

St Albans Cathedral : West Front Repairs (1 of 2 projects funded)

Awarded £438,000 in July 2014

The need

The west entrance to the cathedral, always open and the main way in for services and events, has three deeply recessed arches leading to three doors into the nave. These doors sit under the huge First World War memorial window designed by Sir Ninian Comper. The stonework was in a visibly poor state due to water penetration; this was largely caused by blocked outlets on the roof which had recently been fixed, making this a good moment to repair the damage caused. Damage from pigeons and other birds sheltering in the porches and decay to the wooden doors also needed addressing.

Outcomes

The works have enabled the west front to be fully restored; there is no longer water penetration from above and associated stone erosion. The works have also prevented pigeons and other birds from sheltering in the porches. Through working on the projects at the cathedral the team have learnt a great deal about the building and associated conservation techniques. Working on different areas simultaneously enabled the cathedral to save money due to efficiencies of working, particularly in stonemasonry.

Economic and social impact

The work supported eight jobs in traditional leadwork, masonry, carpentry and glazing, including one apprentice stonemason. The projects at the cathedral have increased the quality of the experience of the cathedral services. They also gave the cathedral the added impetus to put on an interesting range First World War commemoration events. The great west window, a First World War memorial, is now easier to see, having been cleaned and re-pointed, and the cathedral has run a series of associated lectures about it. Both grant-aided projects been very publicly visible, which has sent out a message about the need for repair work and the value of the cathedral. The transformation of the west end in particular received considerable social media attention.

Works completed

The works consisted of investigating drain routes, replacing lead rainwater goods, cleaning masonry and consolidating and re-pointing where needed, cleaning the inside of the porches, repairing stonework, installing better pigeon prevention measures, lighting the spaces, and installing CCTV to provide safe access. A measured survey to identify medieval stonework was also undertaken to aid this and future works.



Conservation work to the west window. Photo credit: Cliveden Conservation.



The repaired West Front. Photo credit: Helena O'Sullivan.

The Cathedral

St Alban's is one of the longest of the Anglican cathedrals, second only to Winchester, and sits on one of the oldest sites of Christian worship, with Alban's martyrdom dating to AD209. It ceased to be an abbey in the 16th century and became a cathedral in 1877. Much of the current cathedral is built of Roman brick plundered from the city of Verulamium. It remains largely Norman, with a series of wall paintings visible in the nave. In the mid-19th century it was much restored, including works to the west end and refurbishment throughout.

St Albans Cathedral: External Stonework Repairs (2 of 2 projects funded)

Awarded £230,000 in July 2016

The need

The stonework of the eastern façade of the cathedral was visibly crumbling and part of the south side of the building, the remains of the cloister arches was at similar risk from water penetration and damage. The cloister arches are the most extensive area of surviving medieval stonework on the outside of the cathedral, preserving the tracery of the original Abbey cloister. They are of great architectural and archaeological significance, but the Totternhoe stone of which they were built is especially vulnerable to wind and rain – the stonework was never intended to be in the open air – and the surrounding area was fenced off to the public. Without significant protective work this part of the Abbey's history would have continued to disintegrate.

Outcomes

The project has allowed the cathedral to address the areas of decaying fabric and water ingress and, with the introduction of new protective measures, ensured the longevity of the building. The building is now drier and more comfortable. Through working on the projects at the cathedral, the team have learnt a great deal about the building and associated conservation techniques. Working on different areas simultaneously enabled the cathedral to save money due to efficiencies of working, particularly in stonemasonry. The project enabled the cathedral to leverage extra funds from the Headley Trust (£25,000) and the Ironmongers Company (£2,500).

Economic and social impact

The work supported eight jobs in traditional leadwork, masonry, carpentry and glazing, including one apprentice stonemason. The projects at the cathedral have increased the quality of the experience of the cathedral services. They also gave the cathedral the added impetus to put on an interesting range of First World War commemoration events. The great west window, a First World War memorial, is now easier to see, having been cleaned and re-pointed, and the cathedral has run a series of associated lectures about it. Both grant-aided projects have been very publicly visible, which has sent out a message about the need for repair work and the value of the cathedral. The transformation of the west end in particular received considerable social media attention.



Conservation work to the south cloister. Photo credit: Bakers of Danbury.



The repaired south cloister. Photo credit: Richard Griffiths Architects.

Works completed

The works consisted of masonry repairs to the medieval stonework of the north elevation external wall at the east end, the east window and the south cloister. The Chapel of the Transfiguration roof has been re-leaded, and the interior has been redecorated. The north churchyard external railings have been repaired and decorated.

The Cathedral

See previous project summary.