

Bishop Edward King Chapel

**REF 2014 submission
by Níall McLaughlin**

Project Details

Author:	Níall McLaughlin
	Níall McLaughlin realized this project through his practice Níall McLaughlin Architects.
Title:	Bishop Edward King Chapel, Oxfordshire
Output type:	Building
Function:	Place of worship
Locations:	Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, UK
Client:	Ripon Theological College and the Sisters of Begbroke
Practical completion:	March 2013
Budget:	£2,034,000
Area:	300 m ²
Building contractor:	Beard Construction
Structural engineer:	Price and Myers
M&E engineer:	Synergy Consulting Engineers
Acoustic engineer:	Paul Gillieron Acoustic Design
Quantity surveyor:	Ridge and Partners LLP
Stone consultant:	Harrison Goldman
Access consultant:	Jane Toplis Associates
Planning consultant:	Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners
CDM coordinator:	HCD Management Limited
Approved building control inspector:	HCD Building Control
Construction consultant:	Richard Bayfield



**Statement about
the Research Content and Process**

General description

The Bishop Edward King Chapel is a new chapel for Ripon Theological College in Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire. The chapel replaces the existing one, designed by George Edmund Street in the late nineteenth century, which had become too small for the current needs of the college. The clients for the project were the college itself and a small community of nuns resident on the site, the Sisters of Begbroke. The brief asked for a building that would accommodate the range of worshipping needs of these two communities within a collegiate seating arrangement.

Questions

1. To investigate the relationship between space and liturgy.
2. To examine the creative use of natural light and geometrical form as an expression of the divine.
3. To consider Semper’s search for origins and recreate the notion of the primitive hut.
4. To explore the use of innovative structures and sustainable design principles in the context of contemporary liturgical design.

Methodology

1. A study of the etymology of liturgical terms and their poetic use in literature.
2. Analysis of the site through video and sound recordings.
3. Research through making in the form of site-specific tools to explore the acoustic and luminous conditions of the site.
4. Text-based research to explore the geometry of the ellipse, the history of its discovery and use in public buildings.

5. Design development through public, collaborative drawing.
6. Experimentation with structural/material principles and building methods.
7. Working through prototypes to refine the skin of the building.

Means of dissemination

The Bishop Edward King Chapel won a two-stage RIBA competition (2009). It has been the subject of two lectures and an exhibition, the Tracing Floor (2011). It has been extensively reviewed in the architectural press, including by Peter Salter in the *Architectural Review* (2013) and by Mary Ann Steane in *Architecture Today* (2013).

Statement of Significance

The Bishop Edward King Chapel won a two-stage RIBA competition in 2009 from among 126 international applications. The other shortlisted practices were Massimiliano Fuksas Architetto, Sarah Hare Architects, Terry Pawson Architects Ltd. and Ushida Findlay Architects. The chapel was the unanimous choice of the jury panel. In 2013 the chapel won a RIBA Regional Award (South), RIBA National Award, and RIBA South Building of the Year.

**The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
Were all at prayers inside the oratory
A ship appeared above them in the air.**

**The anchor dragged along behind so deep
It hooked itself into the altar rails
And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,**

**A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
‘This man can’t bear our life here and will drown,’**

**The abbot said, ‘unless we help him.’ So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.**

Seamus Heaney, ‘Lightenings viii’ (*Seeing Things*, 1992)

Introduction

The practice was commissioned to design a new chapel for Ripon Theological College in Cuddesdon, after winning an invited RIBA competition in 2009. The new chapel was built to serve the two interconnected groups resident on the campus in Oxfordshire, the college community and the nuns of a small religious order, the Sisters of Begbroke. The chapel sits alongside the existing listed college buildings, designed by George Edmund Street in the late nineteenth century. [fig. 1 – 3]

The brief asked for a chapel that would accommodate the range of worshipping needs of the two communities and would be suitable for both communal gatherings and personal prayer. In addition the brief envisioned a separate space for the sisters to recite their offices, a spacious sacristy, and the necessary ancillary accommodation. Over and above these outline requirements, the brief set out the clients’ aspirations for the chapel, foremost as ‘a place of personal encounter with the numinous’ that would enable the occupants to think creatively about the relationship between space and liturgy. They asked for a building that would be an exemplar of forward looking liturgical design that would link the past with the future. The client summarised their aspirations for the project with Philip Larkin’s words from his poem ‘Church Going’: *‘A serious house on serious earth it is...which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in...’* (Larkin 1989). [fig. 4&5]



2

Aims and Objectives

Our aim was to investigate the relationship between space and liturgy through a reflective and research-related design process. We asked if and how the innovative use of materials, building techniques, geometrical form and natural light could lead to an architectural expression of the divine. This aim to explore architecture as an expression of the divine was made specific to the conditions of the site and the users’ aspirations for the chapel. [fig. 6 – 8]

Our work for the chapel began with the word ‘nave’. It is the hidden word ‘nave’ at the centre of Seamus Heaney’s poem ‘Lightenings viii’ (Heaney 1992). The word nave describes the central space of a church, the place for the

2
Christ asleep during the storm on the Sea of Galilee from Abbess Hitda’s Gospel Book (978-1042).



5

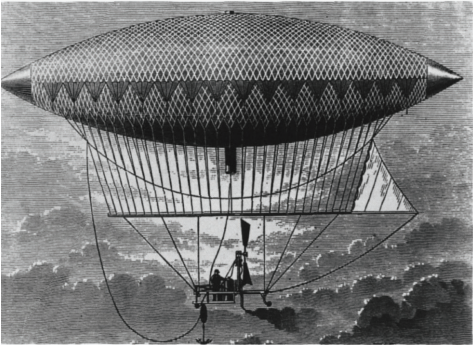


44

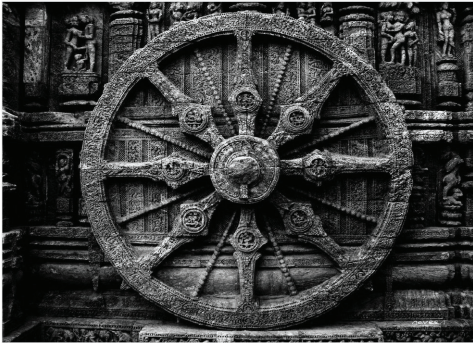
3
Chapel ceiling.

5
A place for personal prayer.

44
Interior view.



6



7



8

6
Henri Giffard's Airship. The first to use powered flight.

7
'Hub of a Wheel' carving on the base of the Sun Temple of Konark, India.

8
Kite flying.

congregation, but shares the same origin as 'navis', a ship. It has four common and deeply interlinked meanings. Nave can mean the still centre of a turning wheel, the body of a church, the navel (omphalos), or a ship. The image of the wheel hub speaks of stillness amidst movement. The navel speaks of origins, of things that grow out from the middle. All of these go back to the oldest idea of making, or finding, a hollow place at the centre. From these words, two architectural images developed. [fig. 9]

The first is a gentle hollow in the ground as a meeting place for the community. The second is a delicate ship-like timber structure that rises into the treetops to gather the light from the leaves. The first idea speaks of ground, of meeting in the still centre. The second

idea suggests an uplifting buoyancy, rising towards the light. We wanted to use the way in which these two opposite forces work off each other to give the building its particular character. [fig. 10 & 11]

Our research objectives were also directed by the landscape of the college grounds. On the site is an enormous beech tree on the brow of the hill. Facing away from the beech and the college buildings behind, there is a ring of mature trees on high ground overlooking the valley that stretches away towards Garsington. This clearing has its own particular character, full of wind and light and the rustling of leaves. From the outset it was our intention to capture these qualities of light and sound within the building. [fig. 12]

Questions

These main objectives and initial observations set the direction for the threefold line of inquiry that progressed the project. Our questions were:

1.

How might an architectural project investigate the relationship between space and liturgy?

2.

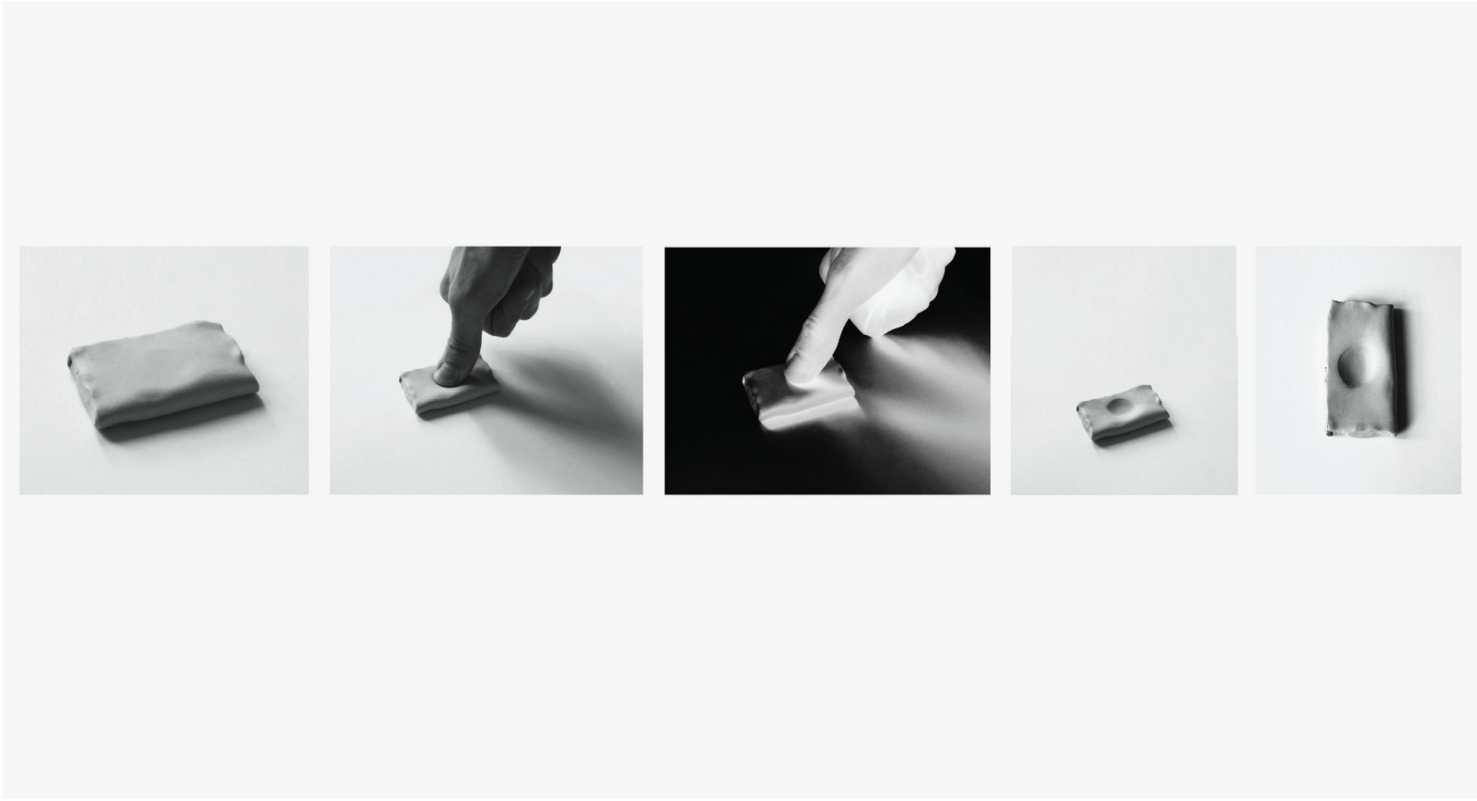
How might the creative use of natural light and geometrical form lead to an expression of the divine?

3.

How might a close study of Semper's search for origins, combined with design practice, lead to a contemporary recreation of the notion of the primitive hut?

4.

What innovative structures and sustainable design principles should be developed in the context of contemporary liturgical design?



9

9
Making a hollow in the ground.



10

10
The great Beech tree.

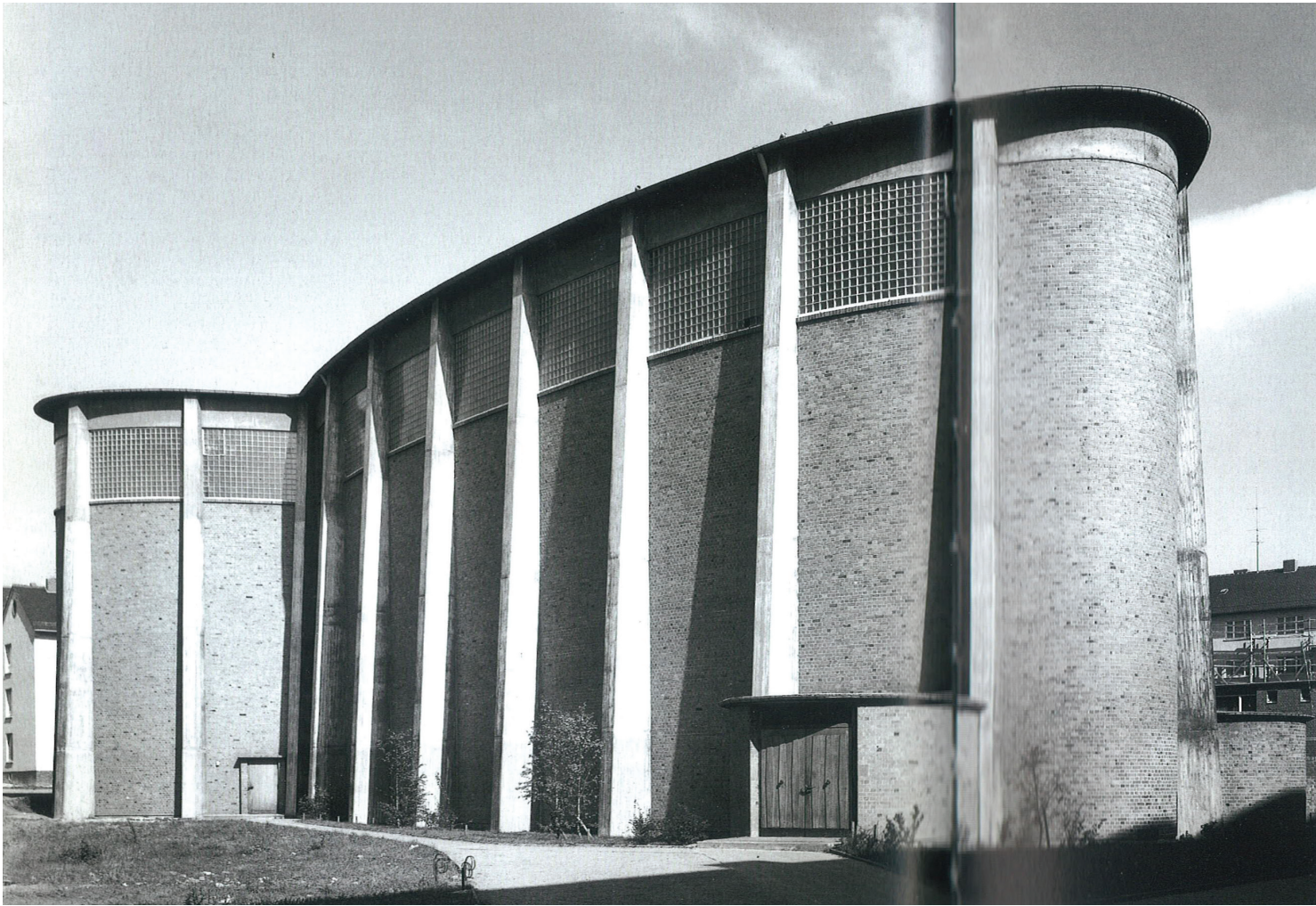
11
A ship in the trees.



11



1



15

Context

The project is situated within a rich context of religious themes and buildings, which we researched in detail. Our design decisions are described below thematically in relation to these contexts:

The ellipse

The chapel is organised around one pure ellipse containing an antiphonal arrangement of seating and surrounded by a narrow ambulatory. The pure central geometry is focussed on the lectern and the altar. Outside the ambulatory, the singular form is broken down into a collection of attached structures that contain spaces for individuals or groups to pray in intimate settings. In many of our buildings, the plan has a particular antecedent. Here, we acknowledge our debt to Rudolf Schwarz’ church of St. Michael in Frankfurt from 1954. In our case, we moved the structure to within the surrounding walls, making a perimeter ambulatory. [fig. 13 – 17]

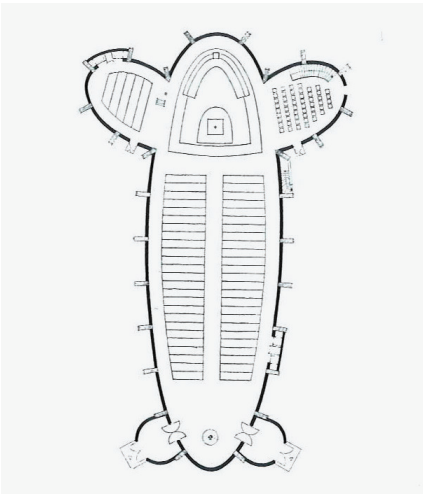
We chose the particular geometry of the ellipse. It was a straightforward solution to the desire for a collegiate layout and the bow of the seating expressed a communal gathering space. To construct an ellipse the stable circle is played against the line, which is about movement back and forth. For us this reflected the idea of exchange between perfect and imperfect at the centre of Christian thought. The movement inherent in the geometry is expressed in the chapel through the perimeter ambulatory. It is possible to walk around the chapel, looking into the brighter space in the centre. The sense of looking into an illuminated clearing goes back to the earliest churches.

