

# Coventry Cathedral: Repairs to Ruins (1 of 3 projects funded)

*Awarded £100,000 in July 2014 towards a £106,000 project*

## The need

Coventry Cathedral is unique in having two consecrated cathedral buildings, one of them in ruins since the city was bombed in November 1940. Management of the ruins has long been an additional cost and challenge to the cathedral, as much of the delicate stonework was never intended to be exposed to the weather, but Chapter is committed to keeping them open and standing. They are designated a memorial to civilians killed, injured or traumatised by conflict worldwide.

The project was to complete the final phase of the urgent stabilisation and repair to the 14th/15th century north wall and first bay of the east wall, to prevent collapse and make the portico masonry watertight.



The ruins scaffolded. Photo credit: A&RME Architects.

## Outcomes

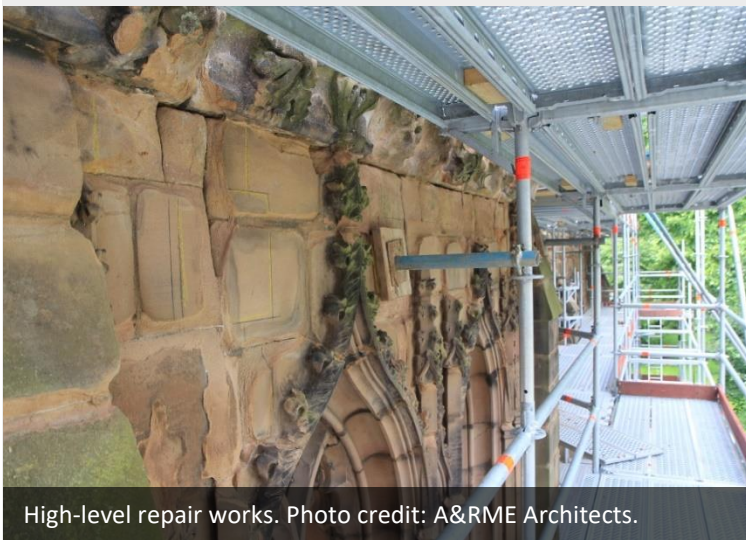
The ruins structures are safer and secure for those working at and visiting the cathedral, and unsightly safety fencing has been removed. Water ingress into the top of the walls has been eliminated, thereby extending their life. The projects instilled a sense of confidence in the cathedral team that they can successfully implement significant projects, which has built ambition for future projects.

## Economic and social impact

The project supported jobs in traditional stonework and concrete repairs. The repaired ruins have enabled the cathedral to run more events and hire more staff to market the ruins as a venue for events. For example, cinema nights and dining clubs have brought in thousands of people. This has generated income; such opportunities are likely to increase as Coventry is the UK City of Culture in 2021. The projects at Coventry, along with those the cathedral architect worked on at Southwark Cathedral, enabled the her to grow her practice. Formerly a sole practitioner, the guaranteed fee and security of the work allowed her to employ others and she now has two permanent members of staff.

## Works completed and timescale

Works by Croft Building & Construction Ltd included the removal and replacement of window guards and the removal and repair of defective stonework, namely the pinnacles and some repointing. It also involved some lead work and slate packings.



High-level repair works. Photo credit: A&RME Architects.

## The Cathedral

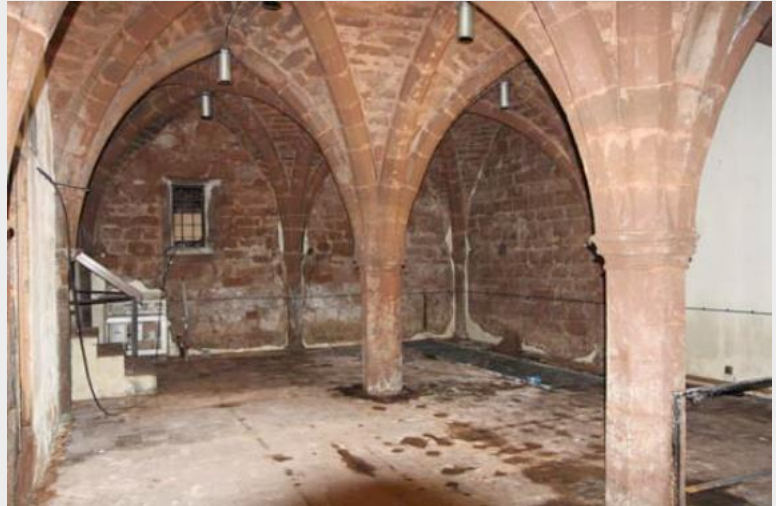
The medieval parish church was elevated to cathedral status in 1918 and had a magnificent spire. The modern cathedral was opened in 1962: Basil Spence's design incorporated the ruins of the earlier cathedral as part of its setting and approach. The cathedral hosts events, concerts and exhibitions, welcoming thousands of visitors each year; in May 2018 it returned to having free admission. The cathedral is home to the Church of England's reconciliation ministry team, working internationally.

