing
- There are a number of sharp creases across the silk, these have probably occurred during rolling tightly for storage, although some appear abraded but most of the creases have not

formed splits. There are however significant splits through the silk at the top edge, directly below the pole loops, this is also a load bearing point

- The lower corners are very weak, possibly once torn, the right has an area of original silk missing while the left appears intact, they have been sensitively repaired at some stage using fine magenta coloured silk and red silk thread. This repair has now failed because the newer silk has started to degrade and shatter, it is possible that this is tin weighted silk which is inherently weak, fragments of this silk were found in places across the banner and packing during unrolling. A further square shaped patch of silk is sewn to the end of the pole channel on the right side, this appears stable and intact
- In addition to the silk patch repairs, there are 8-10cm lines of rough overcast stitching in lengths of doubled pink cotton thread, presumably used to repair a new tear that had started to appear
- The pole loops have faded from a deep red to pale pink colour, they have also become quite brittle as fibres are shed when the loops are handled. The two outer loops on each side are exhibiting holes which are possibly a combination of physical stress and insect damage. In addition to this there is some evidence of mould growth on the inside of the second from left loop as you view the face side. Seven of the loops are nailed onto the top pole, so tightly that the tape is bedded into the pole. However, what remains of the paint is stable so the remaining loops can move freely, they are also shedding fibres suggesting they are physically weak
- The fringe is intact and fairly strong but the silk on the left quarter is abraded either through light damage or excessive handling. On closer inspection it appears that this side of the fringe has a pink rather than cream coloured cotton core and the silk is a different shade of red, it is possible that the dyes on this section are more light sensitive so it has degraded at a different rate. Some evidence of insect damage was also found in the form of two moth casings found on the fringe, no live specimens were discovered



Detail of the adhesive staining underneath the lower text scroll reverse side and splash stains on the cream paint

- The lower text scroll on the reverse side is splattered with stains, on close inspection they are well set in and tests with various solvents did not dissolve the stains, they have the appearance of accidental spillages, possibly drinks while the banner was in use or hung at the church

PROPOSED TREATMENT:

Option 1: Full remedial treatment recommended for continued rolled storage, free-hang display for limited periods and longer term display on a sloped board within a case

- Document banner before, during and after treatment
- Test fabrics, dye and paint stability to determine most appropriate methods for cleaning and support
- Remove poles
- Release previous repairs causing distortion and damage to banner

- Clean and if necessary consolidate paints
- Clean and smooth fabrics
- Prepare conservation support fabrics (transparent silk or nylon fabrics to retain visibility of both sides of banner coated with conservation grade adhesive)
- Apply support to reverse of banner, avoiding the main painted panels if these retain sufficient strength. Augment with fine stitching as required
- Stitched support of borders
- Apply new fabric sleeve across the reverse top edge to bear the weight of the banner evenly whilst hung and secure the original loops so they are visible when viewing the banner from the front.

TREATMENT:

The banner was initially unrolled and inspected with the face side uppermost. Once the condition report was complete I began by releasing the poles to enable access to the banner. The lower pole came out relatively easily as the channel created for it was not stitched too tightly. I then released the top pole which was more difficult because the nails had imbedded so tightly into the wood that most of them could not be lifted without chipping the pole. The only way to release the loops was to cut the pole loop around the nails with a scalpel working right up to the edge of the nail head.



Details showing one of the pole loops still attached, and after the pole was released

I added temporary net patches to the splits at the lower corners to prevent further damage whilst moving the banner for cleaning. I then began surface cleaning the silk areas with a soft brush and low suction vacuum, this was very successful but the more in-grained soiling on the lower edge required additional surface contact to lift the dirt, in this case a soft sponge was drawn across the silk, removing all but a faint layer which is set into the fibres.



Cleaning the borders with a soft brush and micro vac and the collection of sponges with covered in black surface soiling



The upper right border face side before and after cleaning

The painted areas were cleaned with a brush initially to take off any surface soiling; this had little impact on the bloom. Small areas of the paint were tested with water, saliva and white spirit but none had much effect on the bloom. As the paint is generally stable I decided to test a range of dry cleaning methods in the form of sponges and rubbers and found that a soft putty rubber was most successful at lessening the bloom.