Looking towards the light from the shadow symbolises the narrative of conversion, as suggested in Richard Sennet’s description of the Palatine Chapel at Aachen (Sennet 1994). We made a clearing where the community can gather in the light. [fig. 18 – 20]

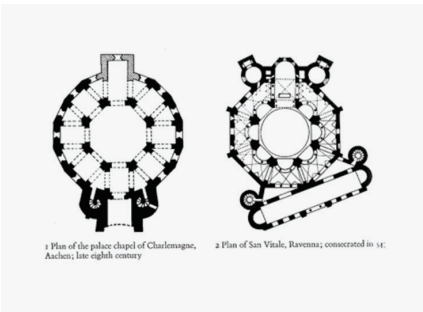
Space and liturgy

We chose to make an enclosure that steps down slightly towards a central space. The difference in level is slight but we considered it to be very important. Older churches often have a slight build up of ground level around them. The act of stepping in and slightly down is very grounding. This goes back to the oldest meaning of the word nave. In Sanskrit ‘nabhis’ is a slight hollow. This must be the primary act of making a place and setting it apart from its surroundings. The move allows people to see over each others’ heads towards the centre and perhaps, more importantly, it diminishes the perceived distance between participants sitting opposite each other. The slight vertical extension makes people feel closer to each other. This perception is important in an antiphonal arrangement. [fig. 21 & 22]

The roof is held up by a thicket of lightweight plywood columns that stand on the masonry rim of the central clearing. They rise up to the level of the trees and are knitted together to enclose the space like the timbers of a boat. By clustering the columns together we increased their ability to carry lateral loads and to resist bending. Visually, this also associates them with clustered soaring gothic columns. The leading edges of the plywood create soaring lines that run parallel and then



16

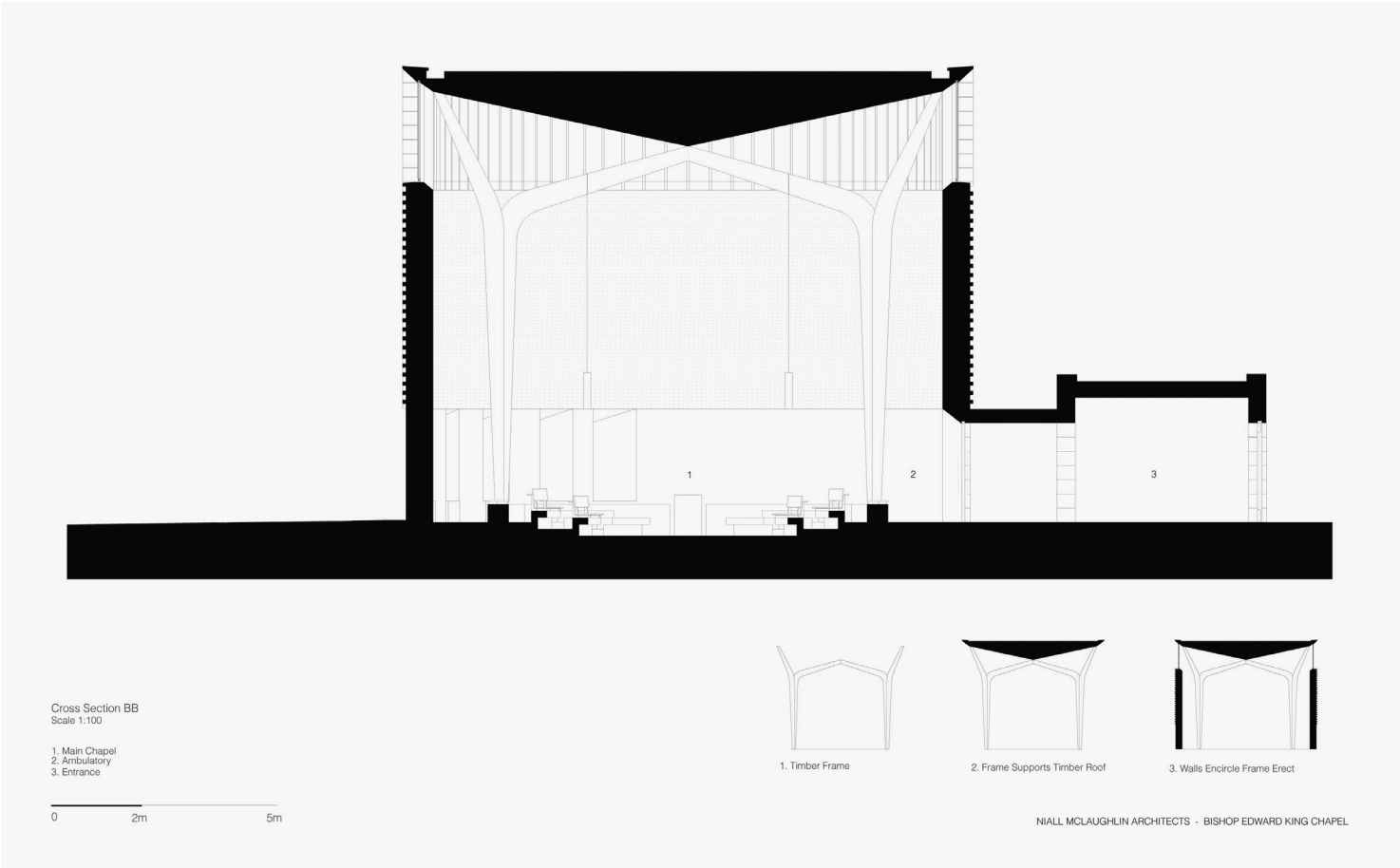


17

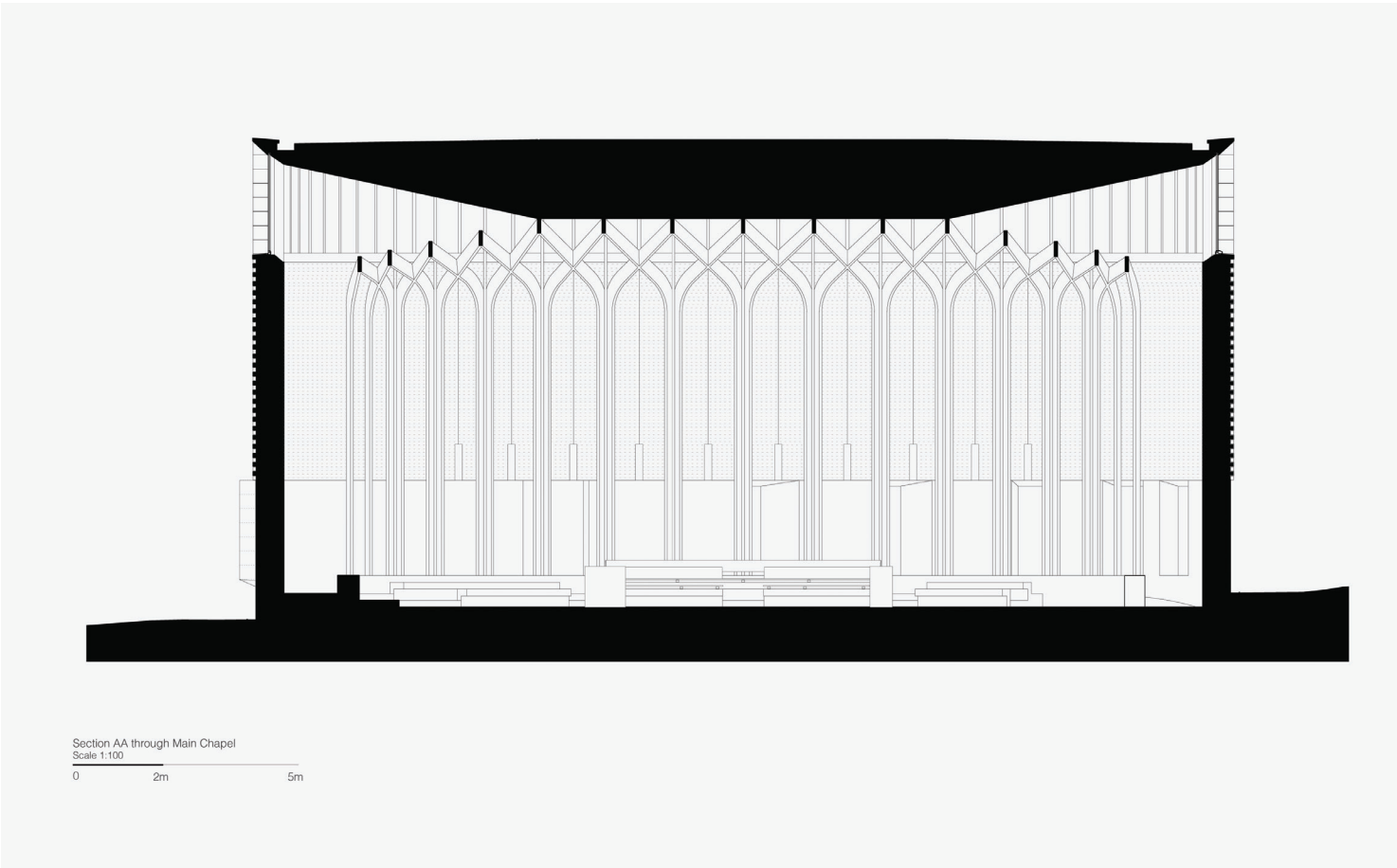
15
Rudolf Schwarz, Church of St. Michael, Frankfurt.

16
Rudolf Schwarz, Plan of St. Michael, Frankfurt.

17
Plans of the Chapel of Charlemagne, Aachen and San Vitale, Ravenna.



24



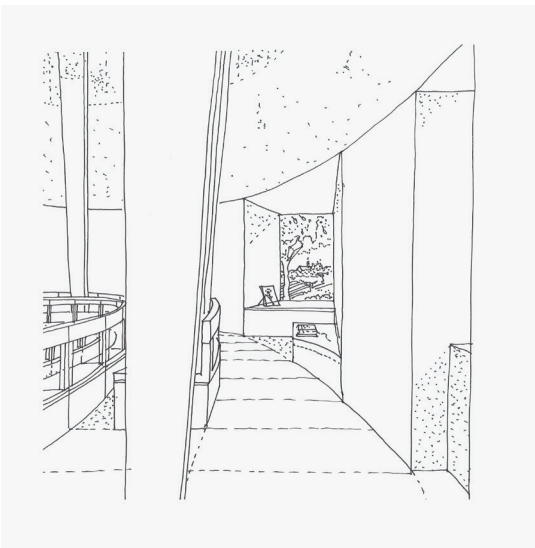
25

splay out to become part of the roof matrix. The plywood sections are knitted together using invisible metal connections. This allows us to create a complex 3D form using very simple, affordable 2D means. We had used this principle before on our De La Warr Pavilion Bandstand project in Bexhill-on-Sea (2001) and developed it further for the chapel. [fig. 23 – 25]

The inner skeleton of the structure supports a ‘V’ shaped ceiling. The centre of the roof is designed like a keel and is completely flat between the lectern and the altar. This underpins the primacy of the space between the Word and the Eucharist. Beyond these points, the ceiling rises out towards the outer walls. The image of a keel in the roof remembers the Venetian carinated church roofs of the thirteenth century, where boat builders from the Arsenale would make the timber structures. By tilting the ceiling up we can catch half tones of light from the high windows. This decreases the luminous contrast between ceiling and window wall. It bounces light into the space and it increases the sense of buoyancy. We would like it to feel as if the roof structure is about to float away. As you move around the chapel there will be an unfolding rhythmic interplay between the form of the structure and the simple elliptical walls beyond. The nave can be understood as a ship in a bottle.

Semper

The formal development of the chapel is an outworking of a longstanding research interest in Godfried Semper. There is a strong strain in English architecture from Arts and Crafts to High Tech where truth telling is the central operation. This notion that architecture has a truth telling capacity, and that in turn there is a moral imperative for architects to build buildings that literally tell the truth about themselves, can be traced back to Pugin and his analysis of the Gothic Cathedral. Semper breaks with this notion to suggest another origin for architecture that he elucidates in *Der Stil*. He suggests that architecture imitates human practice and that at basis of architecture is the act of weaving. He uses the example of the knots made in maypole dancing as a primitive identification of the way in which architecture makes concrete human activity. These knots turn into weaving and therefore architecture is conceived as the way in which space is enclosed by the woven screen. From this premise, he asserts that the basic elements of architecture each relate to ways of making—the earthwork, the woven screen, the tectonic frame and the hearth.

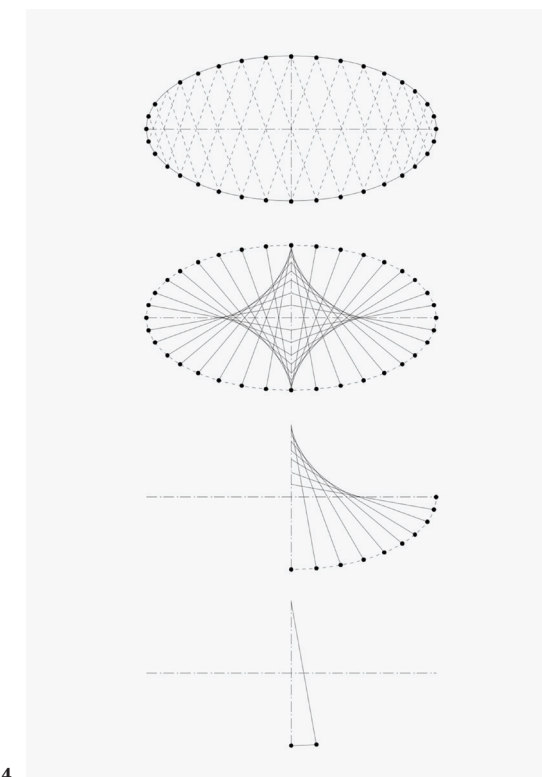
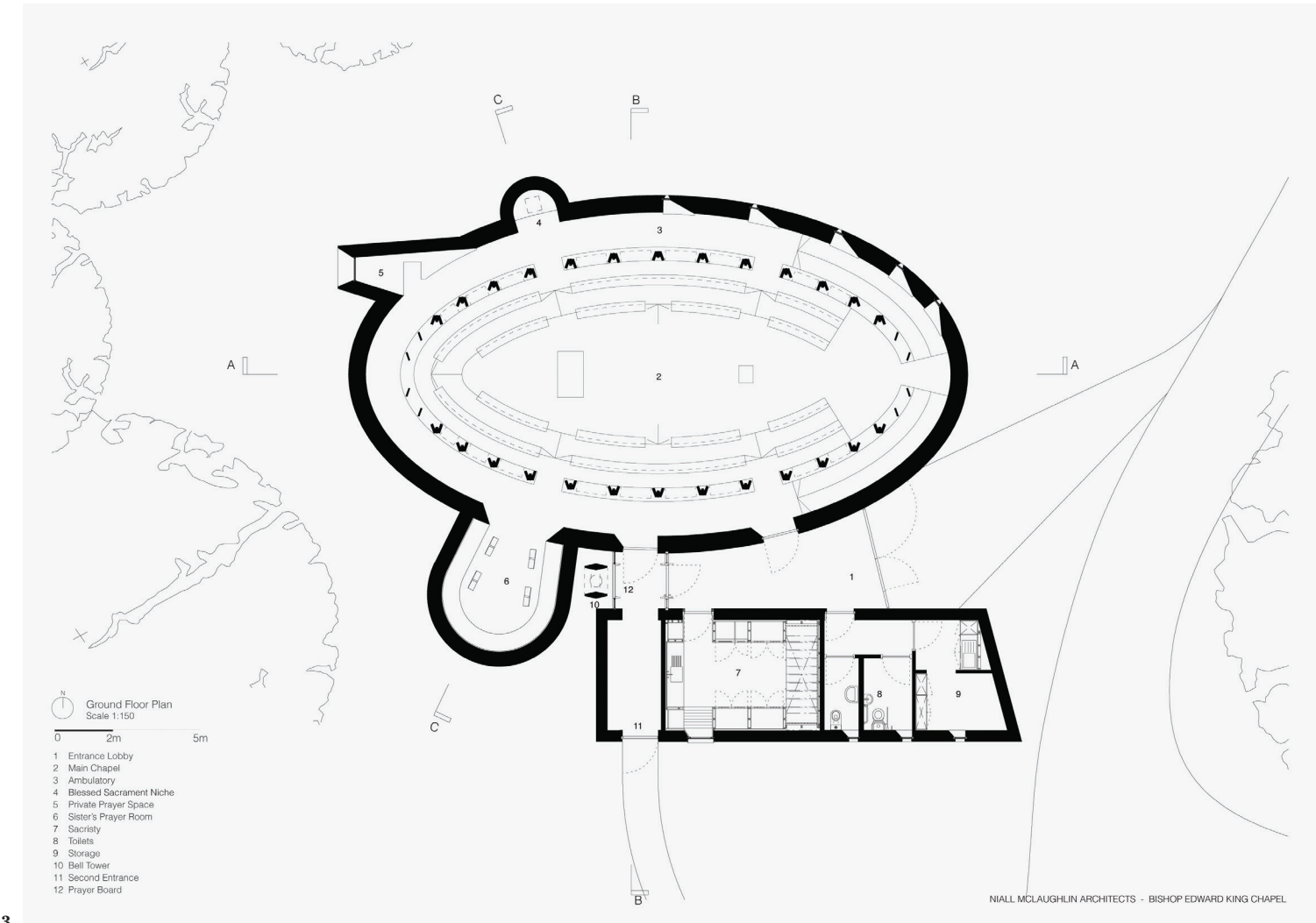
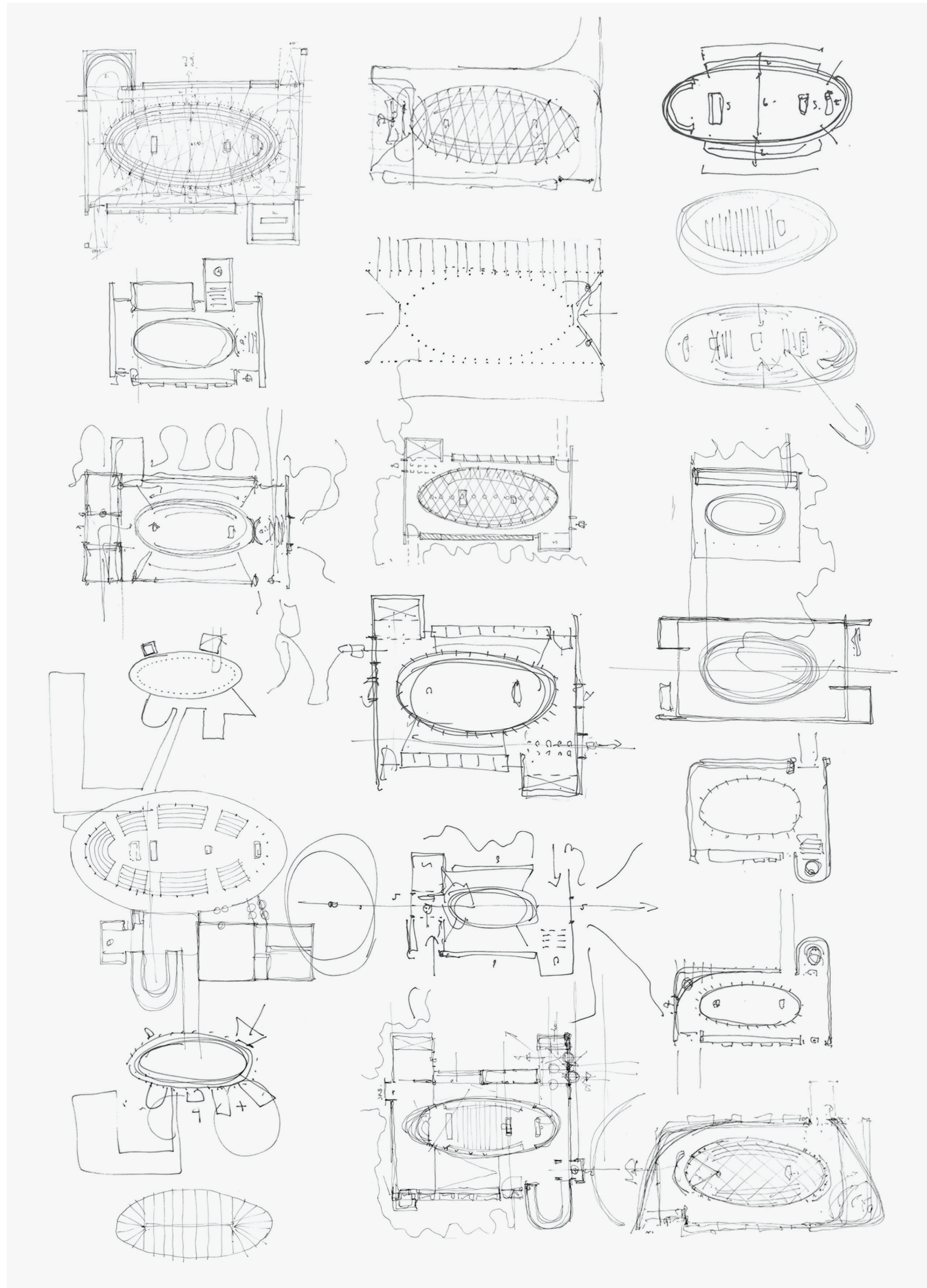


