

Rochester Cathedral: Roof Repairs (1 project funded in 3 phases)

Awarded a total of £832,000 between November 2014 and July 2016

The need

The 2013 Quinquennial Inspection highlighted the need for a number of significant areas of repair work, with the full cost of the repairs in the region of £5 million, a sum far beyond the capacity of the cathedral to fund. Each area required urgent repairs to keep the building wind- and weather-tight, safe and open. In some places leaks had already caused damage to timber beams and threatened plasterwork in the historic Chapter Library. Around the north side work was needed to prevent falls of stone from split and decayed shafts and ensure weather proofing to masonry below, and for repairs and weather proofing to weak, buckled and leaking stained glass and clear glazing. Falling masonry presented a danger to the public and would have required closing the north door, the main entrance of the cathedral for visitors and the only level access point.



Aerial view of the roof works in progress. Photo credit: SUMO Aerial Surveys.

Outcomes

The building is now much more watertight, making the building drier and reducing the risk of damage. There is no longer plasterwork falling from the ceiling. Due to these important works, further development work funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the cathedral's *Hidden Treasures, Fresh Expressions* project could proceed. A new skylight to the Gundulf tower has significantly increased the light available to the music room below, whilst also rendering the roof watertight and draught proof. The works have also increased public pride in the building.

Works completed and timescale

The work started with the repair of the library roof, addressing damaged roof slates, lead flashings and rainwater goods on slopes to the east of the central tower. The second phase, which began in September 2014, consisted of repairs to the nave roof, the flat roof of the choir store and numerous smaller areas of roofing, alongside the cleaning and repairing of guttering. The Gundulf tower was also de-vegetated and repointed and a new skylight was installed. The third phase of the works consisted of repairs to the eastern roof of the cathedral, which includes the quire, quire transepts and presbytery roofs. They have all been re-covered, gutters have been reconfigured and renewed and some masonry repairs have taken place, principally repointing of copings and flashings.

Economic and social impact

The project supported eight jobs in traditional skills of lead working, masonry, and carpentry. The architect and cathedral team organised activities to engage the wider community, including lectures, gathering film footage and getting local schools involved.

The Cathedral

Rochester is a relatively small cathedral with a grand history, standing adjacent to the Norman Rochester Castle. The façade and most of the nave is also Norman, while the east end is mainly Early English. The 12th-century west door is an important feature. The quire is raised over the crypt, which has been extensively refurbished with an exhibition and function space as part of the c. £7 million Heritage Lottery Fund-supported development project. The cathedral has a peaceful setting on the south side, whilst the north side is on the main high street, making it a key feature of the city.



The finished Nave roof. Photo credit: Rochester Cathedral.