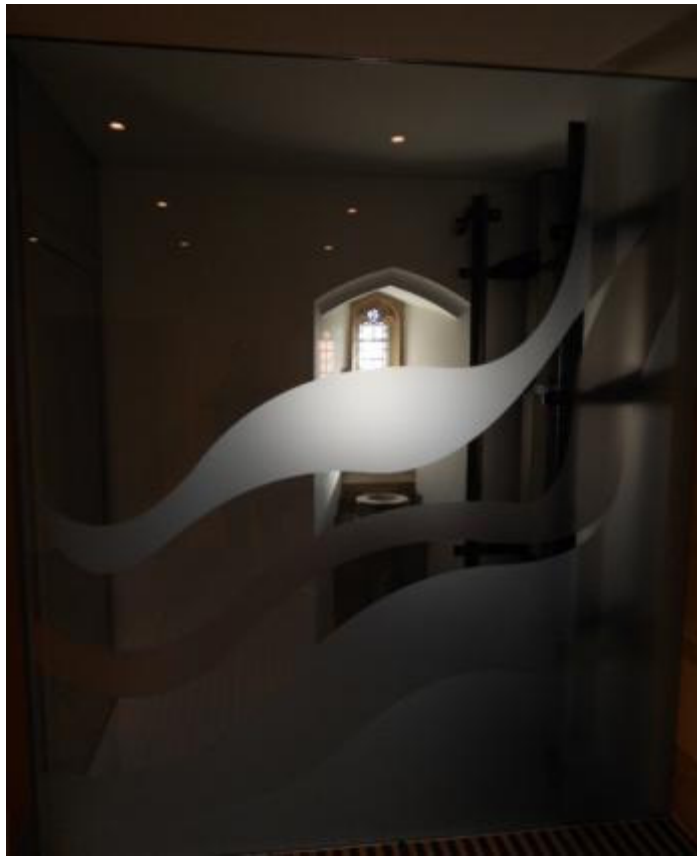


Our Lady of Lourdes RC Church, Harpenden

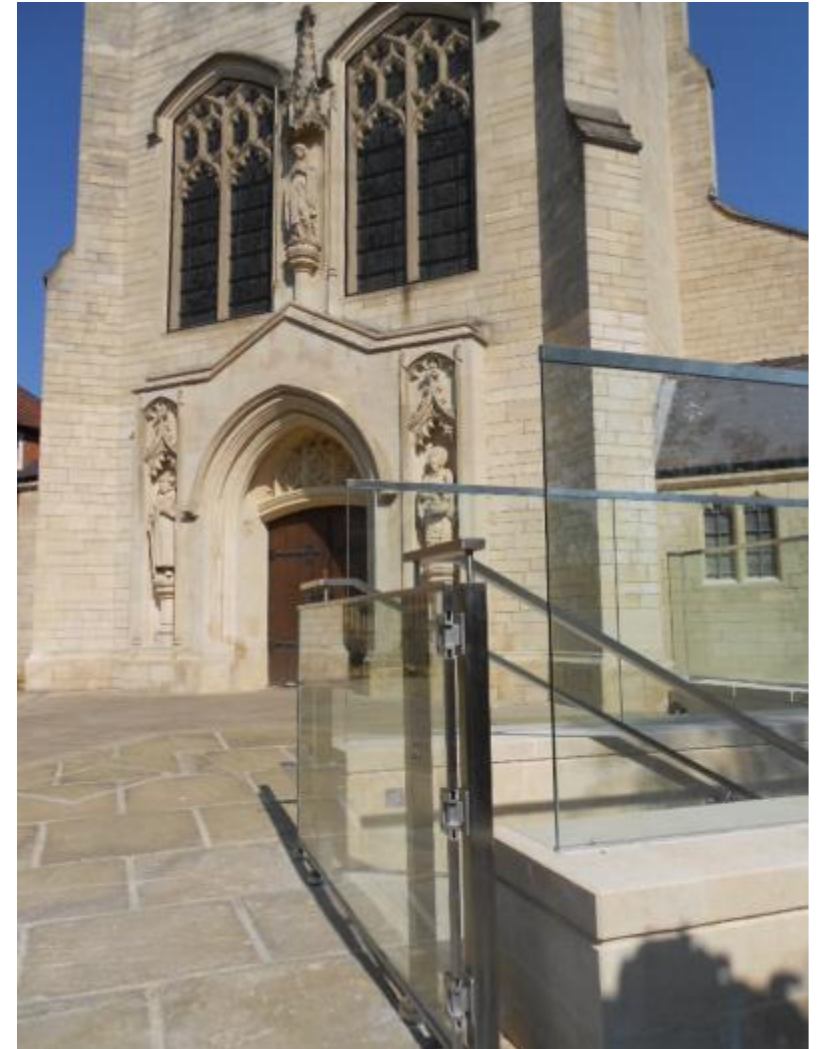
*By Colin Smart, Director
Kyle Smart Associates Architects*