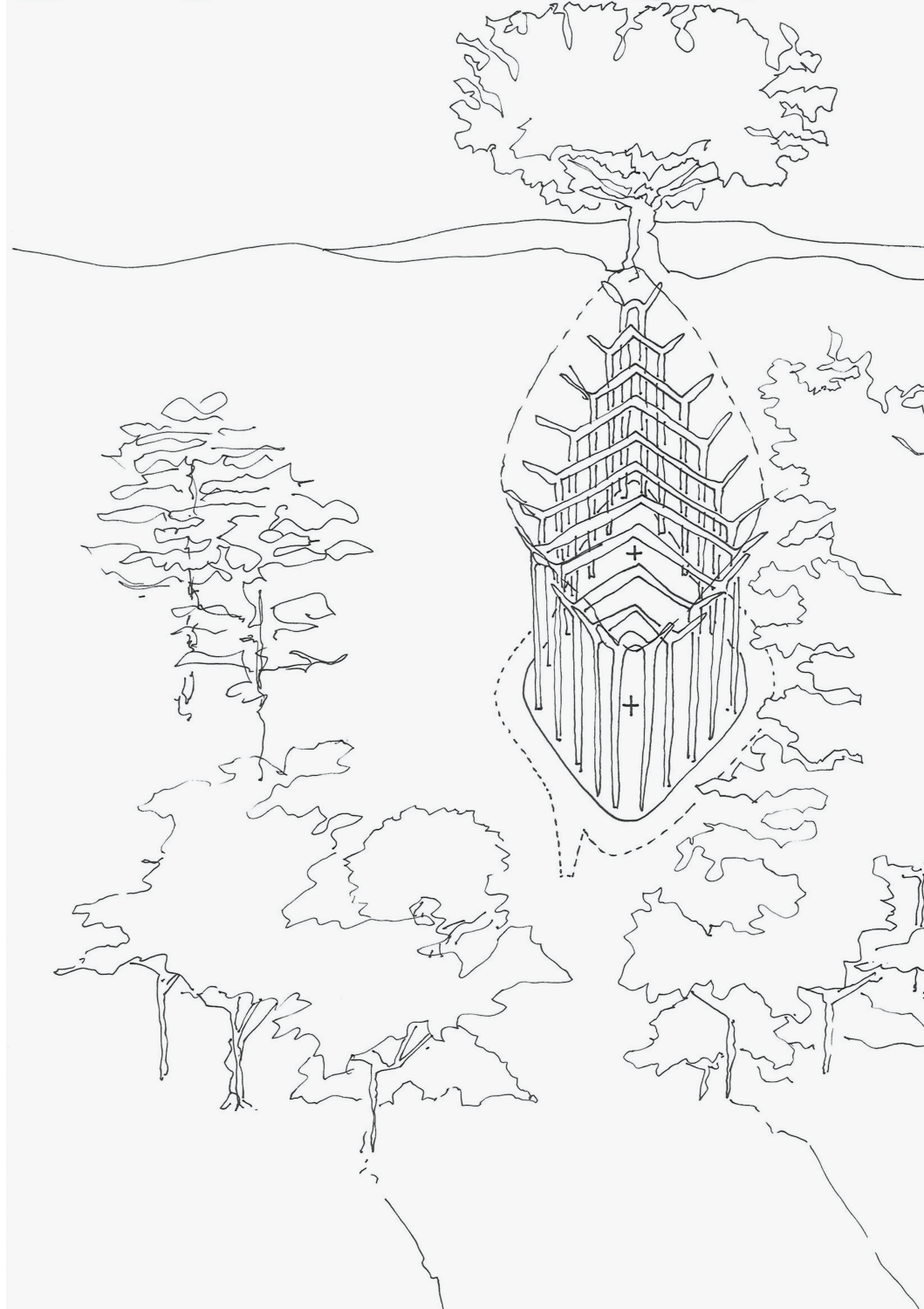
18

18
Sketch of the ambulatory.

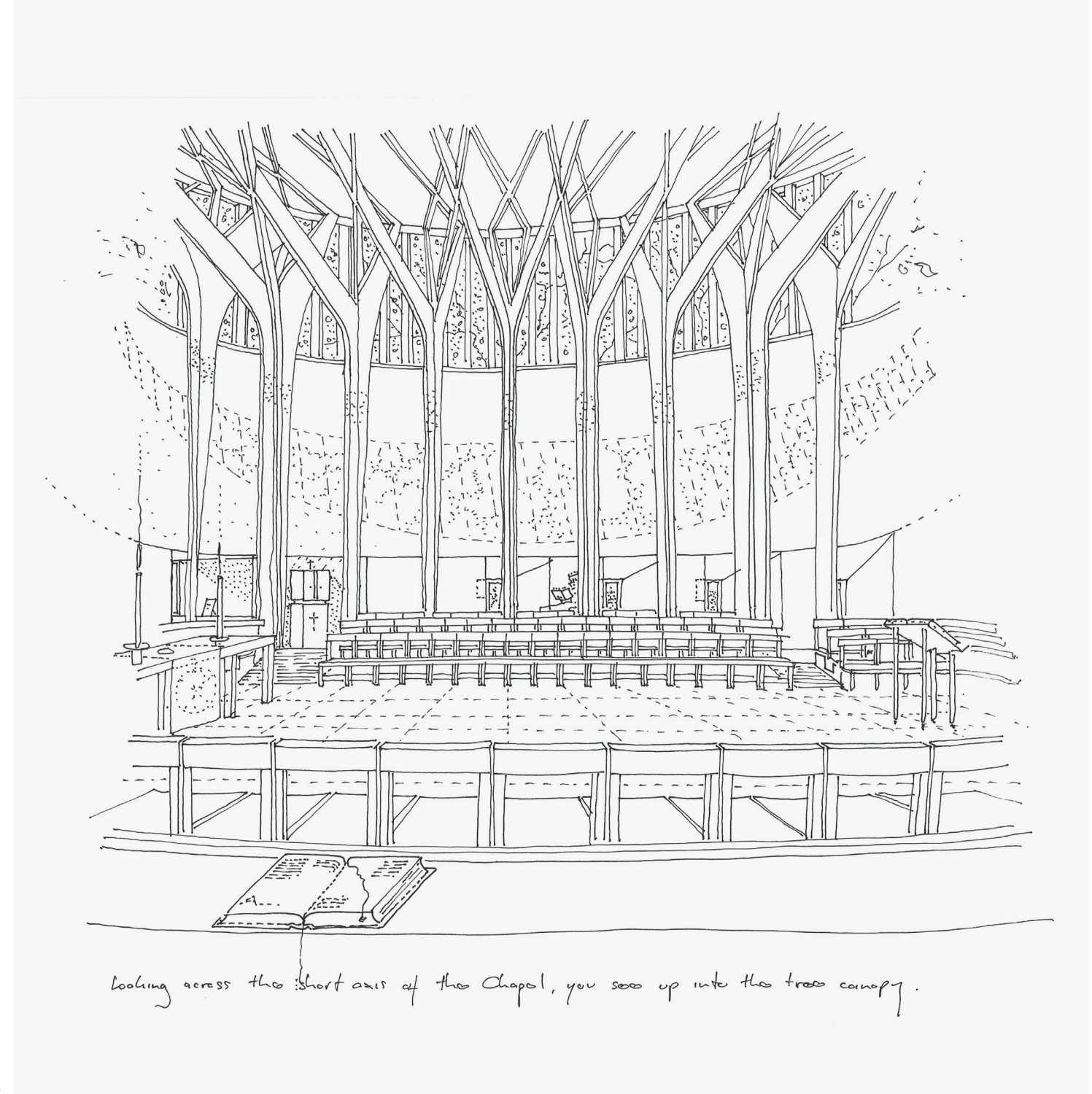
24
Cross section.

25
Long section.





21



22





28

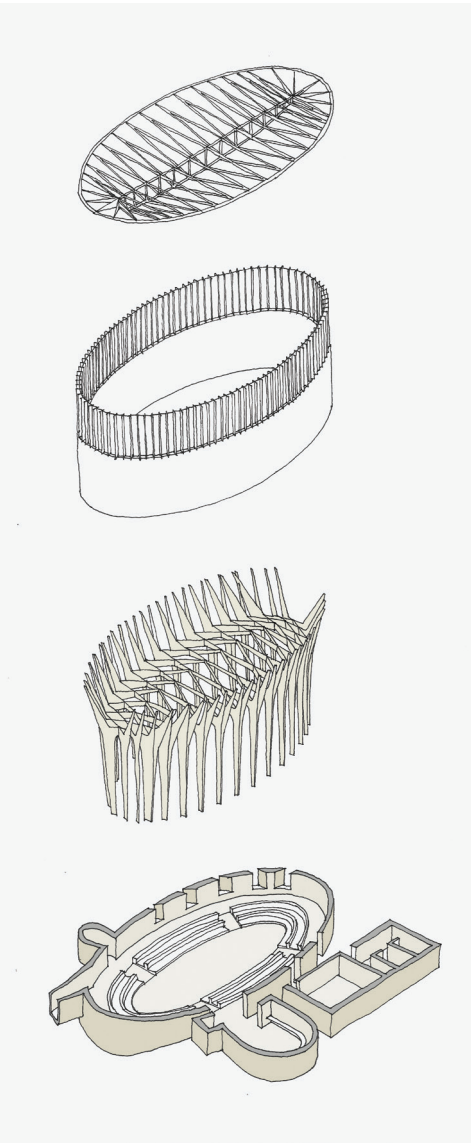
28
Orientated for maximum solar gain.

We were interested in making a building that links to these ideas of origins and potentially recreates the notion of the primitive hut. The chapel can therefore be read in such terms, with a plinth that establishes the building base, an independently expressed tectonic frame supporting the roof, a woven screen separating the inner space from the outer space, and the hearth expressed in this context as the altar. These elements relate to Semper's different material practices. The competition entry for the chapel shows a woven basketwork of timber based on fencing. This developed into masonry screen where long rectangular strips of stone, which are broken off, are then laid in a dog tooth bond that alternate a broken and a cut face. The screen remembers the idea of a textured/woven fabric based on Semper's 'material metamorphosis'. Likewise the heavy mass of Semper's stereotomic earthwork is expressed in the concrete base and the structural lattice of CNC cut plywood is a contemporary interpretation of the carpentry of Semper's structural frame. The tabernacle, which breaks open to reveal a gold interior, provides the metaphorical fire of Semper's hearth. [fig. 26 & 27]

Sustainable principles

The design of the chapel was also driven by the principles of sustainable design, not as a means of compliance (places of worship are exempt from normal energy

requirements under Part L) but as an appropriate response to the client's brief of 'an exemplar of forward looking liturgical design'. We aimed for the project to demonstrate the effectiveness of a simple, passive design philosophy, without recourse to bolt-on technologies. Project research therefore focussed on adopting passive solar principles and making careful use of natural resources. The chapel's orientation allows for south facing windows down the long axis of the chapel and the stone walls and screeded floor give the building thermal mass. The chapel is twice as well insulated and has three times the level of air tightness required under Part L. Natural ventilation was used instead of mechanical cooling, with high level automated louvres and actuators. Clerestorey glazing achieves a daylight factor of around 3.5 in the main seating area. Under-floor heating was chosen in preference to radiators for its ability to achieve comparable comfort levels at a lower space temperature. These energy conservation measures translate into low NOx levels and reduce the CO2 emissions to around 20 kg/m2, half what one would expect for a modern well-insulated building. The external materials of the building, timber and stone, have a low embodied energy and a longevity in order to maximise the lifespan of the building. The off-site manufacture of the main structure ensures less wastage of materials and greater recycling of any waste created. [fig. 28]

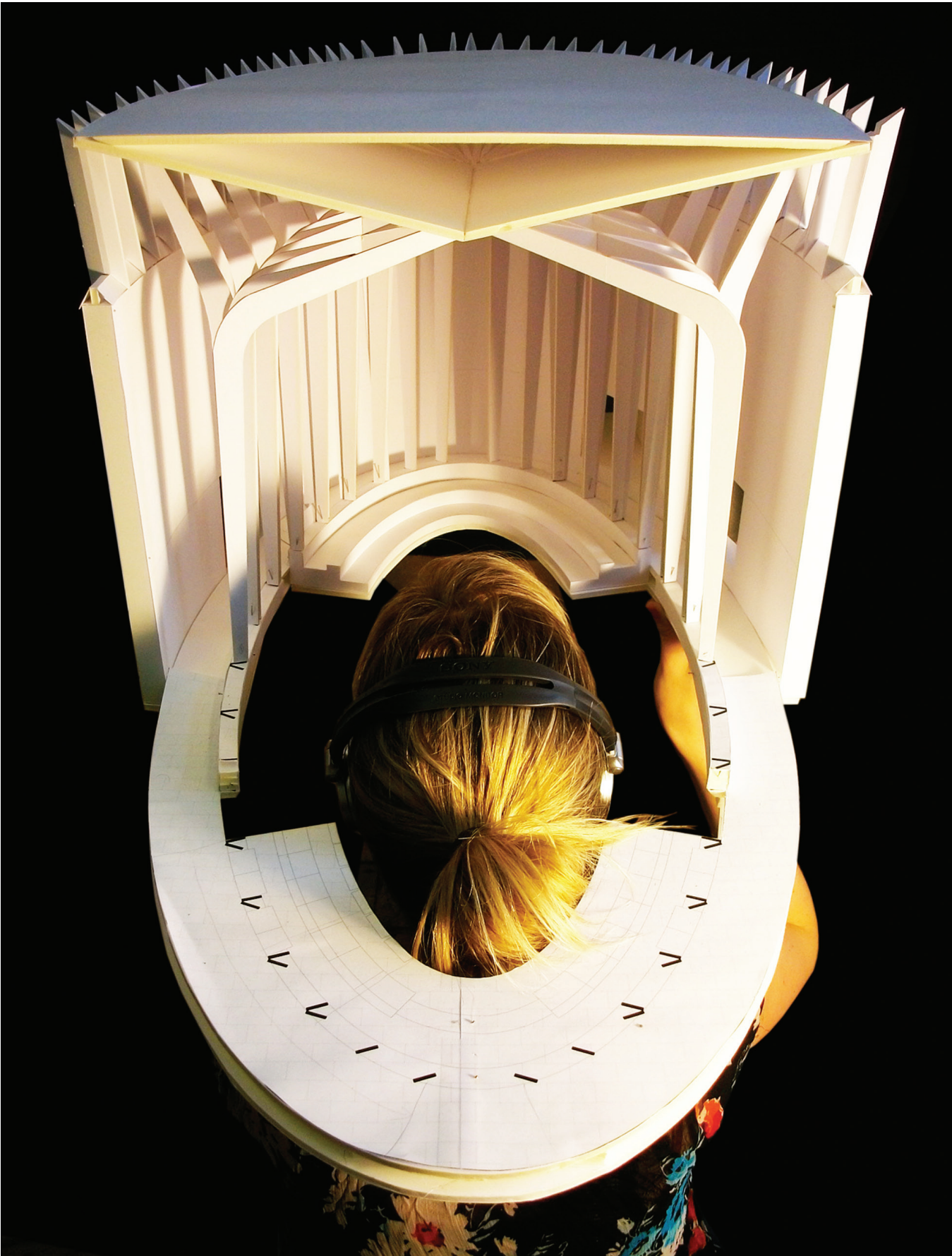


27

26 (overleaf)
Tabernacle.

27
Axonometric sketch showing building elements.





Methods

The methods of research for the project encompassed several strands:

1. A study of the etymology of liturgical terms and their poetic use in literature.
2. Analysis of the site through video and sound recordings.
3. Research through making in the form of site-specific tools to explore the acoustic and luminous conditions of the site.
4. Text-based research to explore the geometry of the ellipse, the history of its discovery and use in public buildings.
5. Design development through public, collaborative drawing.
6. Experimentation with structural/material principles and building methods.
7. Working through prototypes to refine the skin of the building.

Sound and video

During the competition process we had struggled to use our default model making techniques to explore our ideas. These difficulties prompted new research methods to develop. As part of our initial site analysis we used sound and video recordings to present to the client.

Models and prototypes

We also used site-specific models at a large scale to explore and convey our ideas. At later stages of the project we refined the particular bond of the stone cladding using a series of full-scale prototypes built on site. Most importantly we were given the opportunity to create a public installation work, the Tracing Floor, to explore and develop the geometry of the project. [fig. 29–34]



30

30
Imaging the building on the
site using a model as a hat.



31

31
Trying out the building.

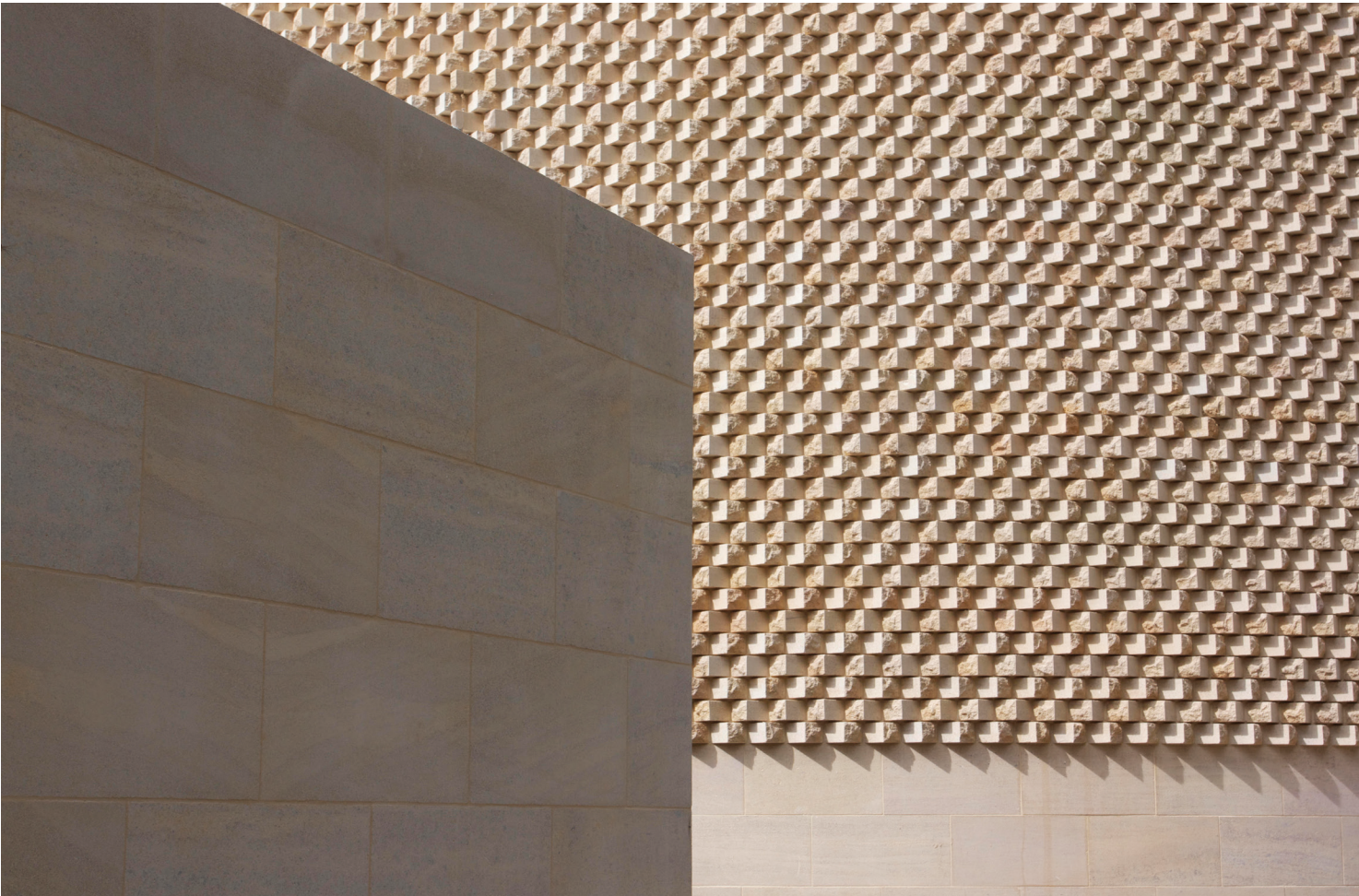


46
Glulam timber columns.



45

45
Interior view.



34

34
The woven screen.



32



33

32 & 33
Cladding prototype.



