

FORMER ST. JAMES CHURCH - STRUCTURAL WORKS AND CONVERSION TO ARTS CENTRE

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FORMER ST. JAMES CHURCH - STRUCTURAL WORKS AND CONVERSION TO ARTS CENTRE

On 16th November 1999 the President of the Planning and Environment Committee answered questions from the Deputy of St. John, following press reports of structural works to the vaulted ceiling of the former St. James church, during the Jersey Arts Trust's conversion contract. It was agreed that a full report would be provided for the information of States members.

This report provides a summary of the action taken by the Planning and Environment Committee (and the former Island Development Committee) through the Department of Property Services to put the building known as St. James Hall into a wind and watertight state suitable for subsequent conversion by the Jersey Arts Trust to an Arts Venue. It also explains the actions of the Committee (as landlord) in assisting the Jersey Arts Trust to solve the problem.

Background

The former St James Church was acquired by the public in 1992 on a leasehold basis and then by freehold in 1994 for a consideration based on the value of the site (approximately £350,000). When purchased, the building was in a poor overall condition, especially due to the defective state of the roof coverings which were permitting large quantities of rain to enter the interior. A number of survey reports were available to the Committee prior to purchase, and whilst the condition of the building was a significant factor in proposing the acquisition, there were other equally important factors which led to the decision to recommend the purchase of the property.

One of the key issues was to secure the future of St. James School, a requirement of the Education Committee.

Had this not been achieved, a new school would have been required at very considerable expense. The Church, grounds and Vicarage were viewed as a bonus to obtaining the school.

Survey reports

In August 1990, Brian A. Morton & Partners, United Kingdom Consulting Civil and Structural Engineers, prepared a 'Brief Structural Survey' report on the Church jointly for the Reverend Wastie (of the predecessor in title) and Save Jersey's Heritage. The report was commissioned to demonstrate that the building was not, as had been suggested, beyond economic repair.

The report said that the overall condition of the structure was sound, but that rain penetration through the roof should be dealt with as a matter of urgency to prevent the areas of wet rot to the roof/ceiling timbers from becoming worse, and also to prevent the vaulted ceiling from collapsing, which was described as being a serious danger.

The report also said that no dry rot had been seen, and whilst the ceiling was described as being severely damp-stained though rain ingress, there were no specific warnings given that the plaster-lath could be defective or that the timber support structure to the same could be rotten.

In 1992, Gilmore Hankey Kirke Ltd, United Kingdom Architects, Engineers, Planners and Economists prepared a report for the Island Development Committee under the instruction of Mr. Philip Geoghegan entitled 'Schedule of Condition with Recommendations to Render the External Envelope Watertight'.

It appears from this report that in the two years since the Morton report (1992), the condition of the building had got significantly worse. Dry rot fungal growth was reported as being present in many areas, and warnings were given that the rot might be much more advanced than was visible.

The report also warned that certain inaccessible roof and ceiling timbers could be affected by rot, and recommended scaffold access be provided to allow further investigation, together with opening up of the vaulted ceiling at the column heads to allow inspection of the support structure.

The Gilmore report, unlike the Morton Report, did not raise any concerns over the ceiling itself, other than the support structure.

Both reports provided an adequate level of sound information about the condition of the building, and put the recipients on notice that the fabric of the building was in poor condition which was leading to significant internal deterioration, and that further investigations would be needed to establish the extent of the internal deterioration.

Response of the former Island Development Committee after acquisition

It was agreed that the Planning and Environment Committee would administer such works as necessary to make the building wind and watertight, and that the Jersey Arts Trust would administer the contract to convert the building into an Arts Venue. This report summarises the various building repair contracts placed during the years prior to the building being taken over by the Jersey Arts Trust in August 1998.

The repair contracts prior to conversion

The Department of Property Services administered six separate repair contracts on the buildings in the complex between January 1993 and March 1998, and carried out routine maintenance works to the former Vicarage which has been used continually since its acquisition and the grounds. This included works to the former church at a cost of approximately £290,000.

The Department of Property Services appointed a local Chartered Architect to act on its behalf as professional adviser on the repair of the building and to administer the repair contracts, who in turn took specialist advice in respect of timber treatment and structural matters (the Arts Trust also appointed the same Architect to act as its lead consultant for its conversion project).