When the Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in Harpenden identified a need for additional meeting rooms close to the Church, this created a challenge for the Parish Priest Mgr Harry Turner and the Diocesan Surveyor Chris Fanning back in late 2007.

Whilst the Church has a Hall, it is some 15 minutes walk away from the Church itself and there was a pressing need for space close to the church which could be used for meetings and teaching.

The church however already filled the site so the only solution would be to go downwards. For such a radical action, the Parish brought in Chris Fanning, Diocesan Surveyor and Colin Smart of Kyle Smart Associates to see if this was feasible. With the input from specialist contractors, although radical, the project was deemed to be perfectly feasible but would require careful thought and planning. What was being proposed was to remove the ground floor inside the church and dig downwards for a distance of some 4.5m, whilst underpinning each structural column and the external walls



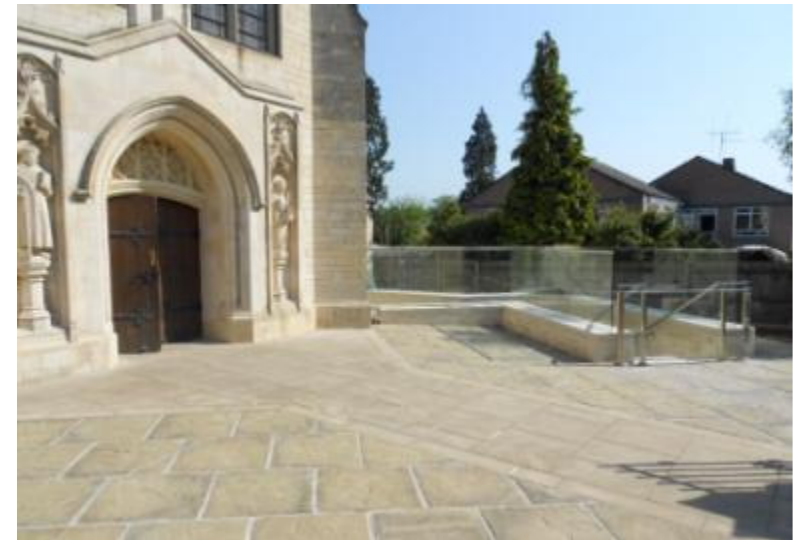
The design was duly agreed and Planning Consent was sought in early January 2009.

Of course the project also included the problem of access to the new facilities and this was achieved by the introduction of a new external staircase leading grandly to the basement as well as a new wheelchair accessible lift from the church itself directly into the new undercroft area.

There was little space in the entrance hall but a bespoke lift fitted into the entrance foyer and a bespoke glass screen kept the open appearance of the foyer.

Parishioner Linda Tait assisted in the interior design of the undercroft and the entrance doors to the church. Linda project managed the fit out of the undercroft whilst Kyle Smart Associates retained the overall project management and design, ensuring that all the specialists were integrated into the main contract works. Specialists included, underpinning, ventilation, flooring, underfloor heating, glazed screens, stone masons, lifts, all of which needed careful coordination and budget control.

Planning consent was achieved on 27 March 2009 and work commenced on Tender information. RE Lay of Dunstable was appointed main contractor and work commenced on site on 10 May 2010.





The Parish vacated the church, taking up temporary residence for the duration of the works in the St George's School and Church of St Nicholas.

Protection works were carried out to the stained glass windows, Stations of the Cross and the Sanctuary, though the sanctuary became home to the pews whilst excavations were being carried out.



Protection for trial pit investigation only – bespoke timber casings were used for the main project





It was a strange site to see mechanical diggers inside the church and the floor slowly disappearing from our eyes as the men dug down.

The columns were constantly monitored for any sign of movement though we were told that the copper covered spire moved up and down three millimetres during the excavations and underpinning.

