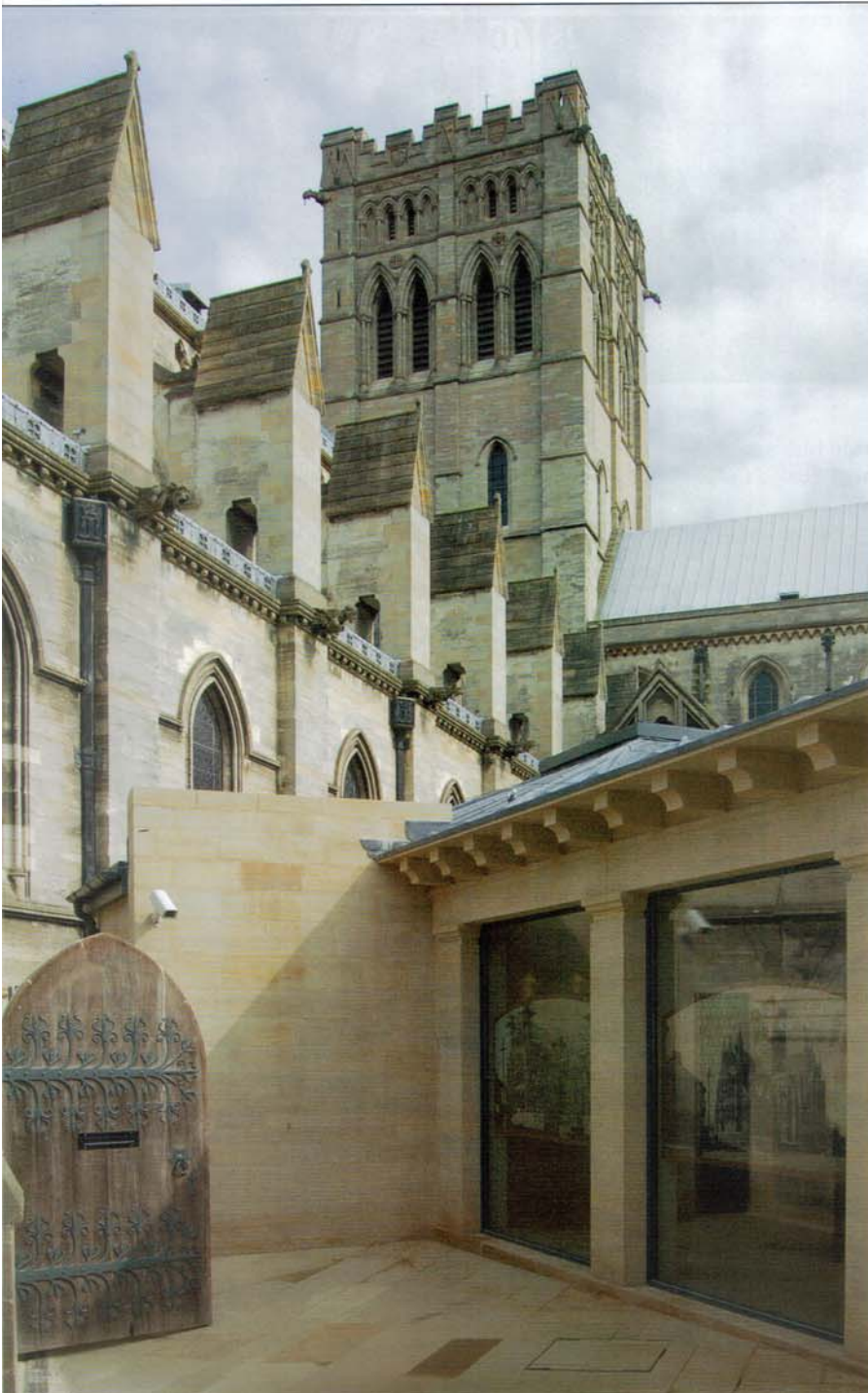


CHURCH

building & HERITAGE
REVIEW



The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist Norwich



After almost nine years of fundraising and a year of construction, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Norwich has now completed a major capital building programme – the Narthex, with the support of a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funding bodies.