36



37

The Tracing Floor

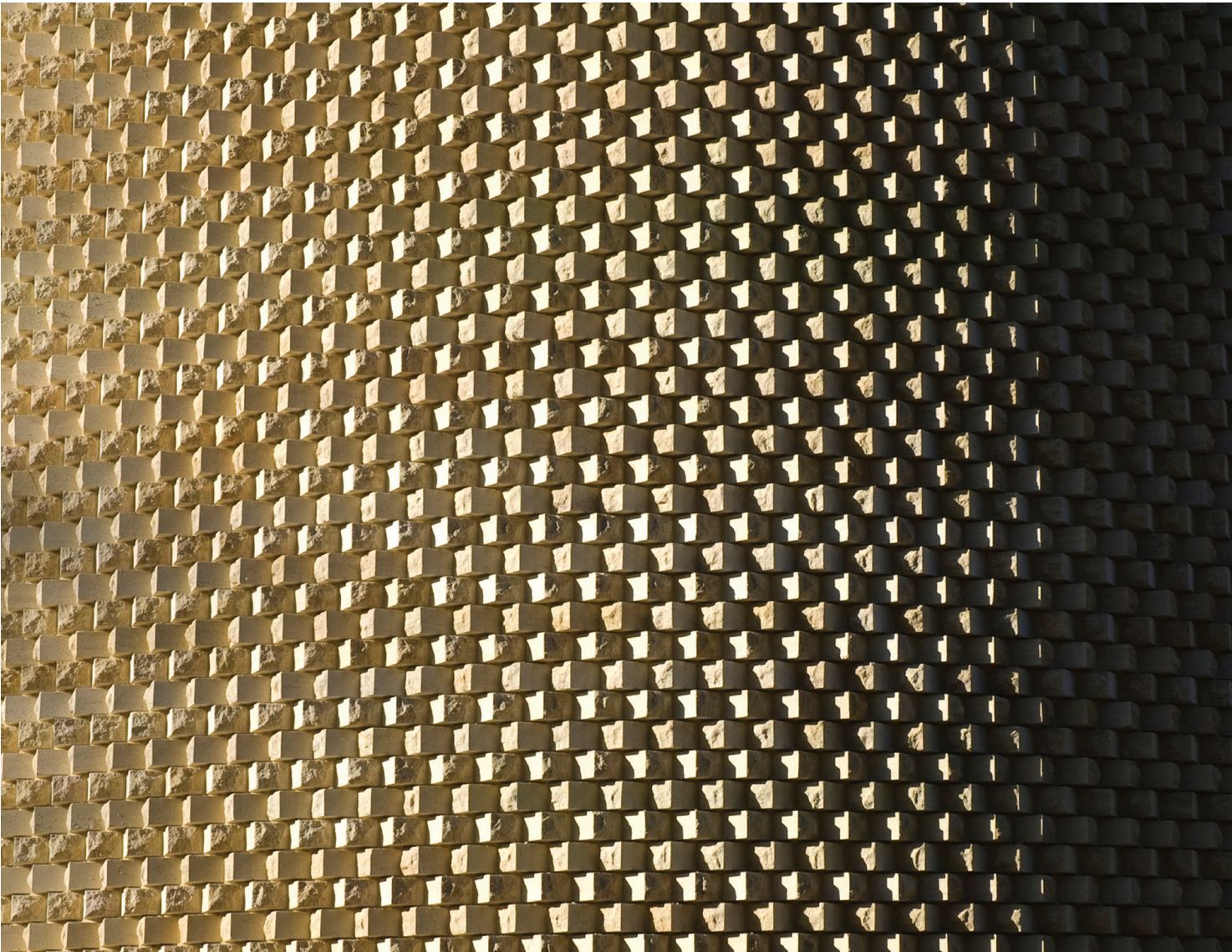
The Tracing Floor was made in response to a request from the School of Architecture at University College Dublin to create an exhibition that would accompany Níall McLaughlin's lecture on the research for the chapel, as part of the 'Into Practice' series being held there. It was decided to make something that would stand beside, rather than duplicate, the content of the lecture.

In conceiving this piece, we reflected on a desire to communicate the contemplative and communal activity of drawing that is practiced in the studio. We found a reference to the old English tradition of the tracing floor used by medieval masons to set out jigs for vaulting. Remnants of these can be found in cathedrals such as York, Wells and Hereford. They were made of plaster and they show the marks of drawing and cutting. By covering the floor in lime plaster we intended to create an inversion of the natural light in the space. We wanted to fill the whole floor of the room. We hoped that foot traffic might gradually erase the drawing, enhancing its fugitive quality. We made a time-lapse piece from the ceiling recording its emergence and dissolution. We edited the film so that it has a drawing-like quality. [fig. 35–37]

The drawing was a plan, showing many layers at once. The status of the drawing could not be justified as a depiction, an instruction or a cutting jig.

We instead considered the manual repetition of the original setting out of the ellipse as a meditative or ritual activity more akin to beating the bounds. The project team carried it out at a liminal moment in the life of the building; the design had been completed and the construction was yet to commence. The research method was in the slow, rhythmic act of making the piece. It allowed us to dwell in it in a way not permitted by deadlines and drawing software. We moved apart and came together on the same floor over four days. We talked about how we got here and what the chapel might become. The marks on the floor are the record of a contemplative activity. So, the act of drawing the nave was itself a still point, reflecting the double meaning stored in the origin of the word.





51

Dissemination

The chapel was opened with a service of dedication attended by the Bishops of Oxford, Gloucester and Dorchester and was published in the local and national press. The building work and design have been reviewed extensively in the architectural press and online (see Appendix). The research forms the basis for one chapter of a sole-authored book by Níall McLaughlin, entitled *Trial Pieces*, due for publication by Ashgate in 2014.

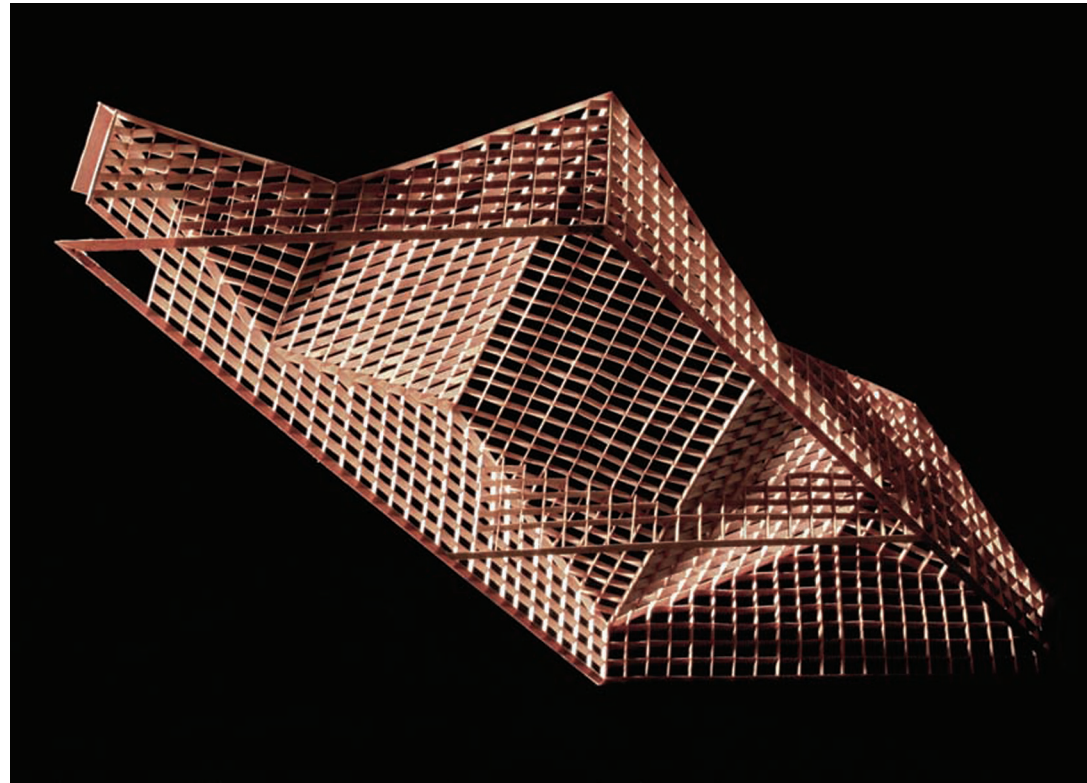
Níall McLaughlin has spoken on themes of space and liturgy as part of lecture programs at the RIBA in London, University College Dublin and the University of California, Los Angeles.

- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Tapestries’, University of Bath (April 2013)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘The work of Níall McLaughlin Architects’, University of California, Los Angeles (March 2013)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Soundings - Semper and Street and a Search for Origins’, RIBA Melvin Debate on ‘The Architectural Uneasy: Relationships Between Old and New’, Royal Institute of British Architects, London (March 2011)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘The Tracing Floor’, University College Dublin (February 2011)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Figures’, University College London (February 2011)
- Níall McLaughlin, ‘Situations’, University College London (February 2011)

A related exhibition, ‘The Tracing Floor’, was installed at University College Dublin in February 2011.

The investigations undertaken for this project are part of an ongoing project of design-led research, developing complex geometries using timber construction. The project can therefore be seen as part of a wider body of research, which includes the design for a pontoon on Loch Ness, the bandstand at Bexhill-on-Sea and the Deal pier café.

The practice’s enquiries into the relationship between space and liturgy is also an ongoing theme of research for the practice, with the Bishop Edward King Chapel part of a wider group of ecclesiastical structures designed by the practice including a Carmelite Chapel in Kensington, the Church of St. James in Peckham and currently the Carmelite Monastery in Dublin. [fig. 38 – 43]



41



38

41
Model for St. James', Peckham,
2007.

38
Pontoon, Loch Ness, 2005.



42



43

42
Sacristy of the Carmelite Chapel,
Kensington, 1992.

43
Model for the Carmelite
Monastery, Dublin, 2013.



39



40

39
Bandstand under construction,
Bexhill-on-Sea, 2001.

40
Cafe on the pier, Deal, 2009.

Bibliography

The research process relied on the following texts:

Frampton, Kenneth (2002). *Labour, Work and Architecture, Collected Essays on Architecture and Design*. London: Phaidon Press.

Hallyn, Fernand (1993). *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*. Trans. D.M. Leslie, New York: Zone Books.

Heaney, Seamus (1992). ‘Lightenings viii’, *Seeing Things*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hvattum, Mari (2004). *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Larkin, Philip (1989). ‘Church Going’, *Collected Poems*. Ed. Anthony Thwaite. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux: 97-98.

Mallgrave, Harry Francis (1996). *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Salter, Peter (2011). ‘Architect Peter Salter records the English innovation of the fan vault, a pragmatic and romantic alternative to the Gothic arch that has challenged his thoughts on contemporary skins’. *Architectural Review* 229.1367: 70-75.

Schwarz, Rudolf (1958). *The Church Incarnate, The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company.

Semper, Gottfried (2004). *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications.

Sennett, Richard (1994). *Flesh and Stone, the Body and the City in Western Civilisation*. London: Faber and Faber.

47 (overleaf)
Structural timber lattice.





4 (overleaf)
Chapel alongside the existing
college buildings.





Appendix

Related publications by the researcher(s)

Testimonials

p. 61
Selection of statements about the Chapel’s design.

Journal articles

p. xx–xx
A+U (July 2013).

p. xx–xx
Casabella (July 2013).

p. xx–xx
RIBA Journal (July 2013).

p. xx–xx
Architects Journal.

p. xx–xx
Michael Webb, MACK Magazine (June 2013).

pp. xx–xx
Ellis Woodman, ‘Sacred Spaces’. *Building Design* (26 Apr 2013): 10-15.

p. x
Paul Finch, ‘A talk at the RIBA highlighted our obsession with history, and how we sometimes misunderstand it’. *Architects’ Journal* (24 March 2011): 22.

pp. xx–xx
Peter Salter, ‘Ark of Light’. *Architectural Review* 223.1394 (Apr 2013): 32-45.

pp. xx–xx
Mary Anne Steane, ‘Lightenings: Niall McLaughlin’s Bishop Edward King Chapel’. *Architecture Today* 237 (Apr 2013): 20-31.

Please note:
These articles are
missing

pp. xx–xx
‘Week in Pictures’. *Architects’ Journal* (11 Apr 2013): 6-7.

pp. xx–xx
Catherine Slessor, ‘Chapel for Ripon College’. *Architectural Review* 230.1375 (Sept 2011): 62-63.

Newspaper articles

p. x
Rowan Moor, ‘The answer to their prayers’. *The Observer* (28 Apr 2013): 31.

pp. xx–xx
Rowan Moore, ‘Bishop Edward King chapel, Ripon College – review’. *The Observer* (28 Apr 2013):
www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2013/apr/28/ripon-college-chapel-niall-mclaughlin

p. x
Reg Little, ‘Ripon’s touching work of art’. *The Oxford Times* (7 Feb 2013): 31.

p. x
‘Week in pictures: Ripon College’s new chapel’. *The Oxford Times* (7 Feb 2013): 48.

p. x
The Church Times (Feb 2013)

Online reviews

pp. xx–xx
Amy Frearson, ‘Bishop Edward King Chapen by Niall McLaughlin Architects’. *Dezeen* (19 June 2013):
www.dezeen.com/2013/06/19/bishop-edward-king-chapel-by-niall-mclaughlin-architects

p. x
‘Lichtung aus Holz und Stein: Kapelle in Mittelengland fertig’. Baunetz (21 May 2013):
www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen-Kapelle_in_Mittelengland_fertig_3188961.html

pp. xx–xx
Ellis Woodman, ‘Ripon College Cuddesdon chapel by Niall McLaughlin Architects’. *BD Online* (24 Apr 2013).
www.bdonline.co.uk/buildings/ripon-college-cuddesdon-chapel-by-niall-mclaughlin-architects/5053695.article

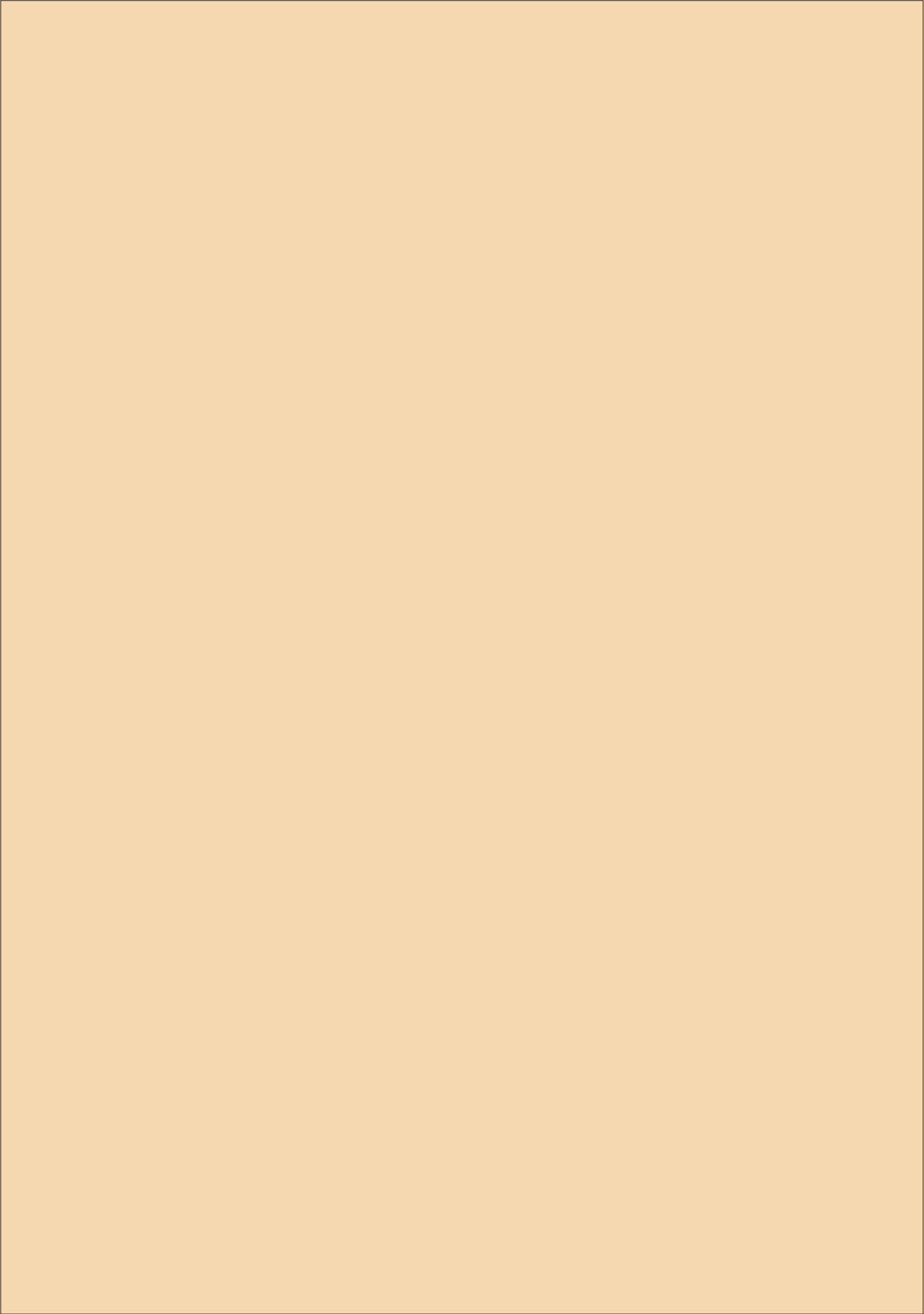
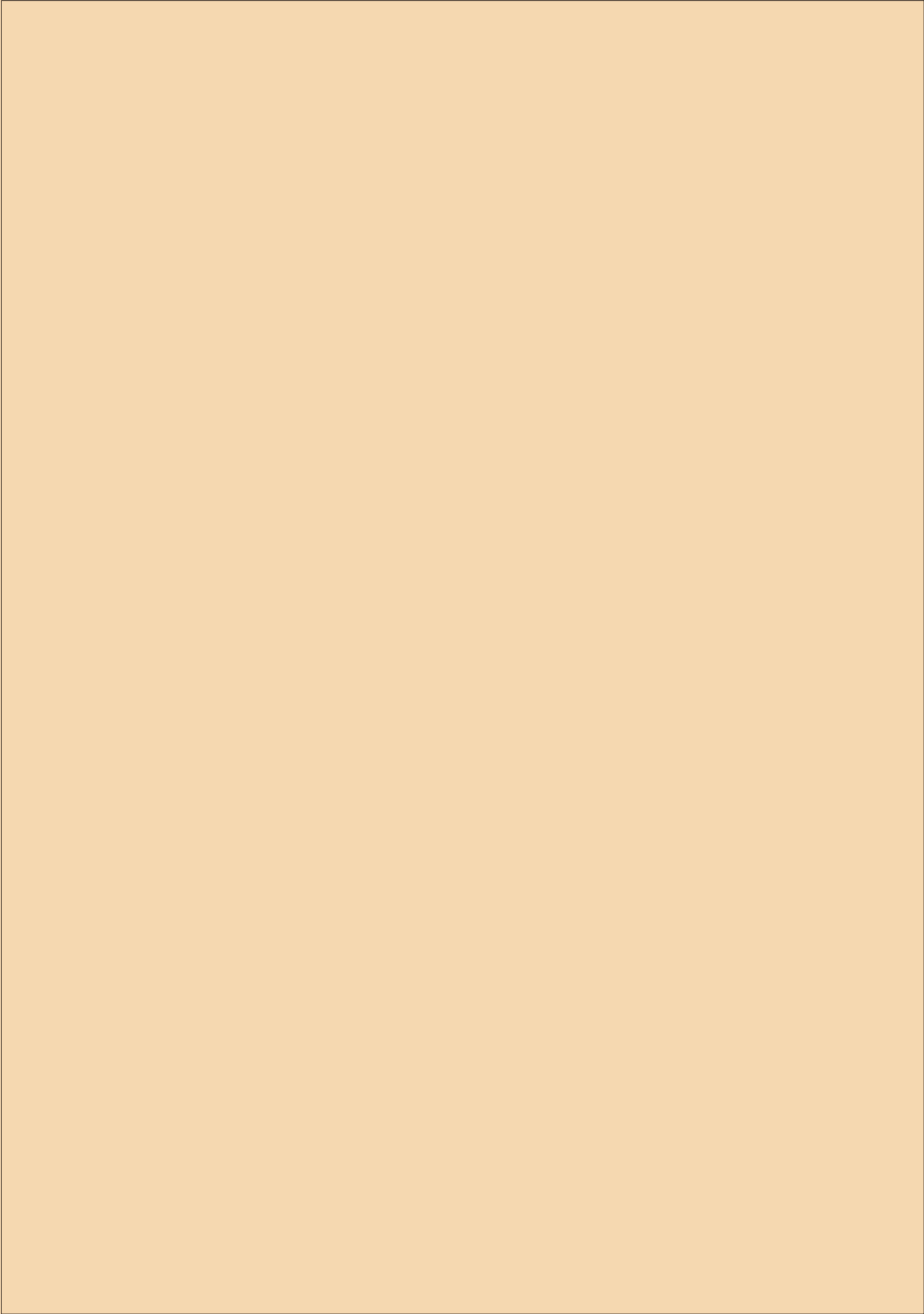
p. x
‘Niall McLaughlin Architects Win Chapel Competition’. *Architectural Review* (Sept 2011):
www.architectural-review.com/folio/folio-review/N%C3%ADall-mclaughlin-architects-win-chapel-competition/8604496.article#