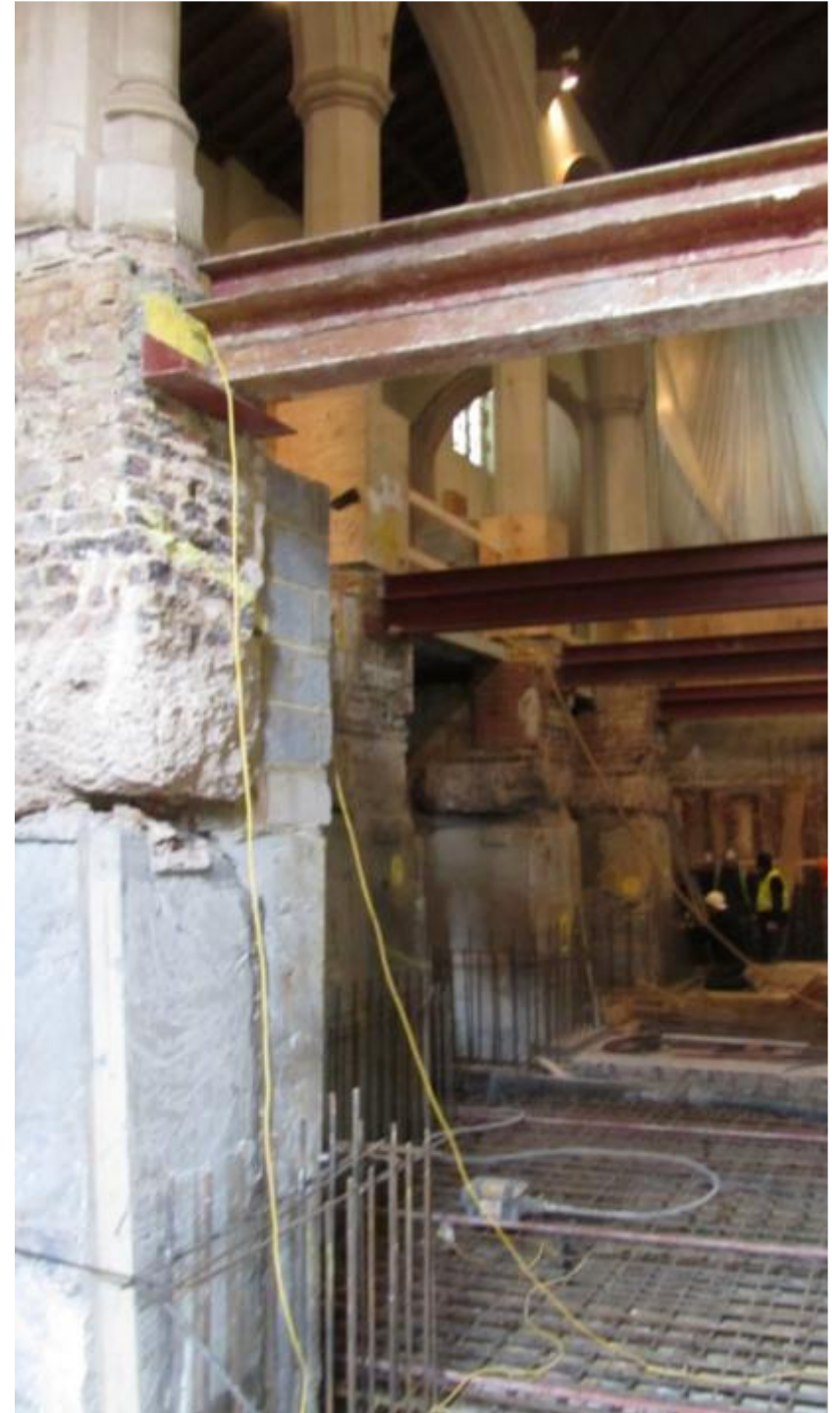
Machines were seen in strange places with men's heads only just visible down deep holes while the tricky work of underpinning the main structural columns was carried out. All the time the Contractor and engineer monitored the stability of all earth works to ensure the safety of the site operatives.





After some time, the new church floor was ready to be installed and the rebuilding began.

This included the tanking of the new undercroft.





After some time, the new church floor was ready to be installed and the rebuilding began.

This included the tanking of the new undercroft.

