

Shrewsbury Catholic Cathedral: Access

Awarded £281,000 in March 2015 towards a £380,000 project

The need

There was a long-standing problem of unsafe access to the cathedral's main entrance. The stairs were too steep and therefore rarely used for fear of injury or accident, and there was no provision for wheelchair users.

Outcomes

The cathedral is now accessible to all, safer for the public and much more inviting to visitors and worshippers. The area will not need further work apart from routine maintenance for a long time.



New entrance to Shrewsbury Cathedral. Photo credit: Arrol and Snell Architects.

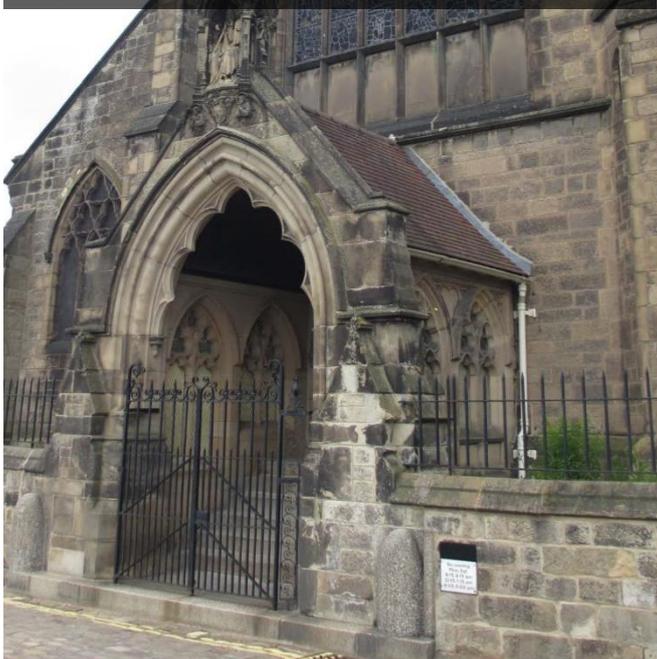
Economic and social impact

The project supported local metal workers and stonemasons and two apprentices were employed. Those working on the project were challenged and extended their skills in specialist labour techniques. The number of visitors to the cathedral has increased from 6,000 per year to 2,000 to 3,000 per month since the project was completed and a team of stewards has been recruited to welcome them. The cathedral has also set up a café and restaurant for visitors making it more of an attraction, and is now used for large Diocesan events. The public are increasingly using the new external porch space, which incorporates a war memorial shrine: people passing who would not necessarily go into the cathedral will now stop at the shrine and can readily get to it.

Works completed and timescale

The project involved dismantling the side walls of the central porch to allow construction of new steps and a platform lift. It also included the building of a new processional route and draught lobby inside the western entrance, moving the font to the west end to give a welcome to visitors, and upgrading the First World War memorial which located in the porch. The work was completed within the timescales of the fund. Elements of the work not eligible for the First World War grant were covered by a substantial legacy to the cathedral.

Before the alterations: a forbidding entrance with steep steps. Photo credit: Arrol and Snell Architects.



The Cathedral

Shrewsbury Cathedral was designed by Edward Pugin, son of AW Pugin, and completed in 1856. Originally, a larger cathedral with a tall spire was planned. However, two years into the building of the cathedral, a stratum of sand was discovered very close the buildings foundations, causing them to be weaker than expected so the spire had to be abandoned and the building scaled down. Located on a tight site close to the old town walls, it is surrounded by the attractive Georgian townscape that characterizes so much of the historic core of Shrewsbury, but somewhat hidden from the town. Had Pugin's great spire been built the cathedral would have been much more visible and better known. It has notable stained-glass windows, with Victorian examples by Hardman & Co. of Birmingham and six windows from the interwar period by an artist inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, Margaret Agnes Rope, the daughter of a local doctor, who had a studio in the Glass House in Fulham and later continued her work alongside being a Carmelite nun.

Shrewsbury Catholic Cathedral: South-West Porch and Exterior Repairs (2 of 2 projects funded)

Awarded £250,000 in November 2016

The need

The cathedral dates from 1853 and its masonry and roof coverings were in generally good order, apart from subsidence at the west end. The west gable wall of the cathedral was relatively stable but the two porches (the central porch and the south-west porch), which were constructed after the main cathedral had been completed, were not provided with sufficiently deep foundations. The central porch was underpinned as part of the first project funded; now the south-west porch

also required require pinning and repointing. The cathedral was also keen to unify the appearance of the west front with new cast-iron railings matching those installed for the first project, to improve safety and access by installing steps with a shallower pitch over the existing steep steps, and to create a small war memorial chapel on the landing which would have level access from the interior of the cathedral and could also be reached from outside.



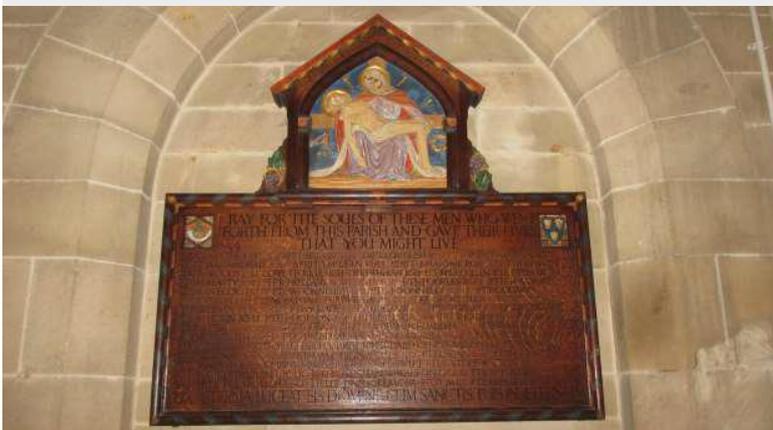
The south-west porch before the works. Photo credit: Arrol and Snell Ltd.

Outcomes

Following on from the first project, the work has made the exterior of the cathedral safer, more attractive, secure and visible to the wider public, and more easily located by the increasing numbers of visitors. It has unified all aspects of the building; it is easier to tell from any direction that it is the cathedral. The success of the projects has inspired the cathedral team to focus on fundraising for further repair needs, including to the 1856 East Window by Hardman & Co. The building and access improvements have allowed the cathedral to run a significant number of services and events that they would not normally have held, such as the Rite of Election and the Chrism Mass.

Economic and social impact

The projects are attracting many more visitors to the cathedral. The number of visitors to the cathedral has increased from 6,000 per year to 2,000 to 3,000 per month since the project was completed and a team of stewards has been recruited to welcome them. The creation of the war memorial chapel provides a special focus for the local garrison and will improve their use of the building; the cathedral has organised a whole series of memorial services for them. The public are increasingly using the chapel, including people passing who would not necessarily go into the cathedral who can readily get to it from the outside.



The First World War memorial plaque, with painted sculpture by Margaret Rope. Photo credit: Arrol and Snell Ltd.

Works completed

Works included underpinning and repointing the porch, the creation of safer steps, new cast iron railings, the refurbishment of the existing First World War memorial plaque and the creation of the memorial chapel. Elements of the work not eligible for the First World War grant were covered by a substantial legacy to the cathedral.

The Cathedral

See previous project summary.