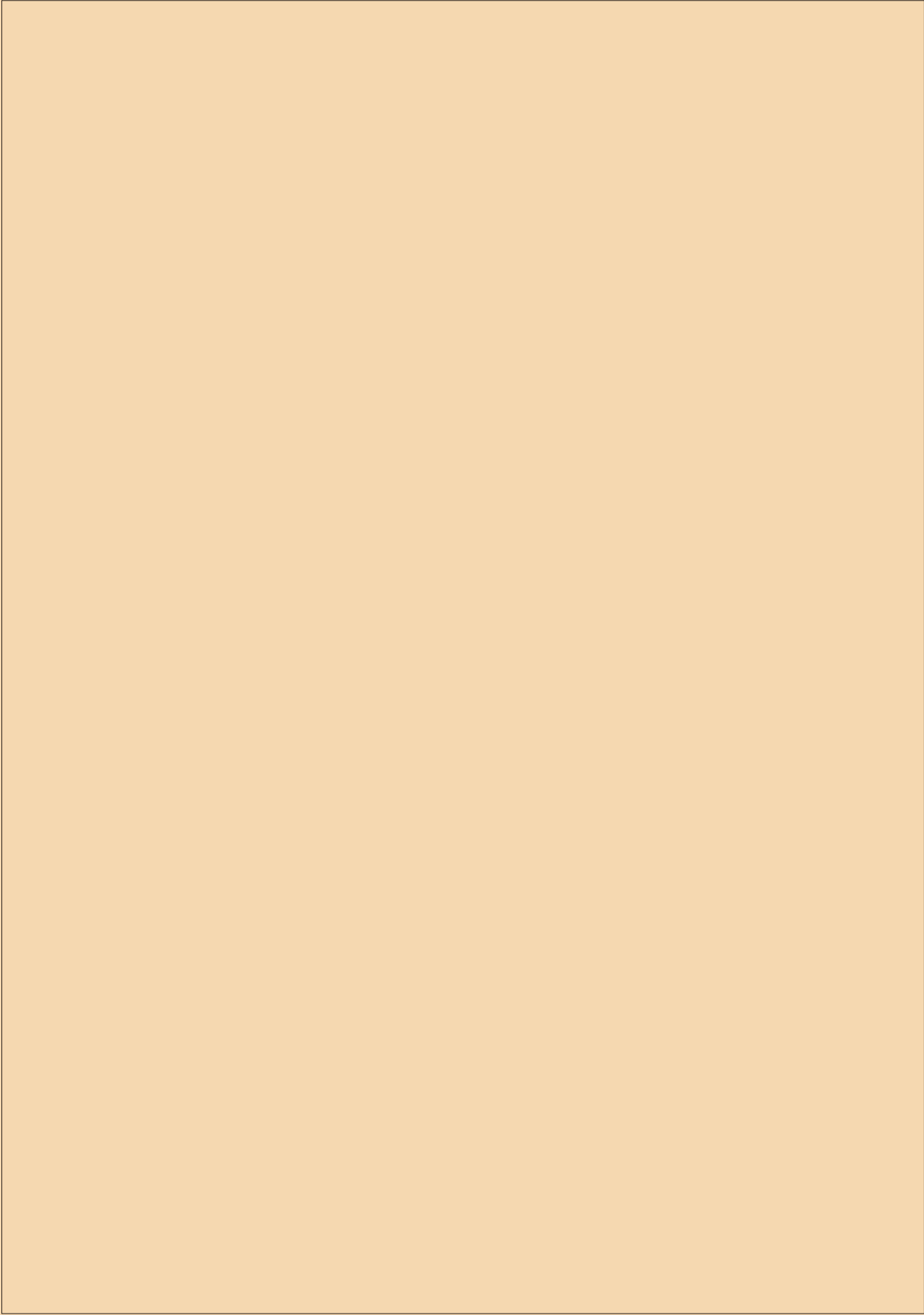
Selection of statements about the Chapel’s design

David Morely, chair of judging panel and RIBA architect adviser for the two-stage competition, said, "The relatively small scale of this project contrasts with its major significance as an opportunity to set new standards for liturgical design... McLaughlin's proposal stood out because of the depth of understanding and inspiration it demonstrated from a strategic to a detailed level."

The donors for the project, the Sisters of Begbroke commented, "From a remarkable field, Níall's design not only stood out for its intrinsic merits but also showed that in him we would have an architect who understands our language and our dream for this chapel."











FRIDAY 26/04/2013
WWW.BDONLINE.CO.UK

10

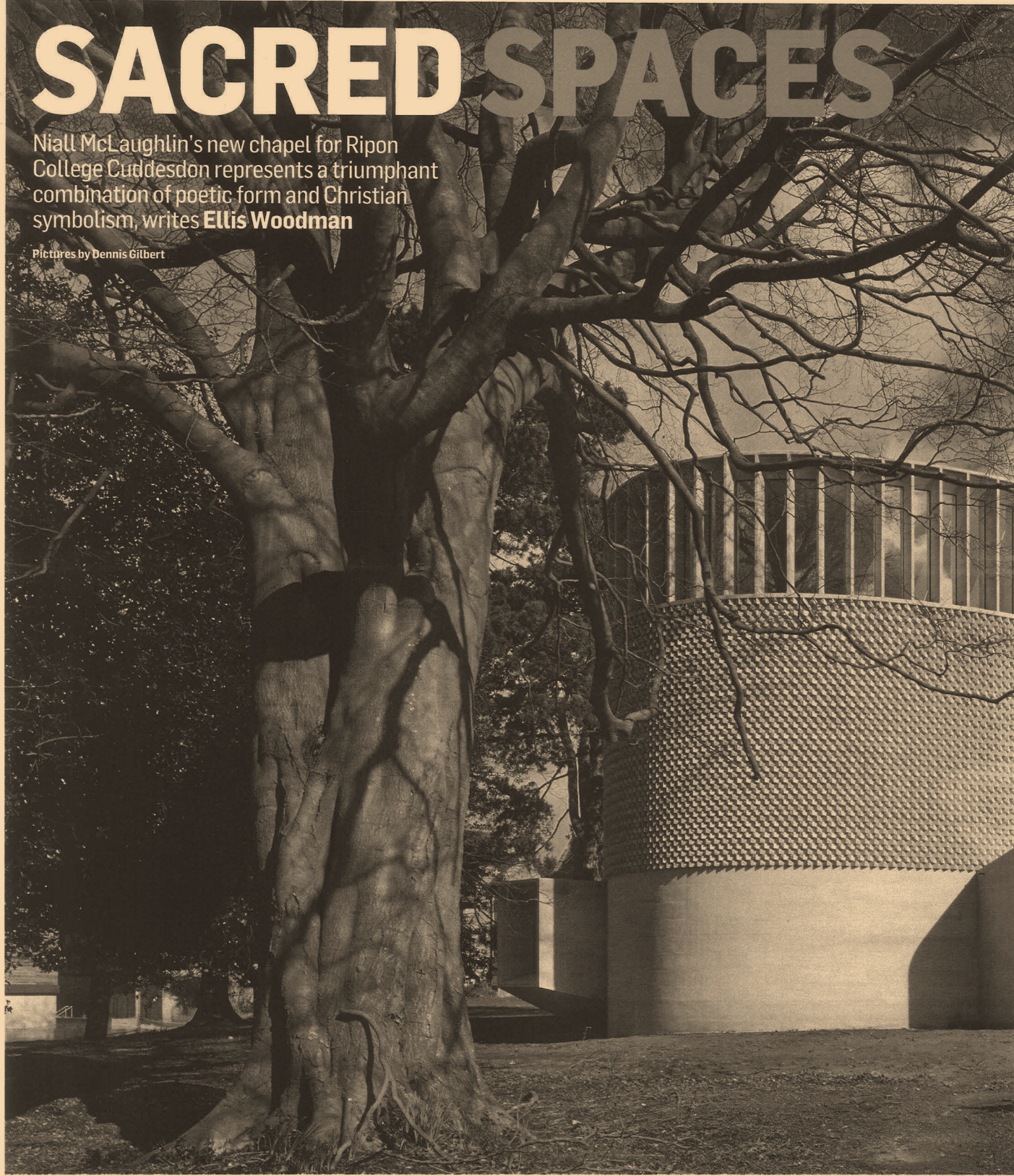
BUILDINGS NIALl MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS

The chapel is set within a
ring of encompassing trees.

SACRED SPACES

Niall McLaughlin's new chapel for Ripon College Cuddesdon represents a triumphant combination of poetic form and Christian symbolism, writes **Ellis Woodman**

Pictures by Dennis Gilbert



11

FRIDAY 26/04/2013
WWW.BDONLINE.CO.UK

Among the first commissions that Niall McLaughlin secured on setting up his practice in 1990 was the remodelling of a Carmelite monastery in west London. Comprising scarcely more than two rooms — a chapel and its associated sacristy — it nonetheless offered ample evidence of McLaughlin's skill at mobilising light, space and materials to atmospheric and symbolic effect.

There followed a long-gestating but ultimately unrealised project for an ecumenical church in Peckham, but it is only with the completion of the new chapel at Ripon College Cuddesdon that the architect has succeeded in adding a second religious building to his oeuvre. One has to hope it is not the last, as this marvellous building makes clear that the challenges of an ecclesiastical brief bring McLaughlin's talents into particularly sharp focus.

If a more architecturally accomplished church has been built in Britain since the heyday of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, I fail to bring it to mind.

That achievement has been aided in no small part by a remarkable site and client. Ripon College Cuddesdon is a Church of England theological college

The challenges of an ecclesiastical building bring McLaughlin's talents into sharp focus

in rural Oxfordshire that dates from the 1850s, when its site was chosen — in part on account of its distance from the fleshpots of Oxford — as the location of a seminary. The work of GE Street, the college's original buildings are ranged around a wide expanse of open ground, liberally populated by mature trees and enjoying magnificent views towards Garsington, which lies a kilometre to the west. The college community has recently been expanded through the introduction of the members of an Augustinian order of nuns, the Community of St John Baptist, who were previously based at nearby Kidlington in accommodation that had become too large for their present numbers.

In relocating, they have initiated a substantial building programme at the college. An education block has recently been completed by architects Hopper Howe Sadler and there are plans to build a convent in the not too distant future. The sisters conceived the chapel, however, as a facility that would be shared between themselves and the members of the college: a gift that would effectively cement the two communities into one.

Standing opposite the main entrance on a site defined by the root protection areas of

SITE PLAN



closely encompassing trees, the chapel enjoys a privileged location within the campus. Its design responds very directly to the character of that site, adopting the image of a clearing in a wood as a generative metaphor. Its principal volume is elliptical in plan, with seats distributed around an altar and lectern located on this form's twin foci. The usual distinction between chancel and nave is therefore negated, reflecting the fact that, as a place of worship for a religious community, the building faces no requirement to demarcate separate territories for the clergy and laity.

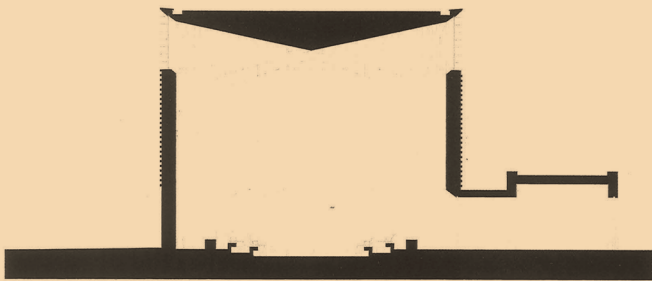
McLaughlin cites Rudolf Schwarz's Church of St Michael in Frankfurt (1954) as an inspiration for his use of the ellipse, a debt that Peter Zumthor has also acknowledged in relation to his similarly formed St Benedict Chapel, Sumvitg (1989). The tectonic logic of the three projects also bears comparison. In each case the enclosing wall is tracked by a ring of slender piers that ultimately rises above it to support the roof. In the case of Schwarz's building the piers are external to the wall, whereas in Zumthor's they stand hard against its internal face. McLaughlin introduces a third variation by pulling them still

further into the plan so as to establish a continuous ambulatory. The threshold to the space of worship that results is further strengthened by a level change between the peripheral zone and the lower central one. While permeable, the line is highly charged — an architectural embodiment of the choice the Christian makes in embracing faith.

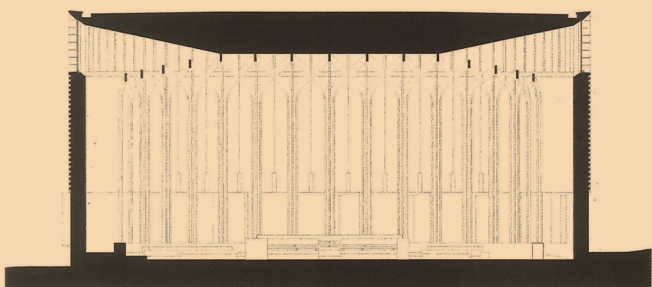
The piers are constructed in a light-stained glulam timber and ultimately strike off to form an elaborate cat's cradle that engages with the roof both around its perimeter and along its central inverted ridge. This form echoes the surrounding trees — the upper branches of which are visible through the clerestory that crowns the encircling wall — but also suggests the image of an upturned hull. As is shown by the story of Noah's Ark — a vessel built by the faithful to secure their salvation — an association between ship and church is deep-rooted in Christian iconography.

During the competition for the project McLaughlin referenced Seamus Heaney's poem, *Lightenings*, which describes the legendary appearance of an air-bound ship above the monastery of Clonmacnoise. The soaring, filigree structure

SECTION LOOKING EAST

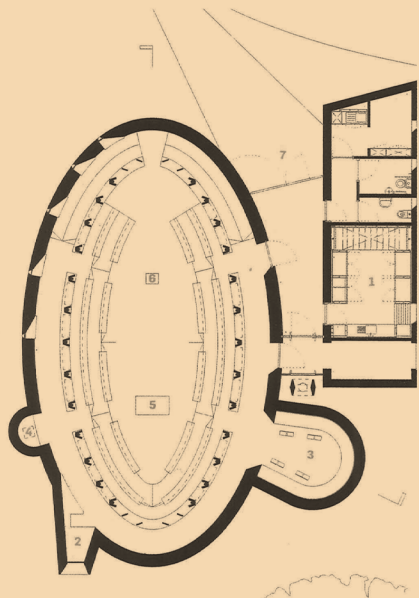


SECTION LOOKING SOUTH

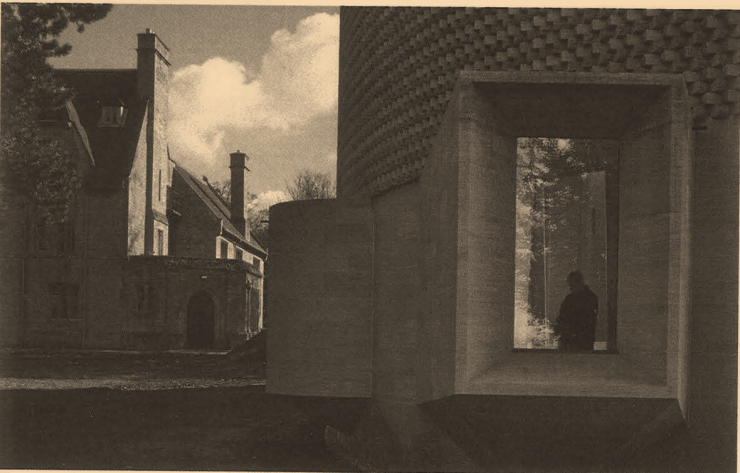


CHAPEL PLAN

- 1 Sacristy
- 2 Private prayer room
- 3 Sisters' prayer room
- 4 Tabernacle
- 5 Altar
- 6 Lectern
- 7 Main entrance
- 8 Sisters' entrance



The bell tower rising above the entrance.



The space for private prayer is cantilevered free of the main volume.

that he has set above the heads of the congregation at Cuddesdon certainly shares something of the poetry of that image.

As integrated as the timber frame is with the building's governing geometry, it nonetheless maintains a strongly autonomous reading. This is in line with McLaughlin's overarching attitude to the building's tectonic expression, which derives from a long-standing interest in the principles detailed in Gottfried

The plan allows each individual to find a place of worship best reflecting their own beliefs

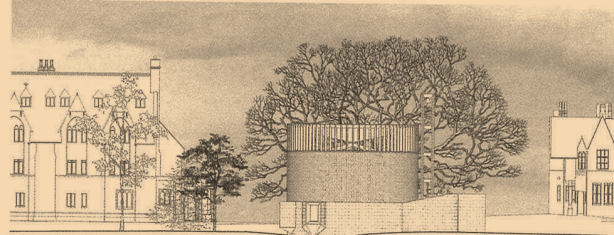
Semper's 1851 treatise, *The Four Elements of Architecture*. Semper's book offered a radical reframing of Laugier's primitive hut, locating the origins of architecture not in a mimetic re-enactment of nature but in the deployment of the four craft skills that he believed characterised "the primordial state of human society". The elements of the book's title, he proposed, are the constituent elements of any work of architecture: the hearth, the embankment, the roof and the enclosure. The origins of each he ascribed to a different handicraft: "Ceramic and later metallurgical works and art to the hearth, water technology and masonry to embankments, woodworking to the roof and its accessories." Most provocatively, he identified the enclosure's origins in the art of weaving — an association that would impact powerfully on the work of architects of the subsequent generation such as Louis Sullivan.

McLaughlin's design makes the distinction between Semper's elements overt, but arguably did so more explicitly still at the competition stage when its external wall was depicted as a

woven timber screen mounted above an ashlar base. English Heritage, however, stipulated that the facade should be entirely in stone — a frustratingly petty requirement but one that McLaughlin has answered without significant injury to the clarity of the building's conception. The tripartite composition of base, middle and clerestory has been retained but the middle element has now been transformed into a screen of dog-tooth bonded masonry rods. Of narrow square section, these are in the same Clipsham as has been used for the base but specified so as to present a broken surface on their leading face. It is an ingenious and captivating treatment, the combination of precision and roughness deftly maintaining the textile association that the original design sought to convey.