Cleaning of the main painted panel

Once the cleaning of the face side was complete I turned the banner over to begin the same process on the reverse side, starting with the silk areas and moving onto the painted sections. To reach the centre on each side the banner had to be carefully rolled around a cardboard tube covered in acid free tissue. A similar level of dirt was collected from the reverse side and the same methods as before were used to treat the individual areas. I also found that the bloom on the grey area and lettering appeared to move easily using a smoke sponge which is interesting and may mean that it was built up slightly differently on this side of the banner. The bloom on the red paint shadows was still more difficult to remove so I used the putty again. White cotton fibres were also

found in these red sections as with the lower text panel on the face side, it is possible that something in this pigment mixture has been tacky at some stage, causing fibres to adhere to it.



The Travellers robes during cleaning with the left side done and the right side still to do



Cleaning the reverse side of the banner, it is partially rolled at this stage to access the centre

With the banner on the reverse side I attempted cleaning of the lower text scroll which had a number of splashed stains, however none of the solvents tested appeared to remove the stains and they are very set in so too much agitation is likely to affect the paint layers. Therefore in line with my professional code of conduct I decided to take no further action on this aspect of the treatment for fear of causing damage. The next stage of treatment was to humidify the banner to ease creasing in the silk areas and cockling in the painted section which was caused by rolling tightly around the banner pole.



The banner during humidification

The technique used for this involves using damp blotting paper and a barrier layer which enables a gentle introduction of moisture to penetrate the object, using glass weights on top to apply just enough pressure to set the paint back to its original shape. This process was effective and eased most of the cockling, some of the creases around the painted areas, particularly where the panels are seamed together could not be removed because the silk has distorted as the paint has shrunk around it.

Tests were carried out on the adhesive tape stains to see what solvents could be used to remove them, white spirit was the most effective and least toxic solvent tried. Although much of the staining was removed some remains and slight ring marking did occur as a result of the solvent migrating into the surrounding silk, this was mitigated using a vacuum suction table to speed up the movement of the solvent. The handle of the silk in these areas is much improved; it is more flexible which means that it is less likely to split further



The adhesive crepe fabric being prepared left and the three sections of adhesive lined up during application right

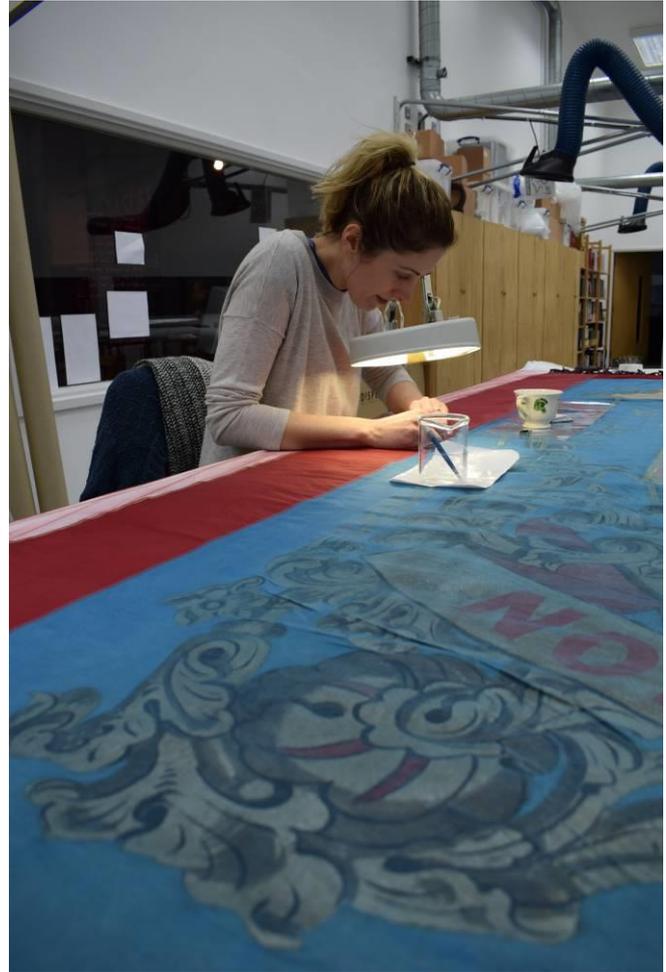
Once the cleaning was complete I prepared conservation support fabrics for the blue silk ground and borders. I chose silk crepe fabric for the body of the banner as it is translucent but strong and nylon net for the borders as they need a little less support but the edges need to be strong. This material turns nicely to get a good finish but it appears almost invisible if the correct dye match is achieved. Both fabrics were cut to size and dyed by hand to match the colours in the banner using Lanaset conservation grade dyes. I also prepared the crepe fabric for the adhesive treatment by casting a fine layer of adhesive called Lascaux 306/498 in equal parts at a 15% solution in de-ionised water. This was applied using a soft sponge roller and working in two sections which run the full length of the banner. Once the adhesive was dry, I cut the larger section in two to form three sections which match the original seam lines of the banner so the new support looks less obtrusive.



