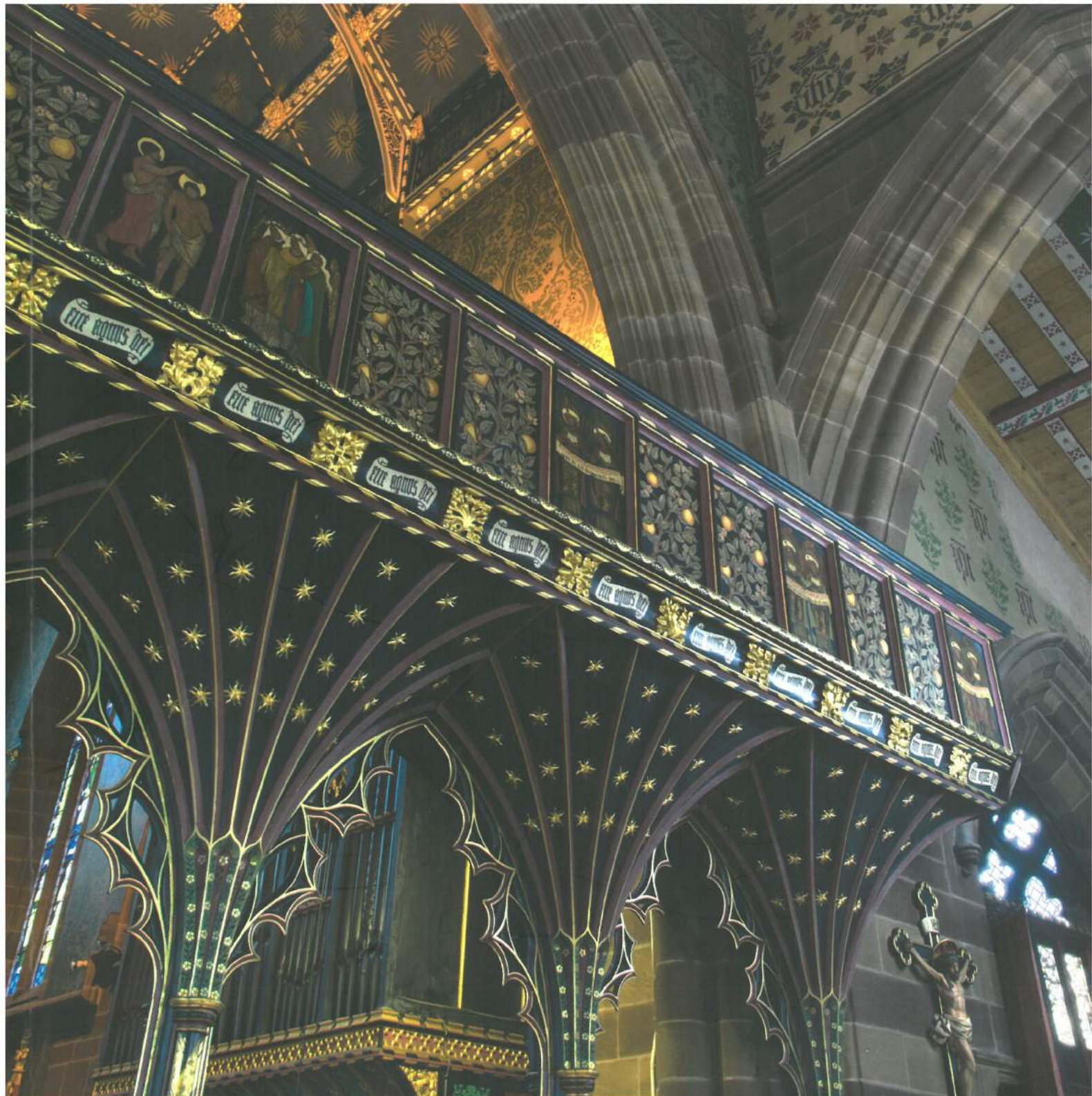


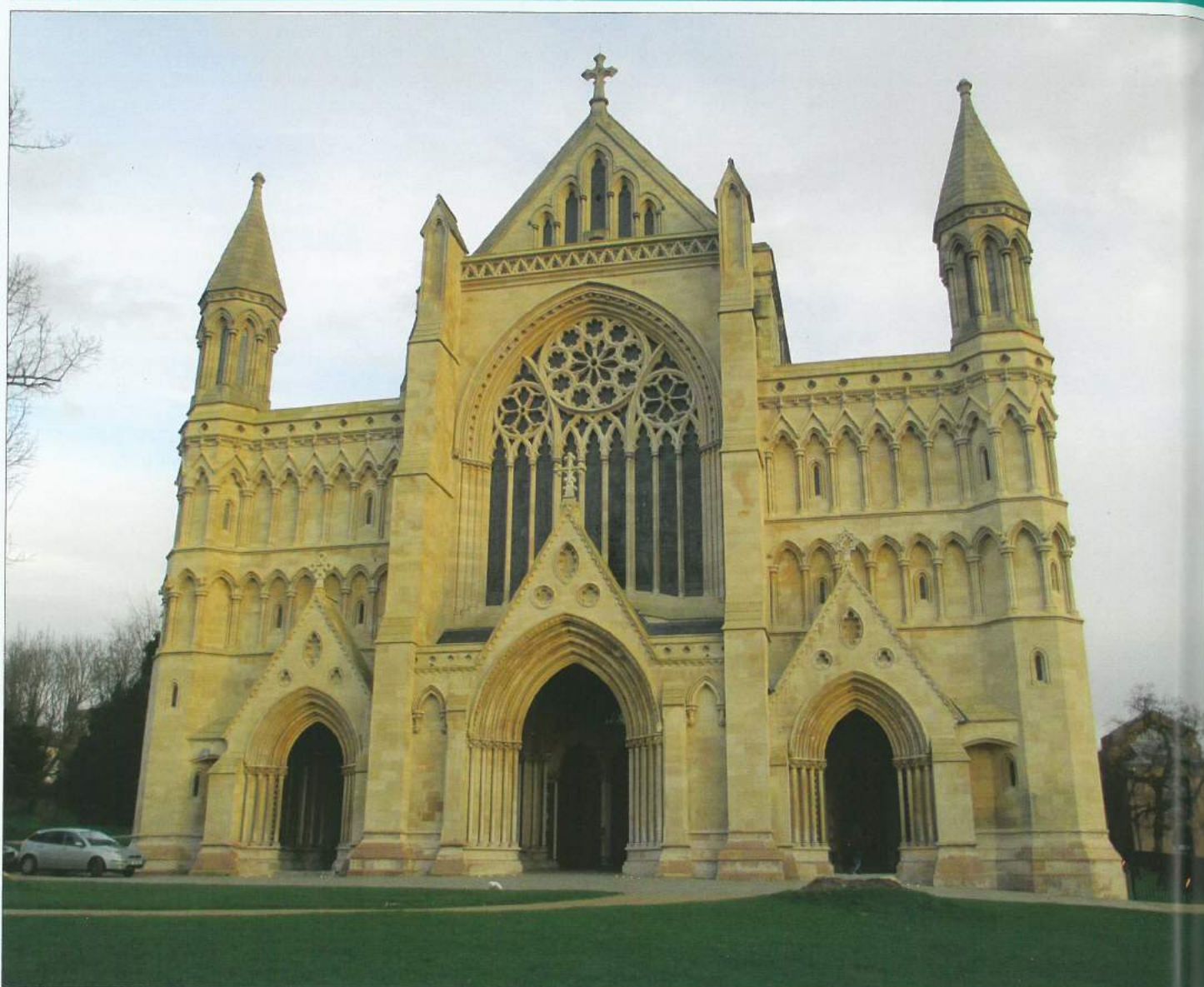


CHURCH

building & HERITAGE
REVIEW



PROJECT



ST ALBAN'S CATHEDRAL

PROJECT TEAM

Architect:
Richard Griffiths
Architects

Principal
Contractor:
Cliveden
Conservation

St Alban's Cathedral is one of the oldest places of continuous Christian worship in the country and welcomes over 180,000 visitors a year. Treasured for its unique blend of architectural styles spanning over a thousand years, including recycled Roman bricks from Verulamium, this building has a rich history of restoration work right up to the present day. Most recently the west front has undergone a two-year programme of repairs.

The west front and porches which act as the main entrance to the cathedral were in desperate need of attention. Despite recent repairs to the roof, water had penetrated and damaged the inside of the porches. Pigeon guano and nests

plus minor vandalism had also left the porches in a sorry state. This caused great concern as the interior of the porches are of national significance as one of the most elaborate and finest pieces of Early English design in the country.

