

Project Update 11– January 2015

Whilst the project progresses the recent archaeological discoveries have meant we have to make some significant changes to the capital works and further details are given in this report. Despite the challenges the contractors are making progress and the archaeologist is having a wonderful time. A date for an archaeology open day in February will be announced soon!

Location of lift access

The discovery of a Norman structure underneath the Kent steps in late September was a hidden treasure we hadn't anticipated finding. The structure is exactly where the new internal lift (serving Quire, Nave and Crypt) was going to go.

The architect revisited the range of options considered at an earlier stage of the project and identified that the only other realistic alternative was to move the lift to the outside of the same wall (but enclosed in the new porch). It would necessitate three openings through this wall to provide access to the Crypt, Nave and Quire and a fairly deep lift shaft next to it.

The trial pits had to be done slowly and in sections because of the concerns over structural issues but were largely complete by early December at which point a panel of experts was called together at the request of the CFCE to discuss the significance of the Norman structure and to discuss the archaeological implications of losing the structure and of the possible alternatives.

This panel was in agreement that the Norman structure was nationally significant and should be retained in situ; as a consequence it would require "wholly exceptional circumstances" to give permission for its removal. The panel understood the challenges faced by the Cathedral including the financial ones. Two representatives from the CFCE were on this panel and they reported back to CFCE who met the following day. Following the meeting CFCE have informed the Cathedral that:

1. CFCE cannot give permission to destroy the newly discovered Norman masonry under the Kent steps
2. CFCE cannot give permission for a three level replacement lift outside the South wall
3. CFCE might consider giving permission for a split solution whereby access from Nave to Quire is achieved by a new stair climbing lift on the Kent steps and between nave and Crypt with an external lift at those two levels (but not the higher level) but this will take time and need design work and further archaeological (and structural engineering) exploration to be undertaken before permission can be considered.

This was then discussed with HLF and the consensus is that the Cathedral has no choice but to remove the full lift from the current contract and to implement the fall back position of providing for disabled and mobility impaired access by a) reinstating the Kent steps and installing a new stair climbing lift on them (thus preserving the remains underneath) and b) providing access to the Crypt from the Nave level externally via the new door into the vestries from the Garth and using the simpler lift serving vestries and Crypt. This will still require the current South porch being removed and replaced with some form of aesthetic but "temporary"

covered walkway along the cloister to ensure in wheelchairs can get into the Garth from the Cathedral and appropriate signage to make it clear where the access is. This is being investigated at present.

Whilst not an ideal solution from an access point of view it does still provide those with mobility issues a way into the Crypt. It will raise some management issues for the Cathedral including how the vestries are accessed and used but minor changes to the design in that area should help mitigate this. A better access solution might be possible in the future but this would now be dealt with as a different project and further funding would have to be sought.

Whilst the main focus has been on resolving the issues surrounding the lift other building work has continued. The stripping of the library roof tiles is now complete as is the rebuild of Garth steps and the lead work to the candle makers' store. Foundations and a new stone retaining wall to west Garth path are also progressing.

With regards to our Activity plan, a major milestone has been reached with the formal launch of the Textus Roffensis on line 5th November, following its digitisation by Manchester University. This formal event was attended by over 150 people. and the document can be viewed on line at: <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk/luna/servlet/s/3t00c6>

Another key document from our library has also been digitised and can be viewed on line at <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk/luna/servlet/s/k4o00t>

We are also a step nearer to the creation of a library catalogue. Discussions with the University of Kent to create and host the new library catalogue are well advanced. The building of this relationship is important for the long term with benefits for both the Cathedral and the University and it will extend beyond the catalogue to further research into the collection.

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