Four appendages are distributed around the church's primary volume. The two largest — a rectangular block accommodating back-of-house spaces and a horseshoe-shaped volume housing a prayer room for the sisters — lie to the south and are rooted squarely in the ground. In contrast, the two smaller bolt-ons to the north — a more intimately dimensioned space for private prayer and a niche housing the tabernacle — are cantilevered out as if flung away from the church by centrifugal action. The effect is to confirm McLaughlin's sense of the building as a structure aspiring to levitation while offering too an echo of the stone oriel windows of Street's opposing facades.

The back-of-house block, which incorporates an immaculately detailed timber-lined sacristy, is laid out parallel to the ellipse's main axis but detached so as to frame an entrance lobby in the gap between the two volumes. This arrangement establishes two ways into the chapel, a primary route for use by most of the college community and a more discrete one, set

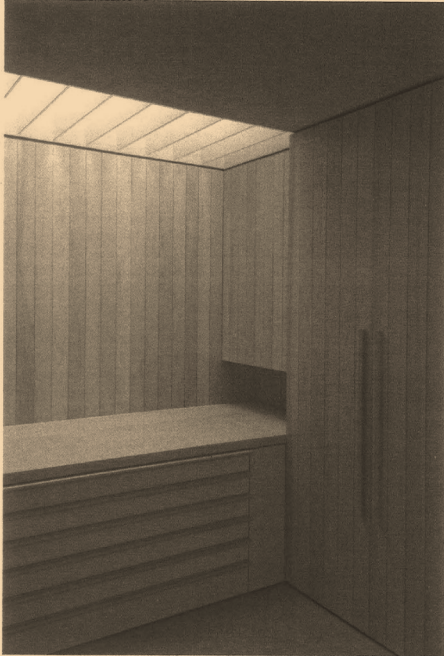


Elevation looking east



Elevation looking west

The timber-lined sacristy.



perpendicular to it, for use by the sisters. A slender timber bell tower set at the intersection of these routes effectively advertises the presence of both axes deep into the landscape.

The sisters' prayer room is a top-lit space that stands adjacent to their designated entrance, and from which they enjoy a carefully framed view towards the altar that extends beyond to the niche housing the tabernacle on the far wall. This orientation reflects the order's high church leanings but that affiliation is not shared by all the members of the college community. The elliptical

The roof piers suggest a ship's hull: a vessel built for salvation, as in the story of Noah's Ark

plan tactfully enables each individual to find a place of worship that best reflects his or her beliefs.

In his Semporian conception of the building McLaughlin identified the altar, tabernacle and lectern as belonging to the family of hearth elements and hoped to realise all three as metalwork items. His clients, however, were not fully persuaded, leading to the altar and lectern being designed in timber, save for a brass floor-plate located below each one. This represents no disaster, but to see the architect's ambitions more fully embodied by the tabernacle — a vertically hinged box which opens to reveal a brass-lined interior — is to regret that he was not extended a freer

hand. That the objection arises at all is testament to the fact that the building has been developed so determinedly as a totality. Few projects built this year will offer as convincing a claim to be considered a gesamtkunstwerk.

The sisters' entrance is not currently in use, having been provided in expectation of the construction of their convent immediately alongside the chapel. This is not yet a live commission but McLaughlin has produced a schematic design comprising a single-storey, three-sided cloister, which would share the language of its neighbour's ashlar base. Offering a ground-hugging counterpoint to the chapel's verticality, it promises to bind the building still further to its landscape setting.

That is an exciting prospect, but fragmentary as it may be, the built work represents a highly convincing performance in its own right. McLaughlin has risen to the challenge of a remarkable brief, creating a building that mediates between the earthly and the celestial to unique poetic effect.

PROJECT TEAM

Architect
Niall McLaughlin Architects
Building contractor
Beard Construction
Client
Ripon College Cuddesdon and the Community of St John Baptist
Structural engineer
Price & Myers
M&E engineer
Synergy Consulting Engineers
Quantity surveyor
Ridge & Partners
Stone consultant
Harrison Goldman

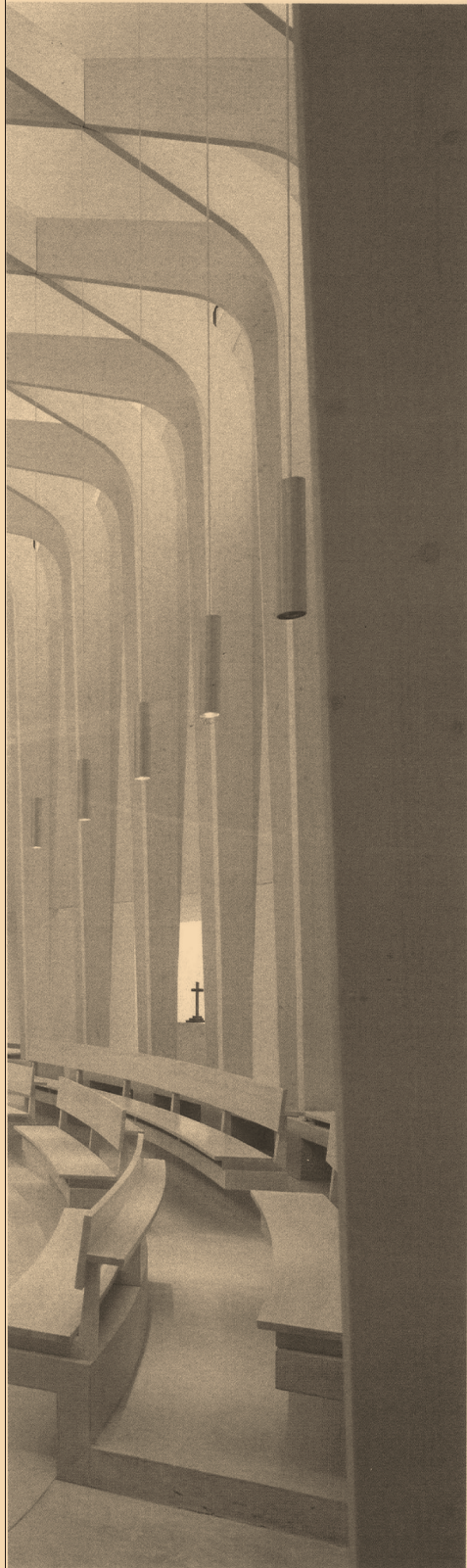
The space of worship is set lower than the surrounding ambulatory.



A niche for private prayer.



McLaughlin's drawing describing the church as a clearing in a wood.



The piers are detached from the enclosing wall, forming a continuous ambulatory.

Column

Paul Finch's letter from London

A talk at the RIBA highlighted our obsession with history, and how we sometimes misunderstand it



The British near-obsession with heritage, and the dilemmas involved in architectural responses to it, was well ventilated at the RIBA last Friday at an afternoon debate titled 'The Architectural Uneasy: Relationships between old and new'.

This was a memorial event (two others will take place later in the year) on issues that interested Peter and Muriel Melvin, two architects who practised for four decades and, in Peter's case, served many years as an RIBA vice-president. In his later career, he had conversations about old and new, partly in the context of his own work, with Francis Golding, former secretary to the Royal Fine Art Commission, who chaired the event with characteristic insight.

The first half was concerning. Why do we seem to have such problems in ensuring appropriate responses to context? Margaret Richardson, lately of the Soane Museum, showed examples of failures in the system of conservation area advisory committees, planning committees, English Heritage and government policy guidance.

These included two smallish sites in Camden on which oversized and ill-designed proposals were being approved; a historic street in Hackney overwhelmed by a large blue whale of a school building; a listed terrace where inconsistent mansard extensions were sprouting; and, not

Speakers thought that the street and the wider environment were far more important than object buildings

least, Renzo Piano's Central Saint Giles development in the shadow of Centre Point, a huge and (some would say) virulently coloured office scheme plus apartments.

Richardson's proposition, in essence, was that if this sort of stuff was getting built, the system wasn't working. Moreover, architects themselves had to share some of the blame, since too many produced bad designs and too few of them knew enough about architectural history; what John Summerson called 'the magic of their own art'.

Catherine Croft, director of the Twentieth Century Society, was also concerned about over-development, citing the blocks by OMA next to the Commonwealth Institute and the adaptation of the building by John Pawson as worrying examples. A concern was the failure to understand qualities of buildings listed in the recent past, for example the listed-then-delisted apartment block by Colin St John

Wilson in west London. Inconsistent decisions on listing reflected an underlying inconsistency about what, from generation to generation, we think we are looking at, and how we value it. A series of thoughtful examples were accompanied by some very funny quotes from past authors, including one Martin Briggs, who thought normal student architects should be drawing buildings from the past 'unless their minds have been poisoned from the outset'!

Owen Luder agreed that listing was inconsistent but warned that the current quagmire could have a stifling effect, with conservation areas 'a blanket to prevent change'.

The second half comprised Niall McLaughlin, then Eric Parry, talking about buildings that responded to history; G E Street and James Gibbs, John Nash, and Reginald Blomfield, respectively.

McLaughlin's description of his chapel for Anglican nuns at Cuddesdon in Oxfordshire, with a disquisition on Gottfried Semper and the nature of the ellipse, was a privilege to hear. Parry described his work at St Martin-in-the-Fields before focusing on an art gallery extension in Bath, reconnecting Great Pulteney Street to the 18th-century pleasure gardens. Another marvellous talk, including a sideswipe at Blomfield and the Grade-I listing of his work, and the recollection of what the Bath conservation officer told him on seeing his designs: 'Lose your dream.'

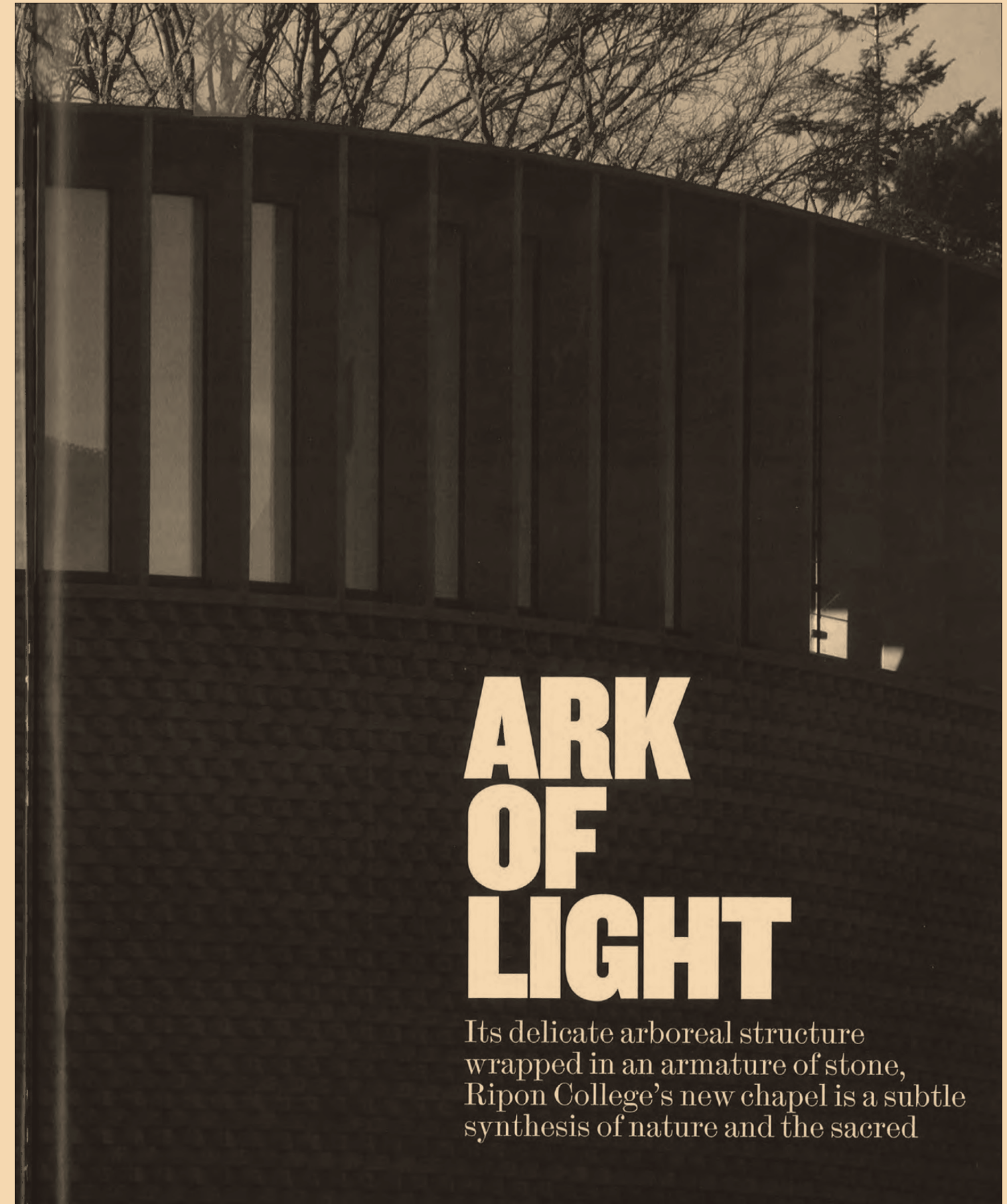
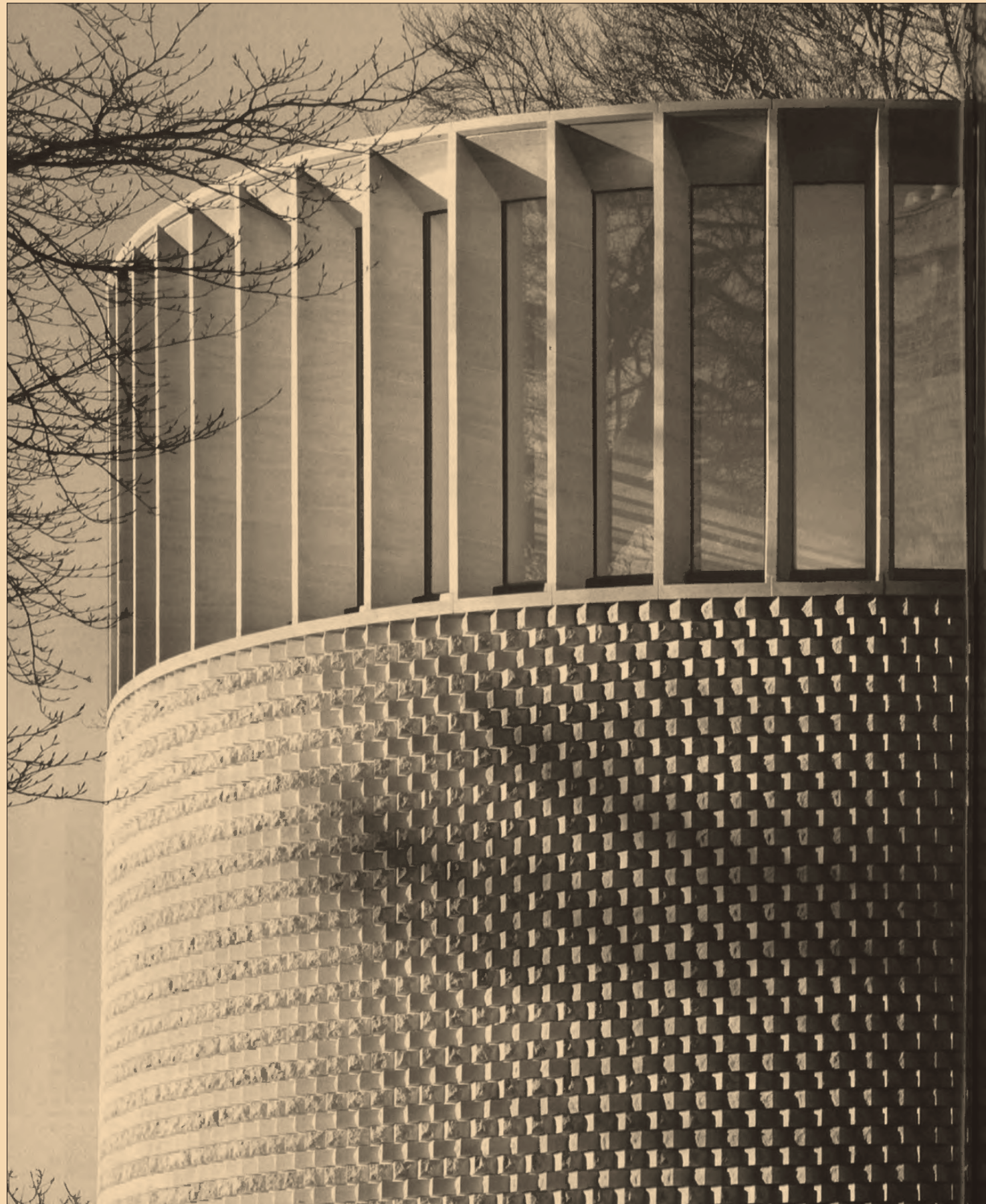
Both speakers thought the street and the wider environment were far more important than object buildings, though in the case of what they showed there was proof of excellence in the round; architecture that dealt with the interior in terms of use, and the exterior as public contribution. Function and art in seamless combination.

The debate series is funded by Joanna, Jeremy and Stephen Melvin. Two further events will take place on 20 May and 16 September at the RIBA, with free admission.



Niall McLaughlin's description of his chapel for Anglican nuns (visualisation, right) was 'a privilege to hear'





ARK OF LIGHT

Its delicate arboreal structure wrapped in an armature of stone, Ripon College's new chapel is a subtle synthesis of nature and the sacred

CRITICISM

PETER SALTER

PHOTOGRAPHS

DENNIS GILBERT

Ripon Chapel, designed by Níall McLaughlin Architects, sits in the garden of Ripon College, a theological centre on the edge of the village of Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire. The chapel sits off the brow of the hill, in deference to the parish church which can be seen on slightly rising ground. The site of the walled precinct of the college is not in the expected urban form of Oxford, but perhaps more like that of a model farm. It is reached by following country lanes that lead over a bridge, and is set among warm honey-coloured manor houses. As part of the client body, the Sisters of the Community of St John the Baptist have relocated their convent to the precincts of Ripon College. The new chapel is a locus for their orders of prayer, their life-long commitment, and also becomes the context for the college's theological reflection. Proposed courtyard accommodation of the convent has not been built.

The architecture of George Edmund Street's college of 1854 sets the institutional tone for the complex. The open-sided courtyards and wings of buildings carry none of the tight quad form of the medieval Oxford college. The garden with its rather languid vegetation provides the over-sized site for the chapel, which is approached through a covered porch on the south side of the elliptical structure forming part of the sacristy.

Looking at the site plan of the chapel without its complex, it does appear alone, like a moored boat, tied to a giant beech within the haven of the walled garden. Its elliptical form presents an uncompromising and 'proper' architecture at ease with the majestic presence of surrounding mature trees. It is as though the trees have connived in the setting out of the chapel, the boughs of the sweet chestnut, beech and cedar giving shelter to its presence. Street's adjacent college buildings are attenuated and elaborate, forming courtyards as complete ensembles, with a 'nod' to the vernacular, and institutional

in setting. The presence of the chapel with its self-conscious vocabulary of stone and fenestration is certainly a match for Street's neo-Gothic bays and oriel windows. The stone detailing of the Street building is matched by the stripped clean detailing of Clipsham stone of McLaughlin's mannered building. Above the smooth and dressed storey-height plinth is a blind band of rusticated stone coursing that wraps the building like a vestment. Its fabric, textured by alternate courses of dressed and split stone laid at 45 degrees to the wall geometry, catches the sunlight on its traverse of the elliptical drum. The scale of stone blocks matches the courses of the Street building, but unlike that building the chapel comes alive because of the geometry that accentuates the rustication like a magnificent tooled shawl.