Some of the problems had also stemmed from the controversial reconstruction of the west front by Lord Grimthorpe in the late nineteenth century. Although Lord Grimthorpe was genuine in his efforts to preserve the Norman and Medieval structure by paying for the work himself he insisted his own designs were used. He sometimes removed surviving Medieval features, replacing them with his

own unsympathetic ideas. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings was founded to prevent anyone else doing such things in future.

William Morris, who had already expressed concerns over Grimthorpe's predecessor Scott's 'restoration' work at the cathedral, was so incensed at Grimthorpe's plans that he wrote a letter to the restoration committee and *The Times*, lamenting the current restoration.

"Whilst sometimes controversial in their actions, the restorers of the nineteenth century ensured the Medieval Abbey church survived and flourished into the twentieth century. Its full title 'The Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban', a unique description, reflects its changing role over the centuries," says Julia Low, chairman of the Cathedral Guides, St Alban's Cathedral.

With the repair work to the west front becoming more and more urgent, St Alban's Cathedral were thrilled to be awarded a grant in 2014 for the sum of £438,000 from the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund. This grant meant a two-year programme to repair and protect the Medieval stonework of the west porches, the surrounding nineteenth century masonry, the grand oak doors and the stunning First World War memorial window could commence.

Richard Griffiths, a committee member for SPAB, and at that time, a trustee of the Churches Conservation Trust, had become cathedral architect in 2000. Since then, Richard Griffiths Architects have been responsible for several major conservation projects at the cathedral. Works included repairs to the thirteenth century timber vaults to the presbytery, the preservation of the Medieval wall paintings to the nave and south ambulatory, the repair of Victorian and Medieval stonework and the cleaning of the Lady Chapel interior. The architectural practice



“Treasured for its unique blend of architectural styles spanning over a thousand years, including recycled Roman bricks from Verulamium, this building has a rich history of restoration work right up to the present day.”

had also installed two platform lifts in archaeologically sensitive locations to provide full disability access inside and around the abbey. The nave has been reordered for worship with a new platform lift and the practice advised on the re-hanging of the bells, and major commissions for new stained glass windows, sculpture and liturgical furniture.

Cliveden Conservation, who are recognised internationally for their academic knowledge and extensive experience, were appointed by the cathedral as principal contractor for the west porches project, following a competitive tender. Founded in 1982 as the conservation workshop for the National Trust, Cliveden Conservation still advise the National Trust on the conservation of stone, plaster and the decorative arts. They also provide award-winning conservation services to organisations such as, English Heritage, The Royal Household, county councils, The Church of England and the numerous college buildings of Oxford.

Cliveden Conservation worked alongside Kathryn Harris of the architects to rectify the issues surrounding the Victorian rebuilding of the west front of the cathedral when the Norman and Medieval structure was last renovated. The cleaning of the whole façade >

