

## Durham Cathedral: Tower and Belfry Repairs

*Awarded £568,651 in March 2015 and a further £599,000 in July 2016  
towards an approximately £2 million project*

### The need

Repairs to the upper parapet and belfry sections of the cathedral's central tower had been identified as high priority in a recent inspection. The stonework of the upper parapet was in a poor state due to its high and exposed location: work required included stone conservation, repairs to roof coverings and rainwater systems, and the renewal of the roof-access decking. The belfry, lower down, needed stone conservation, removal of old asbestos rainwater goods and replacement with modern versions, renewal of internal leadwork and installation of a safe access system to allow for better maintenance in future.



View of Durham Cathedral during the repairs. Photo credit: Tom Banks.

### Outcomes

The repair works have made the central tower safe for thousands of visitors who enjoy the magnificent views it provides each year. It has also made improvements to rainwater drainage disposal within the cathedral, reducing leaks and making the tower drier and safer for the public. The project led to a restructure and expansion of the in-house works team, including the recruitment of new masons and operatives, and has helped to develop the skills of the team, both in terms of managing projects of this scale and enhancing the craft skills of the cathedral masons through the employment of different techniques, both new and old. The project has also provided the cathedral with a unique opportunity to talk about its major works programme and to engage people with its latest fundraising campaign, 'Foundation 2020', which aims to build an endowment to support long-term care and conservation. During the project, the cathedral's development team has worked closely with its property team to develop opportunities for donors and prospective supporters to gain a better understanding of what is involved in a repair project of this scale and to appreciate the skills involved.

### Economic and social impact

The project employed the full-time services of nine craftspeople with traditional building skills, assisted by the remainder of the cathedral's own work team. It also engaged sub-contractors and suppliers in specialist heritage techniques, including stonemasonry and molten lead work, and provided training for a recently graduated architect. The cathedral saved c.£400,000 by working with a scaffold designer and employing a local scaffolding contractor, based in Newcastle, to construct a scaffold which hung from the top of the tower rather than having to be constructed from nave roof upwards. It was then possible to use the same scaffold for both the upper parapet and belfry sections of the project, which provided further savings. The two grants awarded from the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund helped to leverage grants from other funders, who may not otherwise have given, due to the scale of project and the perceived impact of their contribution. However, combined with the First World War Fund investment, they were able to make a crucial difference.

The works have helped generate media coverage for the cathedral and have featured in two films made during the course of the project, including one by The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), in association with ITN, for their annual Construction UK Conference.

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The cathedral has also hosted a series of private events and tours of the tower project to thank donors and benefactors. In November 2017, the belfry became the centrepiece of a major light installation as part of the biennial Lumiere Durham festival, which attracted over 200,000 visitors. The installation, by artist Pablo Valbuena, illuminated sections of the cathedral's interior and exterior, triggered by the ringing of its bells. Upon completion of the repair project, the cathedral will be able to re-open the tower to the public (around 35,000 visitors a year) to enjoy the wonderful views of Durham City. Being able to carry out such major repairs ensures that the cathedral can remain open to welcome over 750,000 visitors each year.



Scaffolding installation. Photo credit: Tom Banks.

### Works completed and timescale

Works began in July 2016, following the erection of a complex scaffold, which took six months to complete. The first phase consisted of a programme of conservation and repair to the upper parapet of the central tower including stone conservation and repairs to rainwater systems. The second phase involved internal and external works to the belfry, including stone conservation, removal of old asbestos rainwater goods and replacement with modern versions, renewal of internal lead work and the installation of a safe access system to allow for better maintenance in future. Following the completion of the belfry works and the removal of the scaffold at the end of 2018, a new roof and roof-access decking will be installed to enable the tower to be re-opened to visitors.

### The Cathedral

Set in a strategic position above the River Wear, Durham Cathedral and the nearby Durham Castle are part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site designated in 1986 and extended in 2008. The Cathedral was founded in 1093 by monks carrying St Cuthbert's bones away from Lindisfarne in the wake of Norse invasion. The mighty building was put up in only forty years and, internally at least, remains remarkably unaltered. It is the only cathedral to have been originally built as a shrine, and many still make the journey of pilgrimage today, with daily prayers and services held over Cuthbert's grave. Perhaps the most striking feature on entering Durham is the pillars, carved with deeply incised designs including chevrons and diamonds. Durham also boasts two particularly beautiful chapels – the Chapel of the Nine Altars and the Galilee Chapel, built in place of the usual Lady Chapel. The mid-14th century stone reredos was donated by Lord Neville, having been carved in London and brought up by sea. Despite damage inflicted by Reformation iconoclasts it remains imposing. A major HLF-funded development project, Open Treasure, has given a new function to surviving monastic buildings, including the Monk's Dormitory and the Great Kitchen, as world-class exhibition spaces for the cathedral's remarkable treasures.

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