## Coventry Cathedral: Crypt Repairs (2 of 3 projects funded)

*Awarded £216,265 in November 2014 towards a £346,000 project*

### The need

The medieval crypts under the ruined cathedral were suffering from severe water ingress which was damaging the stonework, masonry and floors. They were used as air raid shelters in the Second World War and include the Wyley Chapel, dedicated by the family in honour of a son who died in the First World War, and the Chapel of the Cross, used for cathedral services following the 1940 bombing. The application was for investigation and repair so that these two spaces could be brought back into use. The balance of the funding came from a Landfill Tax grant from WREN, the Allchurches Trust and cathedral funds.



The Chapel of the Cross (the West Crypt) before the works, with visible damp. Photo credit: A&RME Architects.

### Outcomes

The chapels are now waterproofed via a new reinforced slab and waterproof membrane which has been laid over the medieval crypts, preventing water ingress and facilitating drying out. The archaeological excavation report provided a wealth of new information on the development of the site. The projects installed a sense of confidence in the Chapter that they can successfully implement significant projects, which has built ambition for future projects.

### Economic and social impact

The crypts repair works helped to support local jobs in traditional building techniques and in archaeology. There are development plans to invest in lighting and heating for the crypts, which will enable them to be hired as venues, opening up a new revenue stream for the cathedral.

The waterproofing, asbestos removal and the internal cleaning now means that the crypts are accessible by the public. The repairs received widespread attention from both local media and the public. The Cathedral Architect and the project archaeologist and conservator gave a seminar on the work undertaken, and two public talks by the Cathedral's Head of Development attracted over 100 guests each. Local schools were also invited to view the site as part of their usual activities with the cathedral. On-site filming was carried out by a number of news outlets, and a short 10-minute film was produced and shown at the talks.

### Works completed and timescale

The main contractor for the repair work was Midland Conservation Ltd, supported by several other

specialist organisations due to the complex nature of the project. The project involved the investigation and repair of the damage to the waterproofing to the crypts, asbestos removal and the laying of a new waterproof membrane. There were some delays to obtain permissions and due to adverse weather conditions: the project commenced in June 2015 and was completed in March 2016.



Archaeological investigation ahead of waterproofing the crypts. Photo credit: A&RME Architects.

### The Cathedral

See previous project summary.



## Coventry Cathedral: Chapel of Unity Repairs (3 of 3 projects funded)

*Awarded £80,364 in March 2015 for trials of repair methods  
and a further £870,000 in July 2016*

### The need

Coventry Cathedral's Chapel of Unity was established in 1945 as a space where Christianity's many denominations could meet to seek unity and reconciliation. First it was set up in one of the medieval crypts repaired with a previous First World War grant. The present Chapel of Unity was dedicated in 1962. Sir Basil Spence designed it circular in shape (representing unity), its style inspired by a nomadic tent.

Soon after construction, the slate fixing began to fail and slates became loose. In the late 1970s rehangings were conducted to the upper sections. Concern remained about slippage of slates due to the failure of fixings and water ingress between the slates where the mortar had broken down; the area around the Chapel had been closed to the public by unsightly fencing since the 1980s. The trials funded by the smaller grant showed that the preferred solution was to remove all the slates and re-fix them.



### Outcomes

The original design concept has been restored to rectify the accumulation of small changes over the years which had eroded the character of the building. All slates have now been securely fixed back, the capacity of the rainwater goods has been increased and access for future maintenance has been made safer. The dalle de verre (thick coloured glass) windows by Margaret Traherne have also been repaired so that the beauty of the artwork can once again be appreciated. Over 95% of the slates were reused.

### Economic and social impact

The repair works helped to support 17 jobs in total, 6 in the first phase and 11 in the second. These jobs were supported across a range of specialist industries including concrete repair, roof repair, and glasswork. The area where the Chapel is located is a natural meeting place for the public and visitors as they move from the ruins to the new cathedral, and it is the backdrop to a number of events and activities, including those commemorating the centenary of the First World War. People enjoy seeing the building in its original glory and there has been positive coverage in the local media. The works have also improved public safety.

### Works completed and timescale

The external repair works were contracted to Messenger BCR. Work commenced in April 2017 and was complete in February 2018. The works mainly consisted of addressing the safety issue of the exterior slates

which had become loose, removing all slates and re-fixing them, where possible recycling the original slates. The interior of the Chapel was comprehensively cleaned for the first time in many years and this led to the discovery and un-blocking of a high-level heating duct which should help improve the internal environment. A small unspent contingency was directed towards repairing cracked paving slabs to the apron surrounding the Chapel of Unity ahead of restoring public access.

### The Cathedral

See previous project summaries.



New copper capping. Photo credit: A&RME Architects