

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

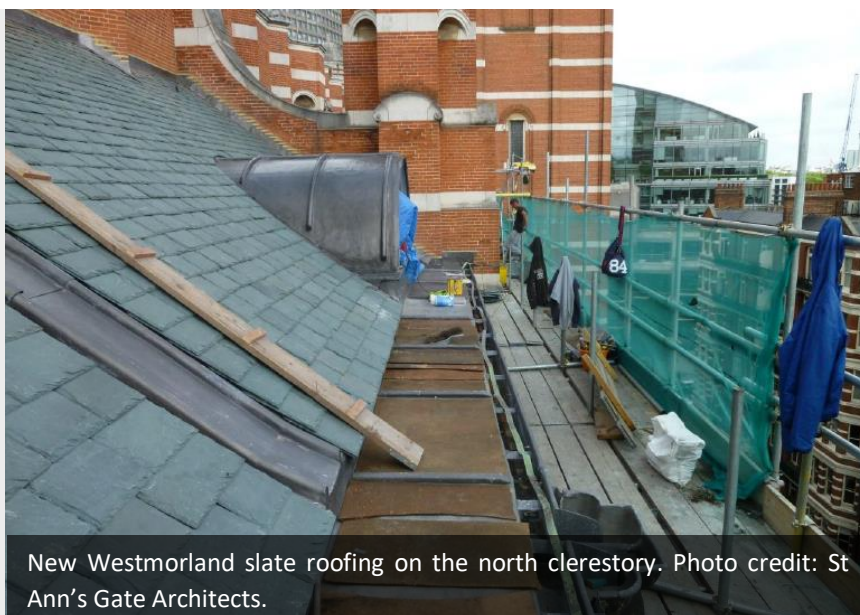
Awarded £690,000 in total over three grants between July 2014 and July 2016

The need

Following the severe storms at the start of 2014, a routine inspection revealed that the cathedral's lead roofing had been badly damaged, and that both the stonework on the upper levels and the asphalt covering needed urgent repair. There were buckets on the floor to catch drips, and leaks to the organ chamber threatened the organ mechanism itself.

Outcomes

The cathedral is now much drier and more comfortable. The cathedral organ is no longer at risk from rain and damp. As a result of the projects, the cathedral team are paying more attention to long-term maintenance planning.



New Westmorland slate roofing on the north clerestory. Photo credit: St Ann's Gate Architects.

Works completed and timescale

The works began with the repair of the nave and chancel roof, then subsequently the organ chamber roof and north clerestory roof were repaired. The first three roof repairs involved recovering the asphalt and renewing the abutment details, the repair of the heavy lead weatherings to the copings of the surrounding parapet, and treatment of the backs of the parapet to resist moisture ingress using a lime-based render. The north clerestory roof was re-slatted.

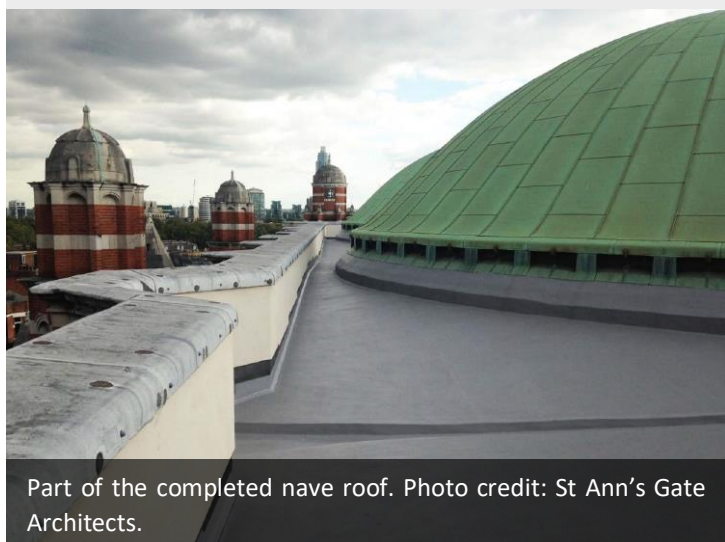
Economic and social impact

The works supported jobs in traditional slate roofing using Westmorland slates, asphalt roofing, and leadwork. The remedying of the leaks problem has allowed the cathedral to continue to give access to the local homeless community to use the cathedral space as a safe shelter when needed. The fund also encouraged the cathedral team to review how they were commemorating the First World War and they made extra efforts in that direction, including memorials to the Irish regiments in the Irish chapel.

The Cathedral

Westminster Cathedral, the seat of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and the Mother Church for Catholics in

England and Wales, was built to an 1894 'Italo-Byzantine' design by John Francis Bentley and completed in 1902. Consciously avoiding comparisons with Westminster Abbey, Bentley veered away from his usual Gothic style and created a huge space, capable of holding 2,000 people, with its massive pillars, broad nave (the widest in Europe) and shadowy domes. It is the largest Catholic church building in England and Wales. Although little more than 100 years old, it now has major repair requirements comparable to those of a medieval building; around 2010 it launched an emergency appeal for £3 million to repair the brickwork of its domes and update the heating and electrical systems.



Part of the completed nave roof. Photo credit: St Ann's Gate Architects.