The Narthex – whose opening coincides with the centenary of the Cathedral itself – provides space and facilities for bringing together people from the local and regional communities and different countries and cultures, for welcoming children and young people, for education projects, and for the service and care of others, as well as serving as the focal point for the Catholic community of East Anglia.

Fr. James Walsh, Dean of the Cathedral, said: “The Narthex has a massive external presence which relates directly in style and materials to the adjacent Cathedral. But it is much more than an impressive building: it marks a new era in the life and history of St. John’s.

“Just as in 1910 the building of the Cathedral was completed, so in 2010 the Narthex will be open as a new and exciting complement to St. John’s. But the Narthex will also enable us to reach out to a wider community in a way that has never been possible until now.” >06

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A ROOF TO LAST A HUNDRED YEARS

Nestled into the far west corner of one of Norwich's most iconic buildings the Narthex still manages to make a statement. Adding anything to The Cathedral of St. John The Baptist would always have been a challenge, a challenge in no small part made more difficult by the need to use materials appropriate to a building from the early 1900's.

It is therefore not surprising that a good thickness lead sheet was chosen for the roof covering. The aim of using code 7 lead sheet, by Anglia Lead Ltd of Norwich, for the roof was in order to utilise both the functionality of the material, which should last for at least the next 100 years, but also to have some synergy with the original building. The main hall area is covered by a steeply pitched roof line, somewhat in keeping with the nave of the main cathedral, and this runs along to the east end of the building where the pitch reduces and the highest point becomes flat, akin to the tower which can also be found toward the east end of the cathedral. To allow the building width the north side of the cathedral has a large flat roof stepping gently north towards the west door before dipping back down to the eaves where the lead meets up with the Clipsham stonework. To make a roof last 100 years means that the detailing of the lead and the leadworker's skill must be to the highest standard and the choice of Anglia Lead, who are a long-term specialist local company, who have been for many years the preferred choice of the Cathedral, made both much easier. Anglia Lead has been casting and laying lead sheet since 1861 and has been a member of the Lead Contractors Association since its inception in 1984, when the then Managing Director, Bob Bangay, who himself has a craftsmanship award named after him, was one of the founding fathers. Ensuring that all details being proposed met with Lead Sheet Association guidelines was no new challenge to Anglia Lead or their contracts manager Dave Norman, who with 20 years experience in this field, certainly knows his business when it comes down to ensuring that specifications were fully adhered to.

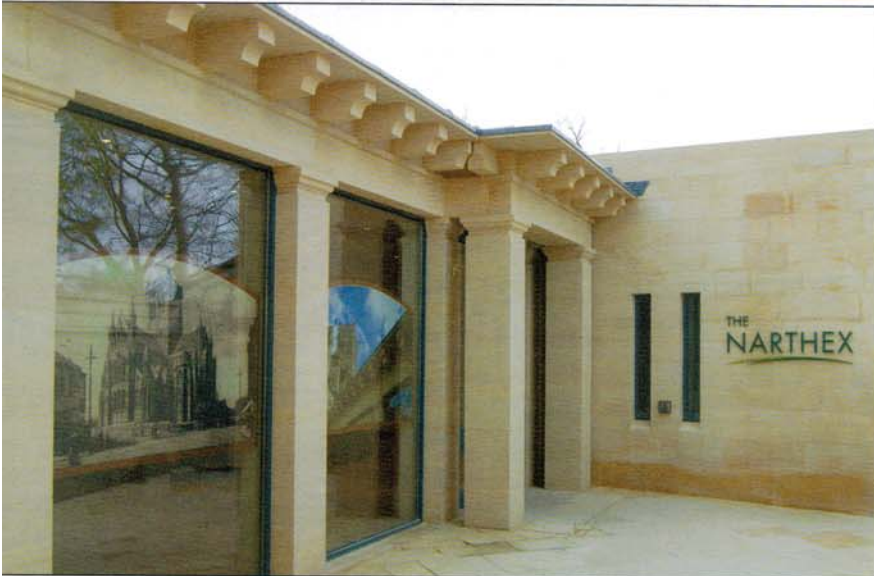
In order to give this building the covering which it deserved, and indeed demanded, every detail of how the lead sheet should be laid (right down to the clipping patterns of the flashing and angles, at which the timber rolls met) had to be considered.

