Truro Cathedral: North West Tower Mullions (1 of 2 projects funded)

Awarded £50,000 in July 2014 towards a £195,000 project

The need

An intense storm on Valentine's Day 2014 caused damage to one of the slender stone window mullions on the north-west tower spirelet, causing pieces of stone to fall onto a public route below. The route was closed and bell-ringing in the tower prohibited as a result. The previous year another mullion on the north-east spirelet had fallen inwards onto the roof. The cathedral's insurance would pay for scaffolding repairs to the two fallen mullions, but not for preventative works to the other 30, which each needed investigating.

The north-west tower under scaffolding. Photo credit: Purcell Architects.

The falling mullions indicated a serious problem with the original 1880s design: the exposed Bathstone spirelet mullions were very tall and slender, and could not cope with the sideways pressure exerted on them by swirling winds around the spire, possibly caused by today's more extreme weather patterns. The cathedral could not take the risk of leaving anything unsafe with a well-used public route passing beneath. To minimise risk, permission was obtained to alter the original design to remove the mullions, though they could be reinstated if this proved feasible at a later date. The change would mean that the north-west tower design matched the south-west tower. The cathedral made a public appeal for funds after media interest in the fall of the mullion into the street, but its success was limited as there was already another major appeal, for re-roofing, in progress at the time.

Outcomes

The work enabled the public route and the cathedral's disabled access ramp beneath the north-west tower to be reopened, and for bell ringing to resume during the First World War centenary period. The cathedral has improved its internal processes for managing large projects and enhanced its fundraising capabilities.

The fallen mullion (2013), pieced together. Photo credit: Izaak Hudson, Cathedral Architect.

Social Impact

The cathedral has been able to continue to services and activities which might have had to stop if the building was unsafe.

Works completed and timescale

The work was completed to timescale and the building is now safe and does not pose a risk to the public.

The Cathedral

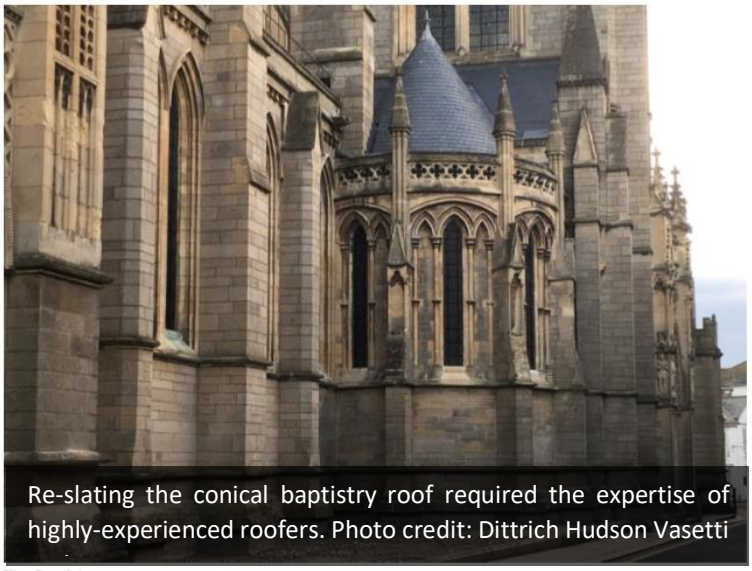
Truro is a Victorian Gothic church, built after the establishment of the Cornish bishopric in 1876. It took seven years to build the cathedral, the first purpose-built cathedral church in a new diocese since the Middle Ages. The architect was JL Pearson, who also undertook major restoration works at Lichfield, Chichester, Peterborough and Bristol cathedrals. The spires on the northwest tower were erected by Pearson's son in 1880. Internally there is an elaborate reredos and marble flooring, beautiful stalls and magnificent stained glass by Clayton and Bell. It is an outstanding example of high Victorian design.

Truro Cathedral: Roof Repairs (2 of 2 projects funded)

Awarded £500,000 in November 2014 and a further £500,000 in November 2016 towards a £3.2 million project

The need

The original slate roofs had been in place since the cathedral was completed, c. 1885-1908, and were now in urgent need of repair. Water was leaking through the lead parapet gutters, which had been much patched and were at the end of their lives. There were holes in the slating: slates fell out on a regular basis due to nail corrosion and slate delamination, and this let water directly into the roofspace. Pigeons were gaining access through loose slates, exacerbating the holes and adding to the build-up of guano and dead carcasses above the vaulting, and the gutters and downpipes could not cope with storm water. It will cost £3.2 million to replace the 60,000-plus slates; a further £1.7 million remains to be raised at the time of writing.



Re-slating the conical baptistry roof required the expertise of highly-experienced roofers. Photo credit: Dittrich Hudson Vasetti

Outcomes

Through this and the previous project, the re-roofing of the entire western arm of the cathedral roofs has been completed within three years of the Roof Appeal launch. The cathedral team's capabilities in managing large-scale repair works and fundraising have improved dramatically since receiving the grants. The repaired roof areas mean that they are able to deliver services and events in a water-tight building and the fund helped to focus their minds in relation to the First World War commemorations. They also now have better access to the roof which will enable safer, cheaper and more timely maintenance in future.

Economic and social impact

The funding provided work for skilled roofers and leadworkers, and helped to develop their skills in different techniques including the use of hot lime. As part of their fundraising the cathedral started a 'Sign A Slate' campaign in 2015, which provides the opportunity for visitors to sign their name or write a message on the back of one of the new slates being used on the roof, with the option to make a donation alongside this. This has been a great success: almost 5,000 people had participated by mid-2018, with linked donations contributing £230,000 towards the appeal, and enabling an additional £50,000 to be reclaimed from Gift Aid.

The roofs of the baptistry and the south aisle. Photo credit: Dittrich Hudson Vasetti Architects.

Works completed and timescale

The first £500,000 grant enabled like-for-like repair of the nave and nave aisle roofs, completed in 2016. The second £500,000 paid for urgently required re-slating, re-leading and associated stone and window repairs to the south save aisle and west return of the south transept, the octagonal baptistry, the south porch, and narthex, completed in January 2018. New balustrades and access hatches were installed to encourage safe access for maintenance. The repair needs were urgent prior to the grant and now they have been addressed the roofs will only need routine maintenance for several generations.

The Cathedral

See previous project summary.