During heat re-activation of the adhesive on the reverse side of the banner

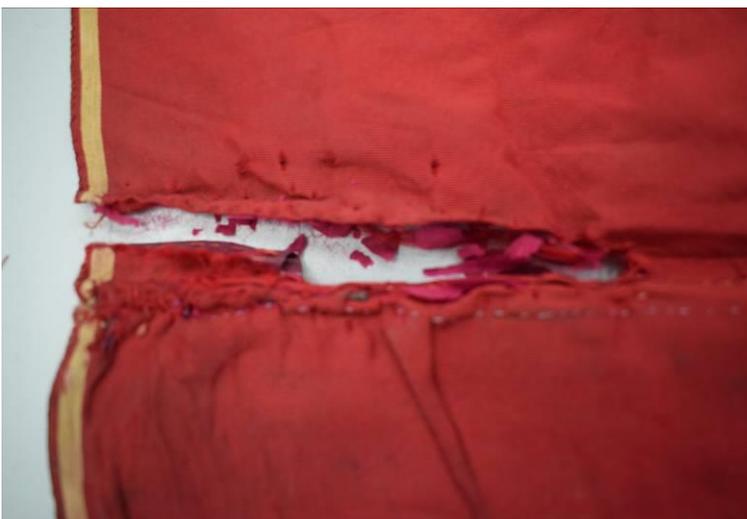
I rolled the sections of crepe fabric up to make them easier to work with and set them into position on the banner, unrolling a small strip at a time and using a heated spatula to re-activate the adhesive and bond it to the banner. I trimmed the edges where necessary and cut around the main painted panels overlapping the framed edge. I have worked the crepe fabric over the silver mantling because cutting around these sections would decrease the strength of the support and there were cracks appearing on the upper scroll which needed a full support as they are in a load bearing area.

With the body of the banner supported I now moved onto the border supports, this was done with nylon net stitched to the banner using very fine silk thread. I laid the net over the reverse side and overlapped onto the new crepline support by 0.5cm to add strength to this join I then made lines of running stitches at 30cm intervals across the borders staggering the lines to spread the load.



One side border with the stitching lines marked out with strips of paper left and during stitching right

The outer edge of each side border and the lower corners were left open for finishing from the face side. I then turned the banner over and added patch supports for the lower corners of each border where the old repairs had been. Working in between the banner and new net support with a barrier layer in between I attached the new patches to the reverse side first and then stitched them in place with lines of laid couching on the face side. The old silk does not line up exactly because it has been distorted through use with the weight of the smaller pole.





The lower border corners before removal of the old patch repairs, and after treatment

Once the corners were supported I turned the edges of the net around the outer sides of the borders to encapsulate the edges and prevent further damage through handling, this does obscure the cream selvedge a little but it is still visible and the edges are much more stable. The lower border was treated in the same way with a slight overlap onto the heading of the fringe. I then supported the torn areas on the pole loops with net and carried out additional stitching on the torn areas of the blue silk which required extra support.