Nor did the workers have the luxury of a temporary roof to work with, but instead had to press on quickly in order to

meet the contractors deadlines. Eight lead-workers were used, and between them they laid 35 tons of lead sheet, whilst at all times meeting the excellent standard of workmanship expected of Anglia Lead.

It can safely be said that despite what some might say about the construction industry, those undertaking projects of this nature are still truly craftsmen and will keep the wonderment of our heritage safe for many years to come.

For further information visit: www.anglialead.co.uk



Cathedral architect, Russell Taylor, has been working on the Narthex since 2003. He said: "The project is all about access – access to the Cathedral physically, intellectually, spiritually and socially. Set adjacent to the lofty interiors of the Cathedral, it seems essential that within the Narthex the ceilings are made as high as possible. To achieve this, a barrel vault and a dome

protrude into the triangle of the roof space. The dome is over the South Porch, the immediate link with the Cathedral itself. Its circular geometry guides visitors around the 45° angle between the two buildings.

"Part of the point of the whole Narthex project is to allow the early English Neo-Gothic Cathedral to be seen and appreciated as originally designed; it would not do therefore to design in the neo-Gothic style and create a confusion between that which was original and that which is new. So I have used simple, elemental components hinting at a common ancestry with neo-Gothic but not in any way attempting to mimic its details.

"The interior has been made to follow the exterior. As the walls and pergola relate to the exterior of the Cathedral, the interior tries to relate in the same way. The pergola piers carry on the inside flat beamed ceilings, the barrel vault and the dome. Interior and exterior are united. The columns, the flat ceilings, the barrel vault and the dome are, in the very simplest terms, the sort of Darwinian ancestors of the neo-Gothic piers and vaults within the Cathedral. Thus the Narthex – being more primitive – is subordinate to the Cathedral. Which is exactly as it should be." >08

The Narthex

An innovative classical design

PROJECT TEAM

Client:
Catholic Cathedral
of East Anglia
Preservation &
Development Trust

Architect:
Russell Taylor
Architects

Services Consultant:
MLM

Structural Engineer:
Scott Wilson

Quantity Surveyor:
Philip Pank &
Partners

Contractor:
John Youngs Ltd

Stonework:
Fairhaven & Woods

Leadwork:
Anglia Lead

The visitor centre for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Norwich was completed in January and will be formally opened by the Duke of Norfolk on 22 May. Designed by Russell Taylor Architects based on an initial concept and design by Anthony Rossi, the building called The Narthex adjoins the south side of the Cathedral and creates a new main entrance with level access into the Grade I Listed Building.

Adding to such an important building was always going to be an architectural challenge. What is an appropriate style? The Cathedral is a stunning essay in Early English neo-Gothic, wholly consistent in every part. Should the new work follow this style or retreat into modernist minimalism?

The Narthex follows neither of these routes. It uses a simple elemental, Classical range of shapes: square section columns carrying beamed ceilings, low barrel vaults and domes. The shapes are so simple and elemental they can be seen as the stylistic ancestors of the Gothic architecture of the Cathedral. Thus a stylistic bond is made, but The Narthex is seen as subordinate to the Cathedral.

The Narthex project is all about access – access to the Cathedral physically, intellectually, spiritually and socially. Why is it called The Narthex? A narthex is a transition space, a preparation between the outside world and the special world of the House of God. (Many great churches have a narthex, most usually in the form of a large porch). And that is precisely what The Narthex, seeks to be – an introduction and an entrance, the “front door.”

The building accommodates all functions which are peripheral to worship. As well as providing a new entrance there is an education centre, multi-purpose hall, refectory, shop, lavatories, etc. Construction started in February 2009 and in spite of considerable difficulties with the ground conditions and the constraints of the site it finished nearly on time (just 3 weeks overrun) and on budget!

The cost of the project has been generously supported by a number of grants and in particular by the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as by many individual donations and fund raising. ■

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