What McLaughlin and Street have in common is a sense of permanence, of building for perpetuity. The nuns, although dwindling in number, observe their office five times a day with high church ceremony; they chose building detail that is conscious of that perpetuity rather than the usual building warranties.

The arrival of the order of nuns at Ripon reminds you of those illustrations of early settlers to America – are they dismantling or constructing the boat structure? The carcass is an armature for an idea and a belief. The interior of the chapel carries resonances of a boat structure and of the vegetal forms associated with stone vaulting systems. The chapel's elliptical shape offers the same sense of completeness as a boat, in which you carry everything that is needed for a journey. Its fullness reminds me of the little Celtic gold boat with its oars preserved in the Museum of Ireland, its form produced by the workings of hand and eye drawing out the shape. In a similar way, McLaughlin arrives at his concept, showing a finger forming a depression in clay, a uniformly distributed



site plan

- 1 main chapel
- 2 existing beech tree
- 3 College House
- 4 Linden Building
- 5 entrance to college

- 1. (Previous page) the arboreal structure of the chapel is crowned by a narrow band of clerestory glazing
- 2. The columns meet to form a filigree vault, allowing light from the clerestory to wash through the chapel. Its central feature is a lectern, emphasising the educational function of the space
- 3. Ancient trees surround the compact, elliptical structure, like a boat poised in the landscape

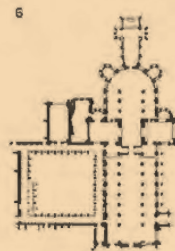


Ripon Chapel,
Cuddesdon,
Oxfordshire, UK,
Níall McLaughlin
Architects





4. The boat is a recurring image in Christian theology: here Christ and the apostles navigate the Sea of Galilee
5. The swelling fullness of the cymbiform chapel recalls an ancient Celtic golden boat in the Museum of Ireland



6 & 7. Gloucester Cathedral and its cloister, famous for its intricate fan vaults. Stone becomes lace in the hands of Gothic masons
8. The timber frame of the chapel seems to stop short of the soffit, creating an impression of weightlessness. A sequence of sections (below) shows the structural principles

loaded structure displacing ground. The chapel space steps down into the ceremonial dish, marked by two brass plates locating the centering of the elliptical geometry which in turn locks the altar table and the lectern into the geometry of the chapel.

The chapel, like the boat where every cargo is balanced against its plimsoll line and centre of gravity, distributes its precious spaces as niches and outliers, so that the sisters' prayer space is sited opposite and across the ellipse to the niche that is to contain the tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament. The focus of prayer is glanced at from the settles opposite. In his competition document, McLaughlin alludes to the accretion of structures around the chancels of Gloucester and Canterbury Cathedrals. Such chapels, tombs and chantries tried to position their form as close to, and aligned with the altar and the Sacrament, as though such spaces had become part of the ceremony of worship. However, this is not a chapel for the village, which has its own parish church beyond. Consequently, the chapel has no font or other furniture of public worship.

The chapel design has to reconcile the wishes of both client constituencies. The high church ceremony associated with the Sisters of the Community of St John the Baptist, which included at the chapel's first blessing a celebration with incense, and that of Ripon College which, one would like to imagine, would use the space much like a Scuola in Venice, with fixed seating around the periphery of a central space used for readings, debates, and presided over by an altar of the Blessed Sacrament. Unlike the usual arrangement of the church, this chapel locates its altar in the western end of the space – albeit, the altar table and the lectern have interchangeable positions on the east-west axis of the chapel. This has much to do with the orientation of entry to the space and its relationship to the siting of the unbuilt convent. The clients wanted the lectern to be the first component of worship to be seen on entry to the chapel. Turning left at the entrance, the visitor follows

the ambulatory down a ramp that reconciles disabled access with the quiet processional route to the lectern sited at the eastern end of the space. The slope emphasises McLaughlin's wish for the chapel to be grounded at a lower level to the outside space, like a medieval church in which the threshold steps down into the nave.

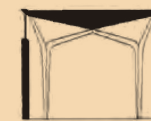
The main space of the chapel is formed from a layering of structure. As a geometric figure, the ellipse enables the external wall to be self-supporting. The setting-out used the dimensions of the major and minor axes to describe the ellipse full-size on the ground, just as medieval craftsmen set out at full size the curving stone components on a tracing floor. The projecting intersections of geometry became the nodal points for the positions of the columns. Much like the erection of a boat skeleton, or the timber centerings for an arch, the chapel portals were erected and became the datum for all the



basic gable timber frame



roof is supported by the frame



walls encircle the erect frame

Ripon Chapel, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, UK, Niall McLaughlin Architects

later elements of structure. They stood exposed to the weather, waiting for the layers of walling to be built that would finally enclose and protect the space. Inside, the composite V-shaped columns describe the space, so that the ambulatory is a space in between the layers of structure. The V-shaped columns turn at the height of the clerestory to form a portal structure, like the elbow of a ship's rib or the cruck of a medieval frame. A spur of timber from that elbow completes the connection with the roof. The delicacy with which the soffit connects to the columns is due to the stability of the elliptical geometry and the interlacing of the portal structures. The soffit of the roof is 'belly' shaped, its keel running along the axis of the ellipse. Its curvature lifts to the clerestory, enabling light to be reflected at high level through the depth of space. The complexity of the serial forms and the light remind one of the overlaid clear glazed windows of a Norfolk church, the clerestory glazing with its fine stone mullions like a curtain wall in the perpendicular style.

This perceived lifting of the soffit almost separates the column structure from the carcass of the roof, so that the structure becomes part of another order of building. A space within a space much like choir stalls, a large piece of architectural furniture. As an inserted form, it carries the spirit of the Gothic, in which soaring structure and light equate to godliness and heaven. However, this structure needs no flying buttress; as an inserted

structure, it is more akin to the fan vault, resolving its load paths within its envelope. McLaughlin writes of the influence of Gloucester Cathedral. Did he visit the cloister? The stone fan vaults spring from their plinths in ribbed vegetal forms that bifurcate and interweave close to the apex of the arch. Like the fan vault and unlike the Gothic, McLaughlin's timber portal uses the same geometric section throughout the structural ensemble. Similarly, the decorated keystone of the fan vault finds its equivalent in the cross weaving timber structure that locks the portal frame into a self-supporting arch. McLaughlin consulted the sisters on the structural alternatives to this fixing detail; they chose the detail for its clarity and sense of perpetuity. At Gloucester, the bench seats are like a string course around the perambulation of the cloister; at Ripon the bench seats share a base with the columns. The honey-coloured stone of the Gloucester cloister finds its equivalent at Ripon in the lime-rendered walls that reflect a similar quality of light. In both the cloister and the Ripon chapel, the paring down of the materials used contributes to the quietness and power of the space.

McLaughlin is also to design the Tabernacle for the Blessed Sacrament, to be made in oak and brass, as a further refinement of the scale of the chapel. As one of the rare reflective architects, McLaughlin has responded sensitively to the spiritual challenge of this commission.



9. A thumb print in clay recalls God's moulding of Adam – an indexical trace of creation – and inspired the chapel's sunken floor

10. The architects work on a large-scale plan on plaster, a technique informed by Peter Salter's article on the traditional design process used to create fan vaults (AR January 2011)



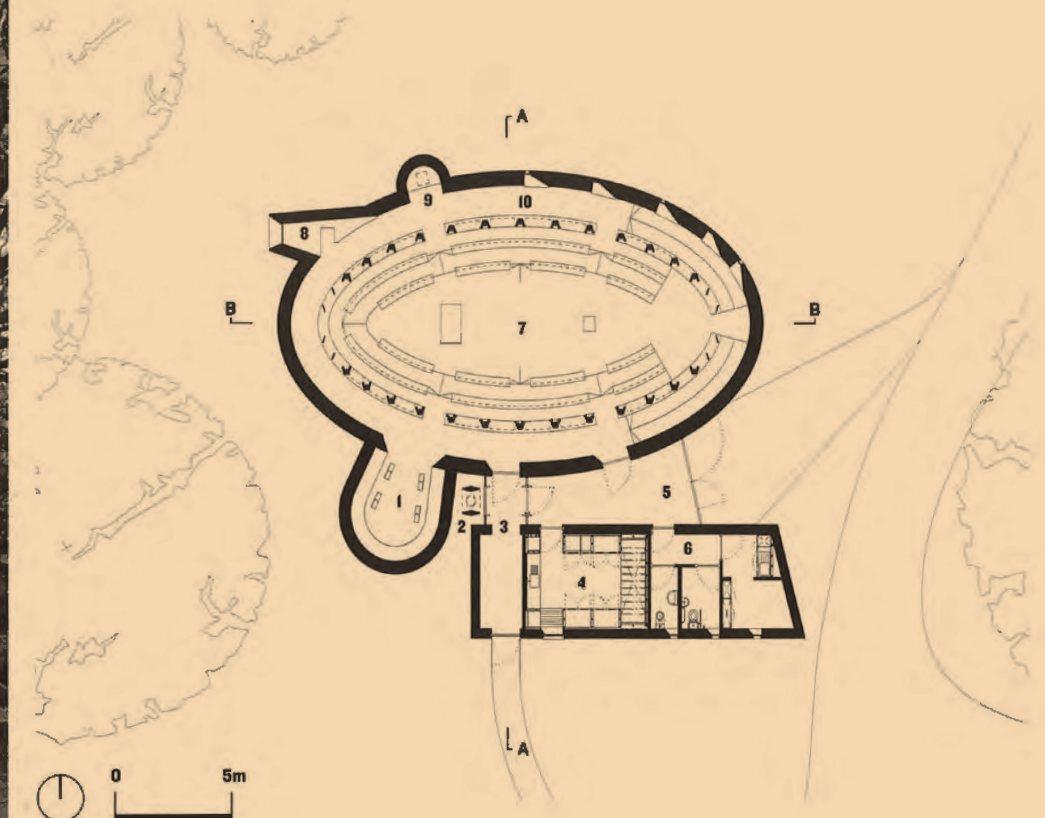


**Ripon Chapel,
Cuddesdon,
Oxfordshire, UK,
Niall McLaughlin
Architects**

11. The facade is detailed above the podium with a textured band laid in alternating courses of dressed and split stone
12. McLaughlin's addition sits in an easy dialogue with Street's original college buildings



- 1 sisters' prayer room
- 2 bell tower
- 3 prayer board
- 4 sacristy
- 5 entrance lobby
- 6 WCs
- 7 main chapel
- 8 private prayer space
- 9 blessed sacrament niche
- 10 ambulatory



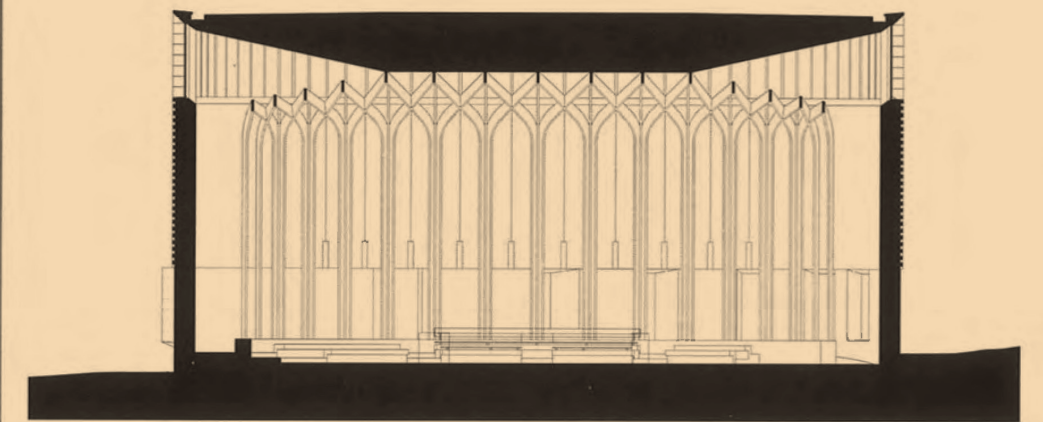
ground floor plan



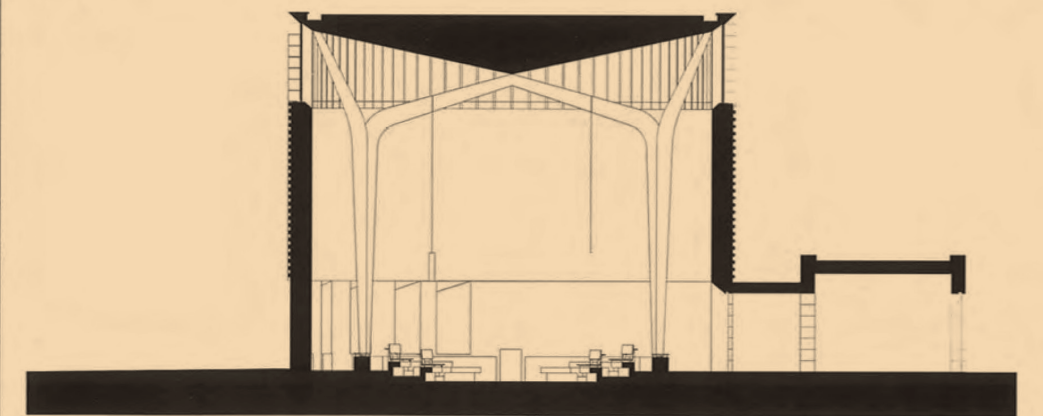


¹⁴ **Ripon Chapel, Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, UK, Niall McLaughlin Architects**

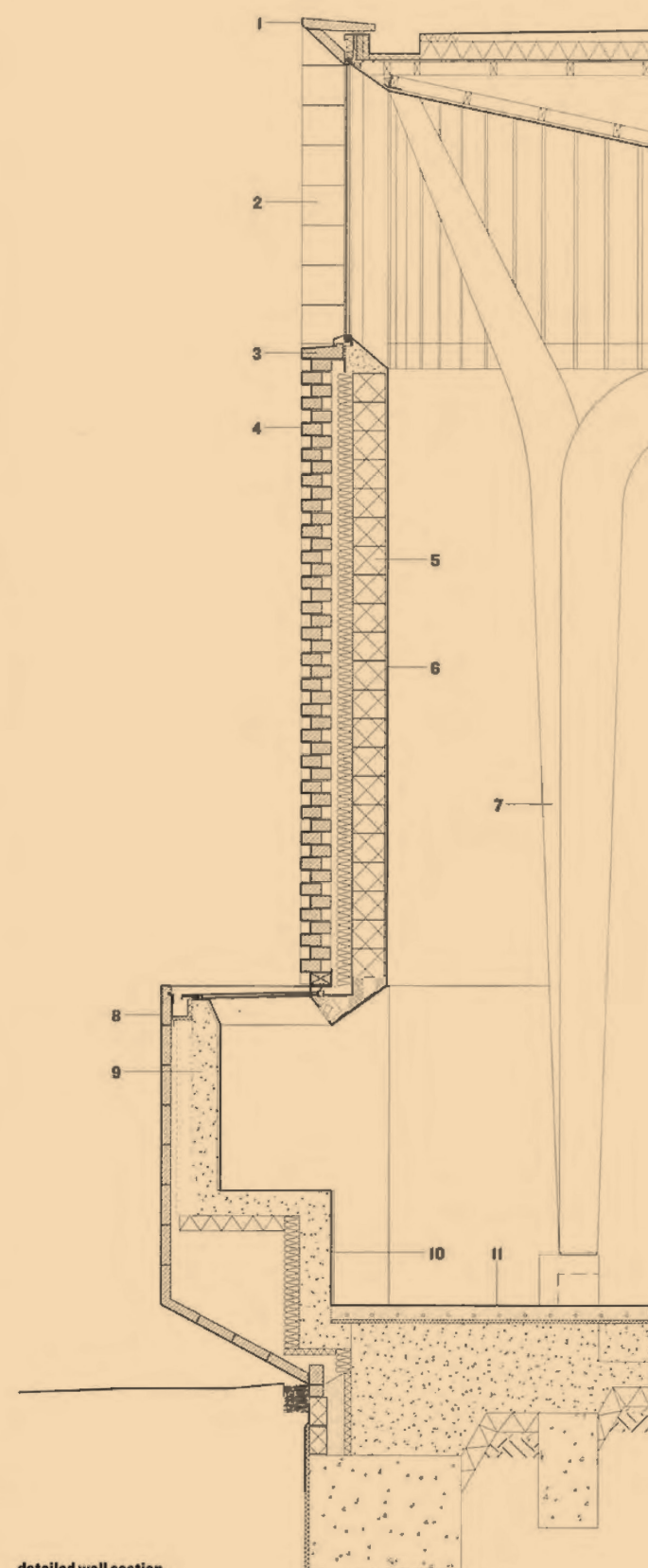
^{13.} (Previous page) the frame meets like interlinked fingers below the meniscus of the roof
^{14.} Materially, the wooden columns and ribs recall the traditional argument that Gothic architecture derives from the forest canopy, echoing the forms of the surrounding trees
^{15.} A circle of clerestory glazing creates an ethereal halo of natural light



section BB



section AA



detailed wall section



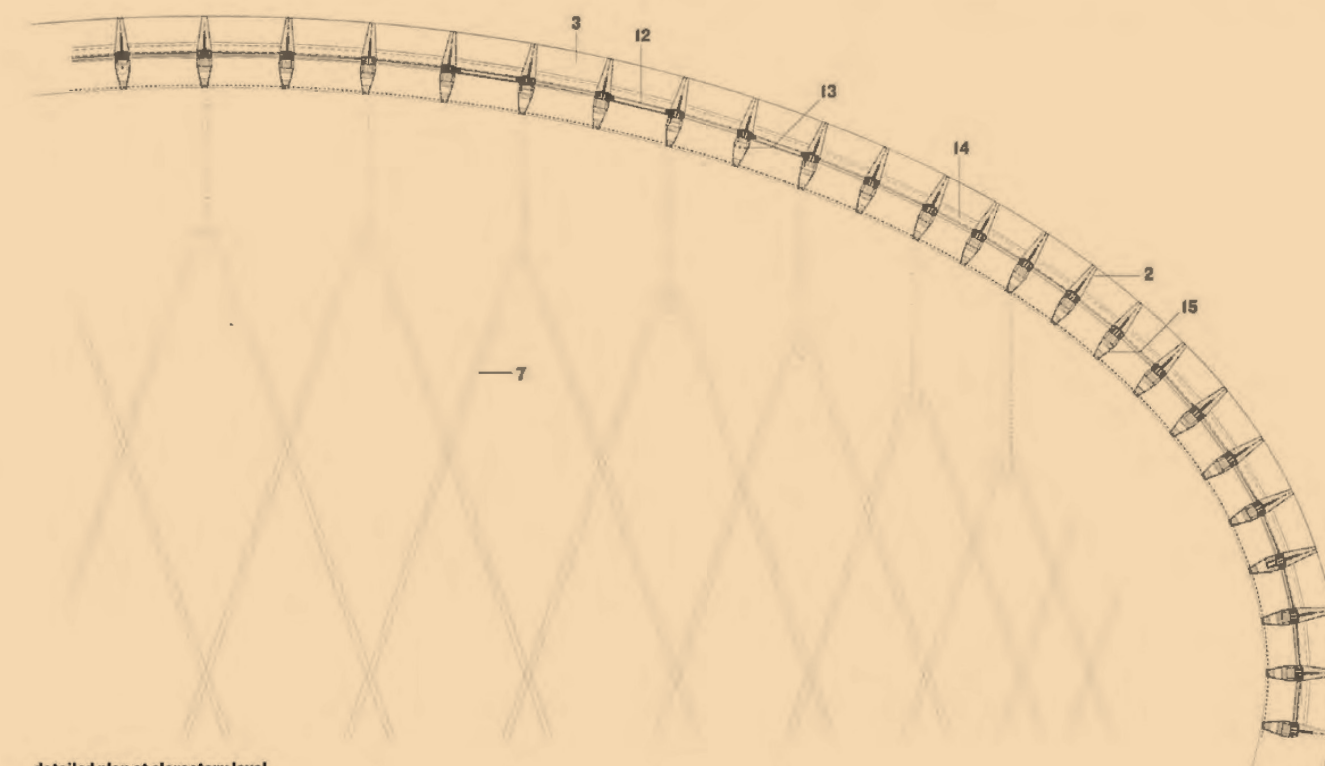
- 1 ashlar stone capping
- 2 ashlar stone fins
- 3 stone sill
- 4 dogtooth stone wall
- 5 reinforced concrete block
- 6 textured lime plaster render
- 7 glulam timber structure
- 8 ashlar cladding
- 9 reinforced concrete wall with lime plaster finish
- 10 fair faced concrete
- 11 power floated concrete floor
- 12 clear frameless glass louvres
- 13 rain water pipe
- 14 clear fixed glazing
- 15 timber fins

**Ripon Chapel,
Cuddesdon,
Oxfordshire, UK,
Niall McLaughlin
Architects**

16 & 17. A bay window extrudes through the curved walls, illuminating a human-scaled, contemplative space



Architect
Niall McLaughlin
Architects
Structural engineer
Price and Myers
Services engineer
Synergy Consulting
Engineers
Stone consultant
Harrison Goldman
Photographs
All photographs by
Dennis Gilbert/VIEW
except 1, which
is courtesy of
the architect



detailed plan at clerestory level

ARCHITECTURE TODAY • 237



April 2013

Niall McLaughlin's chapel of light at Ripon College
Learning lessons: schools by Penoyre & Prasad, Design Engine, John Pardey/HKR, Avanti, Haworth Tompkins, Charles Barclay Wild on Seagram • Whitby in Singapore • Hamburg's IBA

■ BUILDING

Lightenings: Niall McLaughlin's Bishop Edward King Chapel

Mary Ann Steane admires a lyrical embodiment of liturgy and light. Photographs: Dennis Gilbert.