The approach that was taken to restoring the building to a wind and watertight state was largely governed by the limited finances available. There was a long delay in obtaining funding to allow the conversion which the States had approved several years earlier, to take place. It was the wish of the various bodies to open the building to public use at an early stage whilst further funding was being sought for the permanent repair works and subsequent conversion.

Contract Phases I, II, III and IV between November 1994 and January 1999 were therefore planned as minimal expense works to put the building into a state safe and suitable for its temporary opening to the public, i.e., reasonably wind and watertight, all dry and wet rot treated, basic services and facilities in place, and safe and presentable public areas.

Following the temporary opening of the building in November 1994 and the confirmation by the States that the premises would provide a good community arts facility, further funding was identified by the Planning and Environment Committee for the Phase V and VI works (March 1998 to December 1999) which were planned to make the building permanently wind and watertight.

In March 1993, the Architect produced a report for the IDC titled 'Condition Survey and Schedule of Works', which formed the basis of the Phase I, II, III and IV repair contracts.

The report identified that rain ingress through the roof coverings and exterior walls had led to decay of the ceiling structure, and that there was evidence of dry rot to the timbers from both above and beneath the ceiling.

The report went on to recommend that certain sections of the ceiling structure be sprayed with a fine insecticidal spray, the debris from within the column heads be cleared (from above), and 50mm diameter holes be drilled through the plaster-lath at the column heads.

Attached at the back of the Architect's report were two short reports from specialist firms dealing with timber treatment, damp proofing and pest control. Both reports recommended courses of action for dealing with the dry-rot that was active in the roof structure.

Shortly after the Architect's report was produced, a further report was received from the specialist timber treatment firm, Rentokil.

The report said that many timbers showed serious breakdown due to fungal attack from both wet and dry rot, and explained that the problem had developed to a degree where full discovery of the extent of the decay was impossible from a normal survey.

The report recommended that in conjunction with patching the roof to stop rain ingress, holding works in the form of fungicidal treatment of timbers take place.

In January 1995, the Architect produced a further condition survey report of the building which set out the longer term and more permanent repair works.

The report confirmed that during the holding works (contracts I to IV) the roof and ceiling timbers had been spray treated, and the localised collapses of the plaster-lath ceiling had been repaired.

The repair contracts undertaken between Jan 1993 and March 1998 are summarised as follows:

Contract	Date	Value*	Brief description of works
Phase I	Jan. 93- Feb. 93	£1,010	Works on roofs to reduce severe rain ingress. Making building secure.
Phase II	Sep. 93- Dec. 93	£46,804	Works on roofs to make watertight Boarding-up defective windows. Internal timber treatment to kill dry and wet rot. Removal of pigeon colony and guano.
Phase III	Feb. 94- Jun. 94	£30,183	Further roof repairs. Further timber treatment works. Electrical supply. Internal carpentry repairs.
Phase IV	Sep. 94- Nov. 94	£27,365	Works to allow the building to open to the public on 12.11.94. Window repairs. Repair of rainwater goods. Internal decoration. Electrical and sanitary fittings installed.
Phase V	Dec. 95- May 96	£91,216	Re-roofing works. Damp proof course installation.
Phase VI	Sep. 97- Mar. 98	£93,603	Re-pointing works. Drainage works. Window repairs.
	Total:	<u>£290,183</u>	

* Exclusive of professional fees.

The various contract Phases are described in more detail -

1. In January 1993, the Phase I contract was let. This was prior to the Architect's detailed report of March 1993, and the works were intended to reduce the severe rain ingress into the building through gapping holes in the roofs, and to secure the entrances to the building against intrusion. By largely stopping the rain ingress, it was expected that the dry rot infestation in the roof would start to die-off.
2. In September 1993 the Phase II contract was let, which included a sub-contract with Rentokil for the timber treatment works. Smaller holes in the roof coverings were patched, which were not dealt with under Phase I. The pigeon colony was removed, as was the huge build-up (eight skip-loads) of guano over the entire attic area. All visible timbers were sprayed and/or drilled and injected to kill-off the active dry rot, these works amounting to approximately £36,000.
3. In February 1994, the Phase III repair contract was let. This was very much geared towards getting the interior in a reasonable state now that the rain ingress had been halted. Further active dry rot was discovered when previously unexposed elements were opened up, and was treated and repaired accordingly. A new three-phase electrical supply was installed to feed basic services.
4. In September 1994 the Phase IV repair contract was let. This contract was planned to bring the building up to a standard whereby it could be opened temporarily to the public. At the end of this contract the building was opened up for public events for a short period.
5. In December 1995, the Phase V repair contract was let. Its main purpose was to completely re-roof the building to make it permanently watertight. The works also included the application of a product known as 'Isothane Thermolok' to the back of the plaster-lath ceiling, which was specified as a means of enhancing the bond of the plaster to the laths, and to provide thermal insulation. A retrospective damp proof course was also installed.
6. In October 1997 the Phase VI repair contract was let. The contract was mainly for the re-pointing of the external elevations and re-building of the parapet heads which were largely defective.

