Condition report (as of 15 February 2003) of the condition of the wax head of Jeremy Bentham made by Jacques Talrich as part of the Jeremy Bentham Auto Icon.

General Comments:

On initial investigation it can be seen that dust and dirt have become ingrained into the surface of the wax giving a patchy and uneven appearance and resulting in a grey pallor. There are some shiny areas of disfigurement most obviously in the region of the nose and chin, at first glance these appear to be the result of a sticky substance on the surface but on closer inspection reveal themselves to be area where the paint has been removed revealing the glossy wax surface beneath.

There are both minor and major areas of abrasion and also some gouges into the wax especially in the area directly under the hat. These also reveal the underlying wax.

The hair for the wax head is adhered on to the surface in groups of 30-50 individual hairs. The hair is soiled, dusty and tangled. One group of hairs has become detached from the wax head but is held in position by being tangled with adjacent hair groups. Signs of insect infestation can be found in the hair though notably only in one area at the back of the head. On further examination of the area three “Woolly bear” (Anthrenus verbasci) larval cases were found and removed. The back of the head is considerably less well covered with hair. This could be for a number of reasons.

1) Hair in this area has been lost due to insect attack. While this is a possibility there are no extensive signs of grazing i.e. bits of shortened hair remaining attached to the head and no sign of large quantities of hair on the shoulders of Bentham’s jacket or on the floor of the case.

2) Hair has been lost from this area due to abrasion from the rim of Bentham’s straw hat. I have noted myself when placing the hat on the head that it fits more snugly front to back than side to side. It is common to locate the hat by placing the front rim at the desired level and then adjust it by sliding the back into position. I suspect that this has caused a considerable amount of abrasion over the years and I am inclined to feel that this is the reason for the loss of hair in this area.

3) Less hair was originally placed in this area (perhaps because the icon was designed to be viewed from the front). I feel this is very unlikely, the wax work head is of extremely high quality and accuracy and it as such it is doubtful that such a shortcut would have been taken.

The head contains padding material which is soiled and dusty. This padding material has most likely been incorporated to prevent the metal threaded rod which emerges from the shoulders of the Auto Icon from damaging the inside of the soft wax head. On investigation the padding material proved not to show any signs of infestation. The material is a combination of …
There are three pins pushed into the scalp of the head, which would seem to correspond to areas adjacent to the hat brim (when in place) and could have been used to pin the hat in position in the past. If this was the case however one would expect to see multiple holes in the wax head (as it would be impossible to place the pins in exactly the same place each time). As there is no evidence of this it is more likely that the pins are used to secure the padding material (mentioned above) in place.