CASE STUDY

The Church of St Ildierna, Lansallos, Polperro, Cornwall.

The Grade 1 listed, medieval parish church of St Ildierna at Lansallos was built in the fourteenth century and is one of Cornwall's oldest churches.

Inside the three aisle church there are a great number of features of historic and architectural interest and importance, not least the magnificent, priceless carved oak pews which were made between 1490 and 1520: the carvings on the ends are largely Renaissance scroll-work in a Gothic framework.

On Saturday 26 February 2005 this beautiful church was entered by miscreants who set a fire in the north aisle.

Fire crews from Polruan, Looe, Saltash, and Liskeard attended the scene. About 45 fire-fighters tackled the blaze and managed to save much of the roof and extract or protect many of the threatened contents.

The fire did however spread partially to the carved timber wagon roof, destroying much of it above the point of origin and causing scorching of the roof of the Nave and Chancel. Fortunately, the rafters largely survived, and this enabled the temporary installation of chipboard sheets overlaid with tarpaulins to prevent further damage by the elements. The corrosive effects of the smoke/soot, generated by the fire, were a concern, the whole building having suffered from soot/smoke staining.

Renowned for their sensitive approach and expertise in such situations, Continuity were called in by the Insurer appointed Loss Adjusters to see if they could help with the decontamination works required in the church. The diocese had appointed Architects (MRDA) with whom Continuity were required to liaise.

After visiting the church, Continuity representatives met MRDA Architects at the RIBA Centre for Architectural Education in London to discuss the issues involved.

Continuity suggested that the best approach would involve a relatively new and innovative form of treatment, previously unheard of by the Architects, which involved “soda blasting” almost all of the affected surfaces – stone, brick, slate (flagstone floor panels and memorials), plaster, lime render, granite, the timber wall plates, braces to the rafters, rafters per se, bosses and boarding, and the wood block floors. It was proposed that this would not only be much quicker than manual decontamination but that, also, components of the church’ superstructure would suffer from the effects of pressure washing, a scheme which had been considered by others. In addition, the Continuity method would result in much of the intricately hand carved (and now charred or scorched) timberwork, at that stage destined for removal and disposal, being saved.

Continuity were duly awarded the contract for the decontamination works required. A birdcage scaffold was erected in the church and a temporary stud partition wall was constructed to the Nave and South Aisle.

Continuity set to work with their soda blasting equipment. Over a period of 7 weeks, and utilising 5 of their full-time staff, the whole interior of the church was treated. This involved the North Aisle, Chancel, South Aisle, Nave, and the Bell Tower at ground and first floor level.

The results were stunning. The Architects and their Clients were delighted.

Photographs are available on request.

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