An area of net encapsulating the border edge

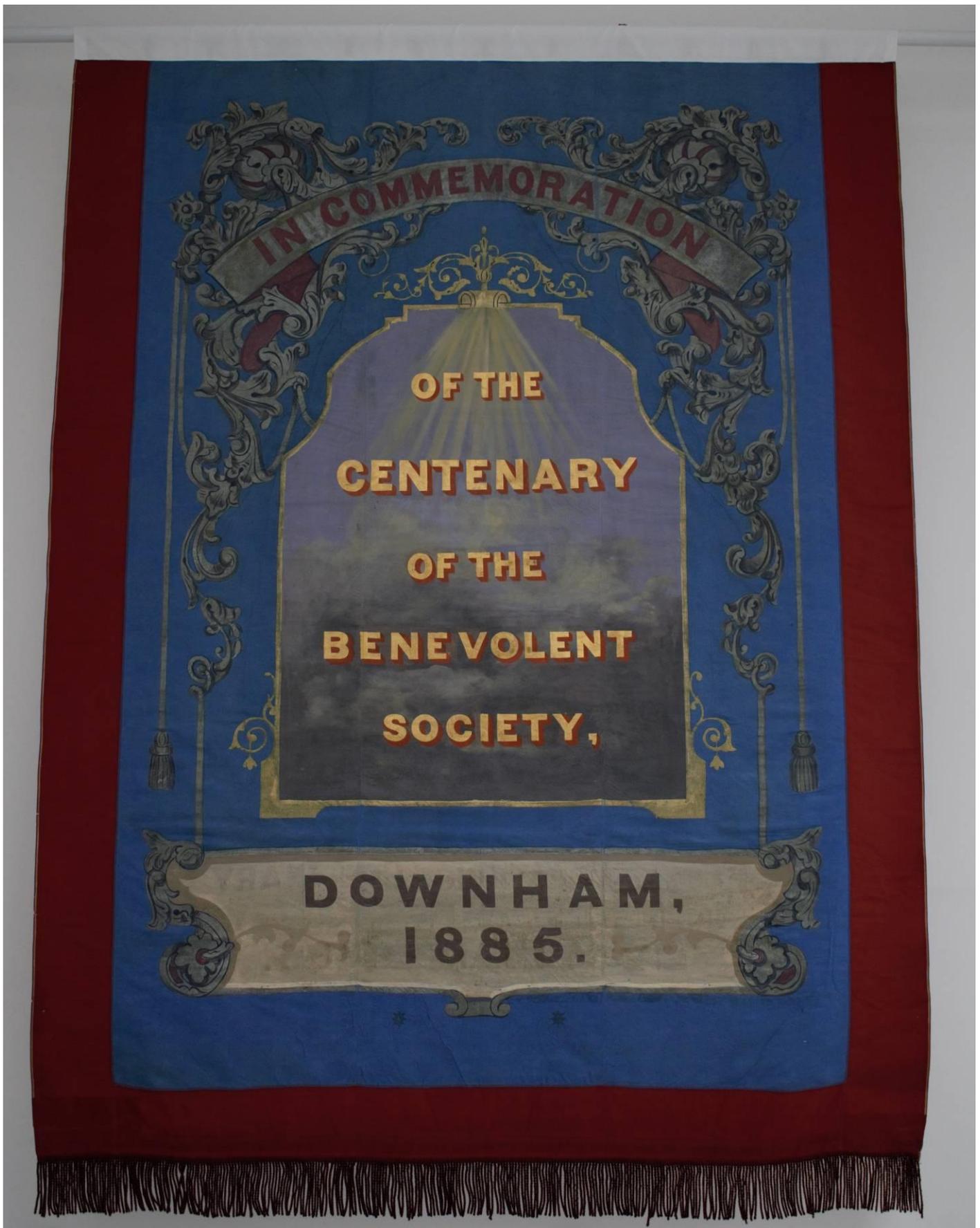


Left: split silk along the top edge which required additional stitching, right: adhesive patch applied to face side of the banner

The large split beneath the lower text scroll also required an adhesive patch from the face side, I felt this was necessary because the split was so close the painted section and I was concerned that if it was over flexed it might compromise the adhesive. By patching from the face as well I am confident that the split is now secure. Finally a white cotton sleeve was stitched to the top edge and the pole loops tacked in place on the face side.



Downham banner face side after conservation



Downham banner reverse side after conservation