Hand-over to the Jersey Arts Trust

In August 1998 the Arts Trust took over the building and let its contract to convert the Church into an Arts Venue. Accountability for this project is with the Finance and Economics Committee and at this time Property Services was no

longer responsible excepting a subordinate role as representing the landlord. As this report will outline, Property Services was requested to take over project management once the problems had been identified.

Ceiling and timber repair works discovered during conversion

Seven years after acquiring the building, and during the Trust's conversion project when it was necessary to erect a full internal scaffold to facilitate both the redecoration of the vaulted ceiling and to act as a safety platform for men working above, it was discovered that the plaster of the plaster-lath ceiling was detached from the laths. Visually the ceiling was in sound condition, but upon taking core samples (which necessitated a scaffold) it was found that the key between the plaster and the laths was suspect. It is possible, but not certain, that the necessary works to soundproof the roof in connection with the building's conversion to an arts venue may have disturbed the ceiling and contributed to the breakdown of the plaster to lath key.

Upon commencing the repair works to the ceiling, it was discovered that the timber support structure to the ceiling in the vicinity of the column head and external wall support points was seriously rotten, and extensive repair of rotten timberwork was needed before the ceiling repairs could be completed. These timbers were obscured from view due to their location at the column heads, and furthermore, timbers which visually appeared sound, were found to be hollow with rot when cut and drilled.

Response to the ceiling and timber problems

When the problem with the ceiling was identified, the Arts Trust sought the help of the Planning and Environment Committee as works were delayed. The Chairman of the Trust met the President and Chief Officer. Subsequently the Committee identified funding of £150,000 from savings from 2-10 Halkett Place and Belle Vue capital projects which, with the agreement of the Finance and Economics Committee, was transferred to the Arts Trust project budget. The Arts Trust requested the Director of Property Services to take over the project as project manager to ensure the problems were fully assessed and the scheme put back on target. This arrangement was agreed free of charge by the Committee in order to help the Arts Trust. Technical evaluations and a thorough review of works was prepared. The Finance and Economics Committee agreed further funding sufficient to deal with the ceiling. That Committee has asked the Planning and Environment Committee to give a guarantee that no further funding will be required. The Committee is unable to provide this undertaking, having not been responsible for the conversion contract, and having taken over project management at a late stage.

However, the Committee has recently forwarded a report to the Finance and Economics Committee from the Department of Property Services which identifies the need to deal with certain building elements which are still compromising the building's wind and watertight state, at a further cost of £50,000. The Planning and Environment Committee has requested approval to allocate a further sum from unspent revenue funds for 1999, bringing its total help to the Arts Trust for £200,000. The report shows that the project can be completed within the amounts voted and earlier than expected. The Committee has recorded its appreciation of the work carried out by the Property Services Department to solve this difficult problem.

Conclusion

The Committee believes that, in view of the lapse of time which has taken place since the building's acquisition, the warnings set out in the structural reports, the difficulties which the Jersey Arts Trust experienced with their conversion project, the exposure to further costs if the project was delayed, the potential for substantial legal costs and disruption which would ensue, is right for all efforts to be focused on solving the problems in the most cost-effective manner.

It is also clear that no actual loss has been incurred as a result of the late discovery of the ceiling and timber repair works.

The project will produce a major new facility for Jersey Arts in 2000 at a cost which is very substantially below the cost of a purpose-built facility of this size and quality and with a superior and unique ambience. The Committee is delighted that, subject to final completion in the spring of 2000, the project is on track to achieve these objectives.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the contribution of its staff, contractors, consultants and the Jersey Arts Trust in this matter, and those who ensured the building is conserved and continues to be valued by the public in a new use for the future.