



## BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO ST MARY'S HALL

### Cloister and Refectory project at St David's

THE Cloister of St Mary's College was built in the late 14th Century, adjacent to the Cathedral North aisle and transept. The Cloister was used for exercise and meditation and had upper floors which provided a library and sacristy. The Cloister walk was bounded to the north by St Mary's Hall, which was the college chapel. Following the reformation the college was dissolved and all of the buildings except St. Mary's Hall were dismantled. St Mary's Hall was re-roofed in the 1960's.

The Cloister Project recreates the lost cloister and brings St Mary's Hall back into full use. The new accommodation provides much needed education, office space and facilities for the 300,000 people who use or visit the Cathedral each year.

#### THE CLOISTER

The new work had to sit lightly within the grade I listed building and Scheduled Ancient Monument, with minimal disturbance to fabric both above and below ground. Our design strategy has been to understand the development of, and alterations to, the historic fabric over time. Jerry Sampson, the Cathedral Archaeologist, explored the order of build and extent of disturbance to medieval work by studying the standing fabric, carrying out trial excavations and interpreting documentary descriptions in relation to evidence found on site.

This gave us a detailed picture of the original work, including ephemeral evidence of lost timber structures, and lost paths. Areas of existing disturbance, caused by excavations for the great buttresses constructed in the 16th and 18th centuries and drainage conduits in the 18th and 19th centuries were plotted. Old foundations, floor zones, corbels and drainage routes were identified and re-used to minimise the impact of the new work on the existing fabric. All of this information identified areas which could be disturbed again, to keep damage to fabric and burials to a negligible amount.

The Cloister west wall, which faces out towards the River Alun and the Cathedral Close is being rebuilt to its original height in local rubblestone, including the distinctive local

Caerfai stone. Views from the Close will therefore be much as they were before the reformation.

The cloister walls which face inwards onto the garth have been rebuilt as green oak, pegged frames. This is a traditional but slim construction, to maximise on limited floor space and meet current insulation requirements. The reconstruction of the original stone vaults to the cloister walks would have been to some extent conjectural. All elements of the oak framing have been set out to reflect the precise lines of the missing stone vaulted arcades and floors. This produces the rhythm and proportion of the original works but using a newly designed structural system. Toilets are constructed on shallow raft foundations, set within 150mm of current ground level to avoid disturbance of burials and with the new high floor levels taking advantage of the sloping site. Buttress and cathedral walls are left exposed, to breath.

Cross beams and independent steel framed gutters were used to minimise fixings into the cathedral wall. Six sets of steel anchors and a leadwork chase following the line of a rubblestone joint are the only fixings into the north aisle wall and wall structures to the new north porch simply rest up against the Cathedral, with soft lime separating joints and no fixings.

#### THE TREASURY

The space between two of the great buttresses had been roofed over in the 1990's to form a choir school. This enclosed corner of the cloister, sheltered from the wind and sun, has provided a safe and sta-

• Continued >



We are pleased to have been principle contractor for St David's Cathedral Refectory

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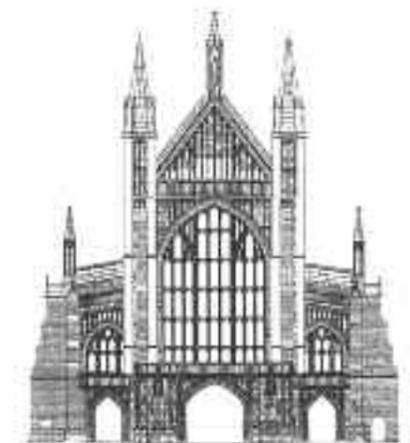
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ble environment to display cathedral artifacts. Minimal alterations were required to the modern work to suit the new use. Both historic and modern joinery and finishes were modified for security and safety in case of fire, to reduce the amount of new work and avoid waste. The Treasury fitting-out and exhibition were designed by Aukett Brockliss Guy.



### ST MARY'S HALL – THE REFECTORY

Additional floor space was required to enable St Mary's Hall to be used as a refectory. The steel framed mezzanine was designed to be a modern freestanding structure, set above the high window sill level to allow daylight into both floors. St Mary's Hall is set over a stone vaulted undercroft. To avoid overloading the vault, the raking steel legs transfer the new floor loads through the vault at its strongest points, at the junctions with the walls. The undercroft houses the choir school, boiler room and staff facilities. Pale colour and traditional materials such as stone paving, timber boarding and limewash have been used to gently blend into the historic setting.

Established restaurateur Bill Sewell, who spearheaded the Refectory project, said: "The space is working beautifully and our customers are enjoying the food we serve – there couldn't be a more exciting place to have a café. The potential here is huge".

Revd Andrew Mottram, founder of Ecclesiastical Property Solutions, a consultancy which supports churches through the regeneration process, added: "The new Refectory at St Davids is stunning. This is a high quality example of church

communities across the country re-discovering the medieval understanding and intentions for our church buildings. Meeting the needs of pilgrims and visitors, while at the same time generating an income to maintain the ministry and buildings, is essential for the future sustainability of the Church." (The Refectory at St Davids is open during the summer months from 10am – 6pm and family suppers are available July/August. [www.stdavids cathedral.org.uk](http://www.stdavids cathedral.org.uk))

### SUMMARY

A mix of different types of well serviced accommodation has been provided as simply as possible, with no loss of important historic fabric, within a sensitive complex and confined space. Traditional external materials have been used, to stand the test of time and to provide useful space for many years to come.

It is to the great credit of the Dean and Chapter and Friends and supporters of the Cathedral that this ambitious project has now been realised.

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St David's Cathedral Cloister Project

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We are pleased to have been contracted for the electrical work at St David's Refectory.

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