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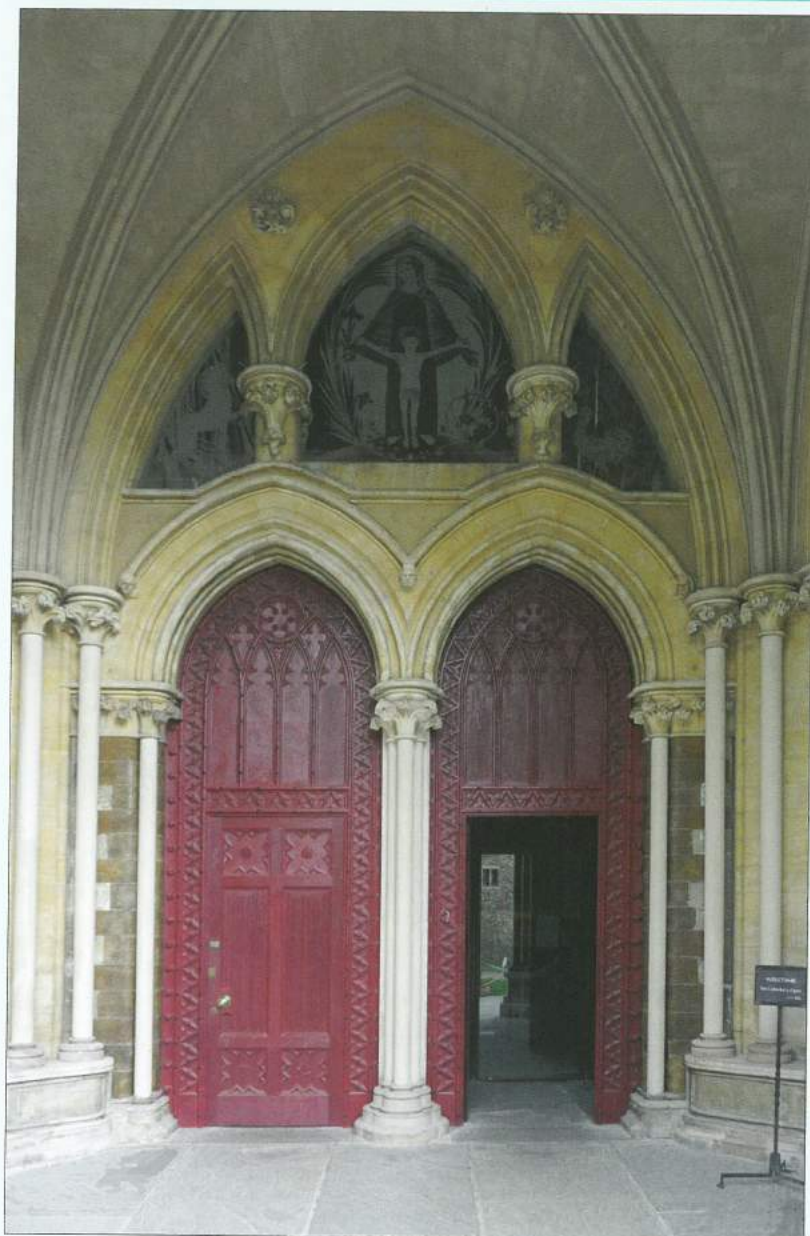
Taplow Court, Conservation of late 18th Century Stonework, Phase 1. Detail of newly carved elements.

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www.clivedenconservation.com

By appointment sculpture conservators to THE NATIONAL TRUST

PROJECT



provided an opportunity to repair, repoint and minimise the inherent deficiencies in the Victorian fabric.

Surveys and repairs to drainage channels and damaged internal guttering were carried out to address the damp and water ingress to the walls. New lead flashing and gutters were installed to allow the west entrance porches to better cope with the weather.

Special attention was given to the three interior porches to clean the stone and replace unsightly pigeon prevention measures with unobtrusive wires and netting to blend in with the masonry. Structural work included pinning the cracks and filling open joints with lime mortar. Carving repairs were also carried out to the foliate capitals and carved heads in the porches. On completion of the repairs, a scheme of tinted limewashing was



undertaken in two tones to accentuate the tracery and carved details within the porches.

As part of the project all the doors to the St Alban's Cathedral were cleaned, repaired and painted red. The Great West Window, designed by Ninian Comper, as a memorial to those who suffered in WWI, was also cleaned both sides. And finally, a new lighting system was fitted which highlights the freshly cleaned façade and porches.

"This programme of repairs was essential to prevent further water damage to the Medieval West Porches, thereby providing the opportunity to reveal their true architectural splendour. The careful work carried out will sustain and protect this important building for future generations to enjoy," says Kathryn Harris from the architects.

At the end of 2016, St Alban's Cathedral received the St Alban's Civic Society's Trevelyan Prize Commendation for the cleaning and restoration of the cathedral's west front at a special ceremony. Cliveden Conservation and Richard Griffiths Architects were recognised as part of this prestigious award for their exceptional conservation and restoration work on the project.

"Our team of masons and conservators are delighted that all their hard work has been acknowledged by St Alban's Civic Society's Trevelyan Prize Commendation. Every inch of the façade was cleaned with painstaking care and an immense amount of effort was made to match the stone repairs to the original fabric of the building," says Lewis Proudfoot, stone section manager at Cliveden Conservation.

The judges were impressed with the high level of care and skill which was required to restore this important heritage building situated in the heart of the city.

"The cathedral community is delighted with the restoration and re-lighting of the west end, and we are very pleased that the project has been commended by the St Alban's Civic Society's Trevelyan Prize committee. It is a tribute to all those who executed the work to such a high standard," says the Very Reverend Dr Jeffrey John, Dean of St Alban's. ■