At this stage, the Parish gained access back into the church at weekends, though it meant juggling with pews every week while half the underfloor heating was installed at a time. The Architects and Monsignor Turner put in the heavy labour moving pews about to ensure that the new flooring when installed covered the correct areas. Each pew was meticulously measured and set out to suit the new flooring layout.

They were then stacked back onto the sanctuary whilst floor layers and decorators carried out their work.

Whilst this was going on a separate team of workmen were completing the shell of the undercroft below and commencing the new steps to the basement outside.





The flooring installation commenced – engineered hardwood for the aisles and Kirkstone beneath the pews.

The Choir loft was extended at this time ready for new glass doors to the church entrance.

The font was put back together in it's new location at the entrance to the church.





Work was completed in the main church in time for Easter 2011, although the fitting out of the undercroft and the lift installation carried on for a number of months.

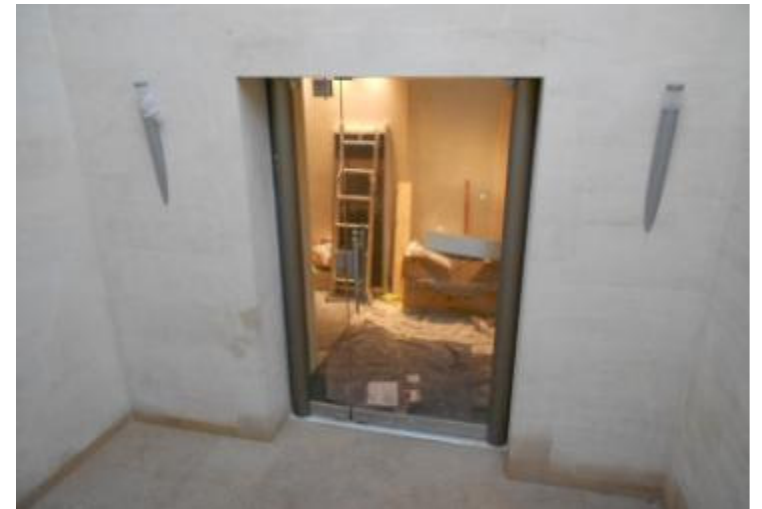


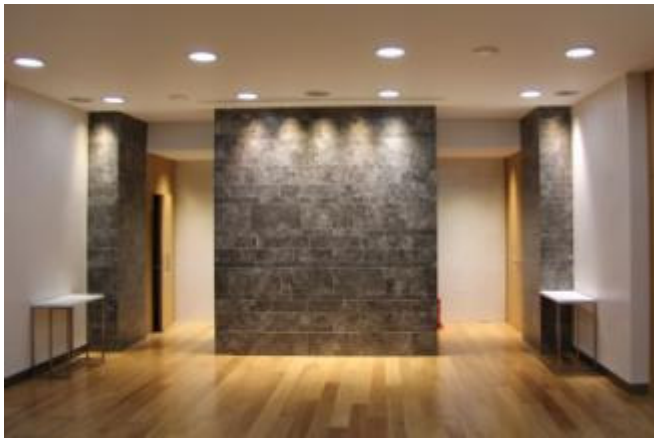


The steps to the basement were clad in stone with glass balustrades, with lighting to the treads, creating a light contemporary yet modern feel.

The doors to the basement were fully glazed with modern lighting to the sides.

The stone mason, Jim Keegan matched the new stone cladding to the existing, with all new walls to the basement clad in stone.





The fit out of the undercroft was managed on site by Linda Tait of Tait Design, who designed and specified the materials and finishings. The contractor was RJM of Luton.

The idea was to create something more than a room in the basement: a space which would be equal to the work of the Parish in their teachings and celebrations.

Quality materials and detailing have been incorporated to create a high quality flexible space: the main room can be partitioned off to create 2 smaller teaching areas if required, by a full height sliding folding etched glass screen which folds completely away into a cupboard when not in use.

This complex project required a commitment far above and beyond the normal client expectations and is successful due to the efforts of the whole professional team, the Diocesan Surveyor but in particular because of the determination of the Parish Priest Mgr Harry Turner. Mgr Turner's calm confidence in the team was often challenged but he kept calm and reassuring at all times. This calmness invigorated everyone involved in the project and was key to the eventual success of what is a magnificent feat of engineering and organisation from all involved.

