



## ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL WINDSOR CASTLE CONSERVATION AND REFURBISHMENT

by Martin Ashley of Martin Ashley Architects

The College of St George was founded at Windsor in 1348 by Edward III as the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter, and its 'new' chapel built in the late fifteenth century, is known to millions as one of the finest late-Perpendicular buildings in Europe. As Surveyor of the Fabric to the College of St George, it is my honour to oversee the upkeep of the chapel and its environs for the Dean and Canons of Windsor, and a privilege to work alongside such a highly

talented client, consultants and contracting/craftspeople to ensure the survival of this outstanding chapel and its Grade I listed and Scheduled Ancient buildings.

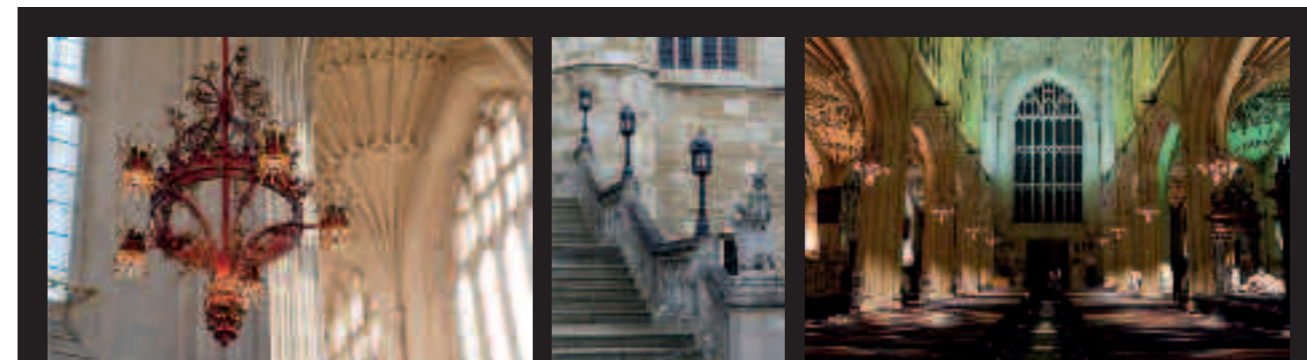
Since commencing as Surveyor in 2000, the Dean and Canons have undertaken a series of projects on the chapel itself, including a major restoration of the iconic west front to address ongoing stonework degradation since the last restoration cycle in the early twentieth



century. We have also been carrying out phases of a rolling programme of conservation and re-presentation of the stonework inside the chapel, re-instating something of the breathtaking impression the interior must have given when first built, and including discovery of rare fifteenth century heraldic decorations.

Most recently, however, our attention has turned to the Canons' Cloister, a remarkable

survival of buildings tucked between the chapel and the castle wall. It was built around 1350 as lodgings for the canons and priests serving upon God, the sovereign and the Order of Garter Knights – a function that survives to this day, making the Canons' Cloister unique as the earliest surviving collegiate range in Britain still remaining in its original use. Despite incremental changes throughout the centuries, much of >



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PROJECT

ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL

PROJECT TEAM

Client:  
Dean and Canons  
of Windsor

Architect:  
Martin Ashley  
Architects

Landscaping and  
Paving Works:  
CWO

Custom Lighting:  
Madson Black

Principal  
Contractor.:  
Paul Webb Roofing

Installation of  
Lighting  
Protection:  
Dawson Steeplejacks



the Medieval fabric survives beneath Baroque, Georgian and Victorian additions. The Dean and Canons' two year conservation and refurbishment programme has sought to conserve not only the early fabric but also later changes in order to preserve the remarkable chronology of the buildings we see today.

The most visible element of the project is a fine new roof to replace copper sheeting from the 1950s which had inevitably begun to leak. Before replacing this material with traditional sand-cast lead, we carried out extensive repairs to the Medieval oak structures beneath. As we always find, the work uncovered a considerable amount of new



knowledge about the building, which has been expertly recorded by Dr John Crook the project archaeologist, including the positions of long-lost Medieval chimneys, and possible oak balustrades and even statuary revealed through our forensic study of timber decay patterns. Once the archeology had been recorded and preserved, we used traditional carpentry techniques to address structural problems. Crucially, the roof now has proper ventilation and fire protection, and new lead hatches to allow easy maintenance, and greatly improved access to the previously haphazard and unsafe roof area.

Below the new roofs, we repaired the timber framed ranges overlooking the cloister garth, where inappropriate cement render applied in the 1960s had cracked and was allowing water penetration and damage. The Medieval frame was re-covered with a traditional breathable lime render, brick noggin panelling was repaired where necessary, and windows and doors were thoroughly overhauled, repaired and decorated.

A particularly challenging but rewarding aspect of the project was the internal refurbishment of a series of lodgings within the Canons' Cloister. Here we preserved the Medieval fabric – including some very significant Medieval wall paintings – together with accretions from every century,



while bringing each unit up to modern-day living standards. When modern plaster was removed and floors opened-up we discovered serious decay to medieval floor and ceiling joists that, in places, had become entirely detached from the rest of the frame. These were repaired using tried and tested conservation materials and techniques before

new kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms were installed, and all mechanical and electrical systems were completely renewed. It is particularly satisfying to know that, thanks to this work, the team has enabled over 660 years of continual use of the Cloister by the Canons of Windsor to continue comfortably and safely into the future.

The project was generously supported by the Bray Fellowship – a philanthropic body established to support the work of the College of St George upon these buildings. At the end of this phase of the project we installed a wall-mounted bronze sundial, imaginatively designed by the Chapter Clerk, featuring a hemp-bray gnomon – a nod to similar motifs in the chapel commemorating Sir Reginald Bray, a Tudor benefactor, and a thank-you to today's generous patrons. ■

*Martin Ashley is Principal at Martin Ashley Architects, and Surveyor of the Fabric to the College of St George, Windsor.*

*For further information about St George's and the Canons' Cloister please see [www.stgeorges-windsor.org/canonscloister](http://www.stgeorges-windsor.org/canonscloister)*

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