A concern for light has always been central to Niall McLaughlin's architecture. In a sense he sees himself as building with light, and yet is aware, more than most, that a search for light needs to find a telling concept if it is not to be read as a merely escapist effect.

At the Bishop Edward King Chapel at Cuddesdon in Oxfordshire, McLaughlin had an unusual brief. The building not only forms the central gathering place for Ripon College, a major Anglican training centre, but is the permanent legacy of the small religious order at Begbroke, the sisters' generous gift on joining their larger neighbours.

A powerful narrative has stimulated many aspects of the design, one that ties the project to the site as it touches on light's fundamental role in spatial orientation. Taking its cue from the Seamus Heaney poem 'Lightenings VIII', the chapel recalls the miraculous ship of the upper air whose anchor hooks the altar rail at Clonmacnoise. At Cuddesdon, the vessel is snagged by the tangled branches of the huge trees that form a leafy backdrop to the college entrance.

The word 'nave' stems from the Latin 'navis' – ship – and boats are a common symbol in Christian architecture: Noah's Ark and the medieval 'ship of souls' spring to mind. As a metaphor, the ship tellingly embodies the collectivity and interdependence of a community, but what has it to do with light?



Above Sketch inspired by the poem *Lightenings VIII*.
Right The £2m RIBA competition-winning project is in the grounds of a grade II* listed nineteenth-century theological college designed by GE Street.

20 • AT237



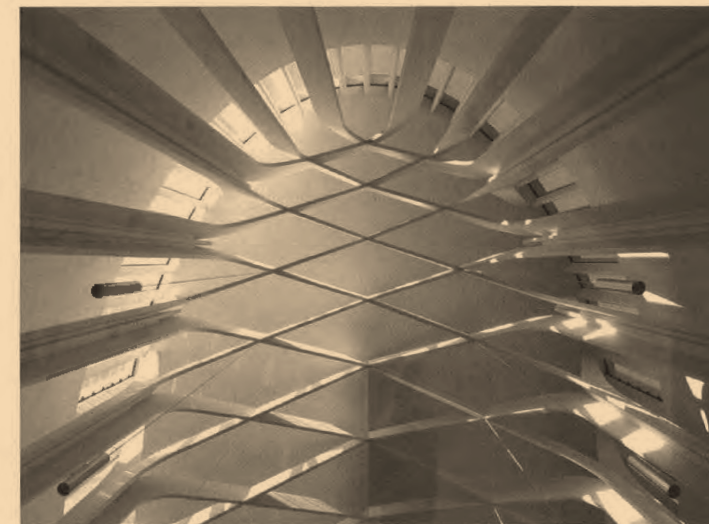


AT237 • 21



Permanence and ephemerality – what is weighty and what is weightless – are held in tension in this project. A primary gesture of grounding initiated the design process when McLaughlin first impressed his thumb on a plasticine model of the hillside site. Within a rigorously simple volume of loadbearing stone located by this gesture, a soaring armature of timber is inserted. This structure not only helps contain the action at the lower level in a fluid orchestration of space and movement, but draws the eye upwards, capturing and filtering the natural light. On a sunny day the upper surfaces become an animated embroidery of light and shadow in tune with the surrounding windblown foliage, but even on a dull day the way that light is held within the tall enclosure is critical to the project's narrative of tethering.

Concern for the marriage of geometry and surface lead to a spatial resolution in which the centre line of the ceiling, the junction at which the complex timber structure and simple plaster soffit gently meet, becomes the ship's keel. The idea dawns that not only are we in the ship, gathered amongst its masts, but at the same time submerged in the womb



of the sea. We are thus not in the light but definitively below it. And suddenly, unexpectedly, the light above us acquires depth.

According to McLaughlin the building's elliptical form was directly inspired by the 1954 Rudolf Schwarz chapel of St Michael in Frankfurt-am-Main. Beyond its capacity to evoke a ship, he uses it here to qualify formality with informality while staging deft critical adjacencies, separations and alignments. An ellipse whose foci mark the positions of altar

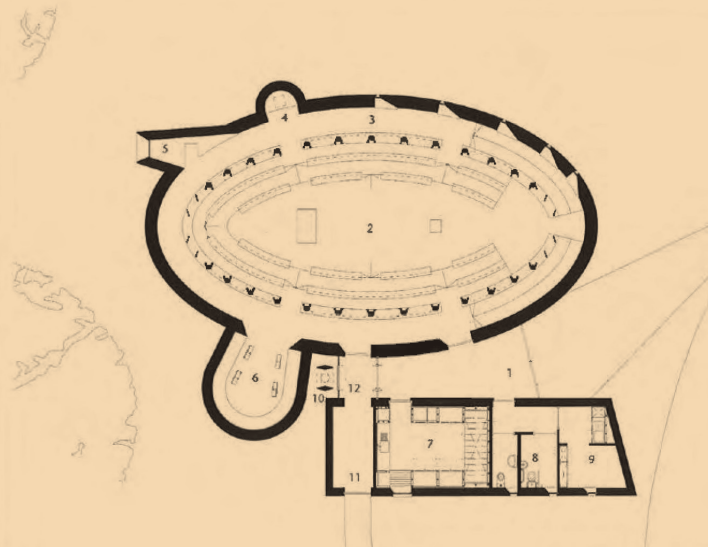
Top right Long section: the roof and the internal frame are self-supporting and act independently of the external walls. Above Chapel of St Michael by Rudolf Schwarz, Frankfurt. Left Main chapel; spruce glulam structure; site plan.

22 • AT237

and lectern, and which contains the two lines of facing seats that are traditional in college chapels, is extended by the entrance porch and three smaller enclosures which protrude off-axis from its base: a seating area for the sisters, an oriel window whose distant view across the rolling landscape brings an unexpected moment of colour and depth, and the tabernacle niche. This arrangement means all members of the congregation can see the altar, with the sisters close by, aligned with the tabernacle beyond, and the college's ordinands closer to the lectern and its sermons. Unlike the Schwarz chapel, the structure supporting the roof is on the inside. Not only does the resulting screen of columns contain and measure the moment and place of gathering, but it disperses sound well enough to prevent the poor acoustics that can dog curvilinear churches.

Gottfried Semper's explanation of the origins of architecture in ancient rites and

Right, below Sacristy, sisters' prayer room; oriel window.
Plan 1 Entrance, 2 chapel, 3 ambulatory, 4 blessed sacrament niche, 5 prayer space, 6 sisters' prayer room, 7 sacristy, 8 wcs, 9 storage, 10 bell tower, 11 second entrance, 12 prayer board.



AT237 • 25



crafts was a major influence on the project's material vocabulary. Thus, the altar/hearth forms the nucleus around which the community meets while, as Semper suggests, a heavy concrete mound, an enclosure of 'woven' stone and a carpentered roof articulate its transaction between earth and light. The argument is particularly clear on the exterior. Constructed in Clipsham stone, and with approximate proportions of 1:2:1, an ashlar base supports a deeply modelled tapestry of alternately smooth-faced and rough-faced blocks below a ring of clerestory windows. At the top, the spacing of the daringly slender stone mullions is carefully attuned to the lightweight 'open-work' of timber ribs within.

These bands reappear on the inside. The walls pass from flatness to a kind of tumult: the lower region is smooth lime plaster, the middle region rough lime plaster, and the upper region a finely wrought interlacing of windows, mullions and ribs that evokes the turbulence of the waves below the miraculous ship. Here everything is washed with white – structural timber, furniture, walls, ceiling – but for the pale grey floor, and the bright gold of the tabernacle interior and the lamps that hang from the ceiling, mediating between the worlds above and below. At the

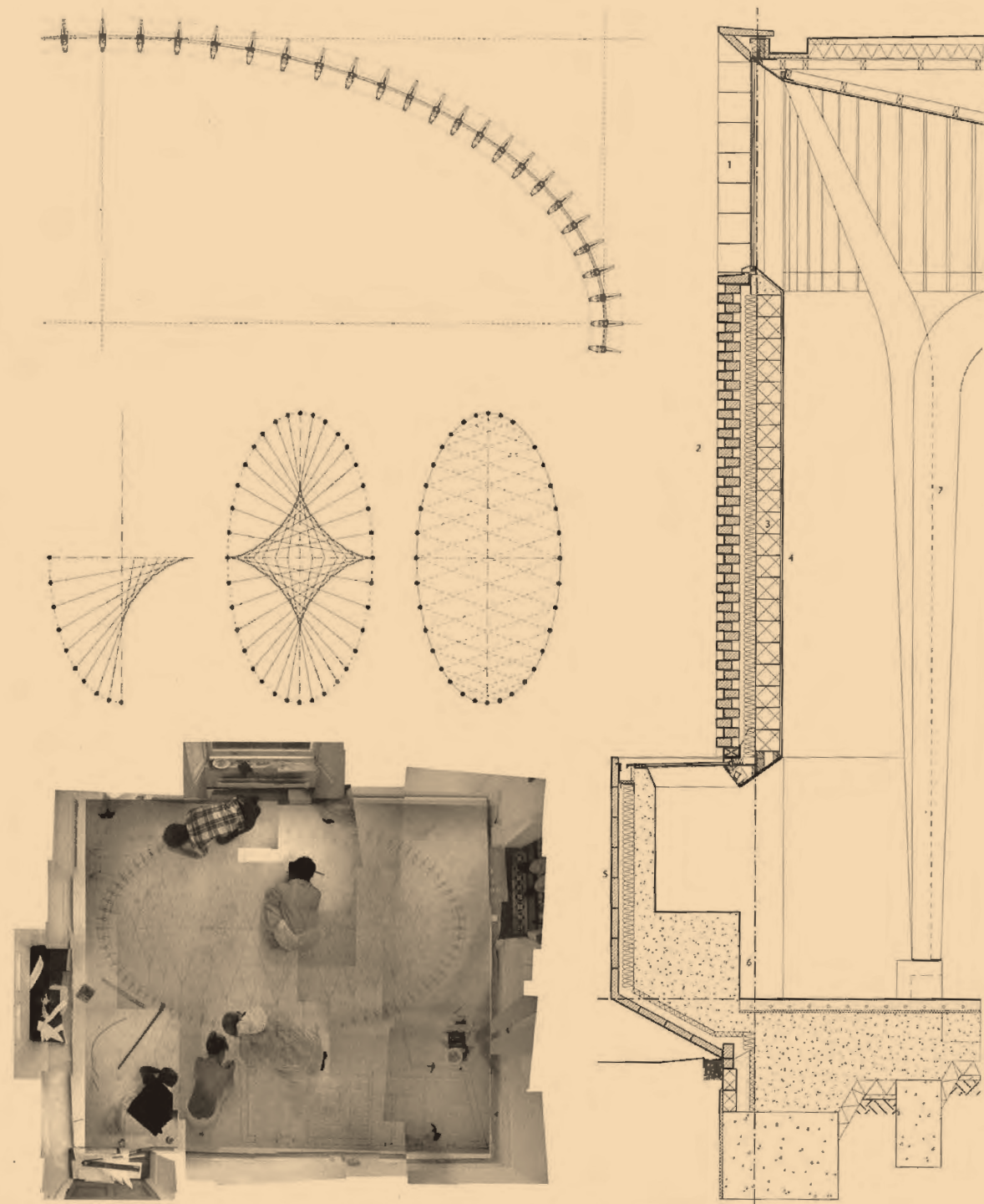


nave's southern edge, narrow slot windows offer further seats and glimpses outwards.

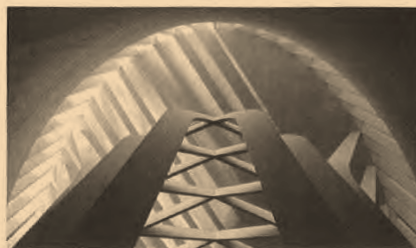
The slight depression of the nave creates an unusual setting for worship in that its linear concentric geometry more obviously recalls a medieval moot, a place of debate, than a church. Such debates sometimes took place in natural theatres in the landscape like woodland glades; as the chapel at Cuddesdon seeks to build a relationship with the trees, perhaps this reading is apt. McLaughlin notes that 'nave' is also the term for the hub of a moving wheel, and thus a powerful metaphor for an institution

Above, left. Dressed stone walls and oriel window; walls are of insulated cavity construction with a curved blockwork inner leaf. The warm deck roof drains to concealed pipes running through wall cavities, and recessed into stone fins at clerestory level.

26 • AT237



offering spiritual education. This idea not only justifies the ambulatory, but in a return to the narrative of space and light explains the location of the chapel's porch. Dictated by the exit rather than the entrance sequence, the passage from the nave floor to the world outside involves a slight ascent, spatial compression and final release into the shelter of the largest beech tree in England.



Above left Setting out the structure: 'To construct an ellipse the stable circle is played against the line, which is about movement back and forth,' says the architect. 'This reflects the idea of exchange between perfect and imperfect at the centre of Christian thought.'

Above Detail section: 1 ashlar stone fins, 2 dogtooth stone wall, 3 concrete block, 4 textured lime plaster, 5 ashlar cladding, 6 fair-faced concrete, 7 spruce glulam.



Another motif borrowed from Seamus Heaney, the figure of the kite-flyer, a man caught up in his task, eyes on the empyrean but with feet planted on the ground, arms straining against the wind, helps explain how McLaughlin builds light. This is soaring yet earthbound architecture, which eloquently reinterprets tradition so that everyone and every element finds its place. This chapel is also a building whose orienting dialectics of site, light, depth and distance distil an argument concerning the human soul out of an eye-catching visual spectacle. A building, therefore, whose light symbolism will become more powerful over time as its lower reaches acquire the patina of age. Seamus Heaney once said: 'If poetry and the arts do anything, they can fortify your inner life, your inwardness.' In this remarkable project, McLaughlin shows us how.

Mary Ann Steane is an architect, lecturer at the University of Cambridge and author of *The Architecture of Light* (Routledge).

Project team
 Architect: Niall McLaughlin Architects;
 structural engineer: Price & Myers; m&e
 engineer: Synergy Consulting Engineers;
 qs: Ridge & Partners; planning consultant:
 Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners; acoustics:
 Paul Gillieron Acoustic Design; access: Jane
 Toplis Assoc; stone consultant: Harrison
 Goldman; construction consultant: Richard
 Bayfield; fire: Fire Ingenuity; concrete con-
 sultant: David Bennett; timber consultant:
 WD+TCC; contractor: Beard Construction;
 client: Ripon College and Community of
 St John the Baptist.

Selected suppliers and subcontractors
 Windows: Schüco; lime render: Limetech;
 doors, fixed furniture and paneling: D Smith
 Joinery; glass louvers: Colt International;
 ironmongery: Allgood; roof membrane: Sika
 Trocal; waterproofing: RW; bespoke lights:
 Vista Light; rooflights: Vulcan; stonework:
 Szerelmey; timber frame: Cowley Timber-
 work; loose furniture: Westside Design.



Week in pictures



1 OXFORDSHIRE Niall McLaughlin Architects has completed a £2 million chapel at Ripon Theological College, Oxfordshire. The stone-clad building is part of a larger campus expansion. The practice won the scheme ahead of a shortlist including Massimiliano Fuksas and Ushida Findlay

2 CAMBRIDGE Tate Lindle has won planning consent for a 229-home project for Countryside Properties at Clay Farm, Cambridge. The scheme is part of the wider 2,300-home Great Kneighton development. Work will start on site later this year, with the first homes set to complete in summer 2014

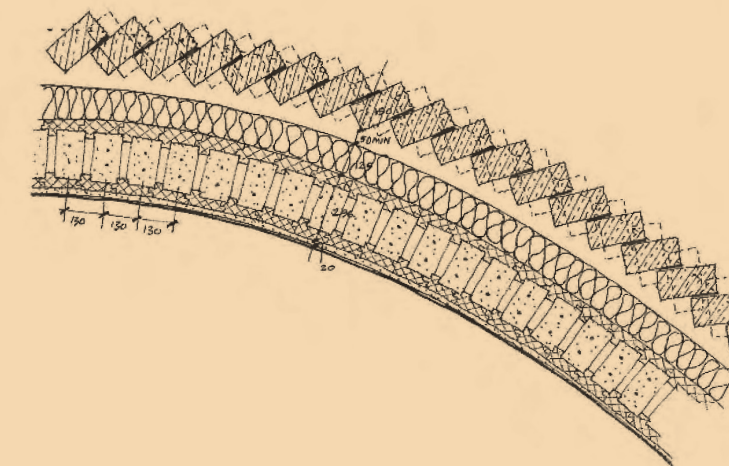
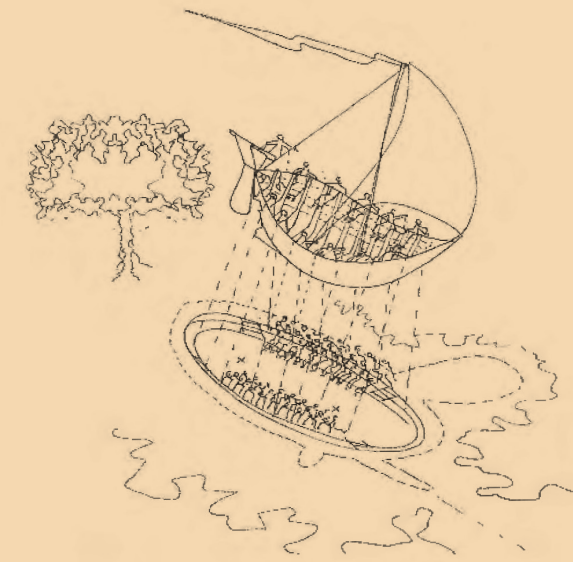
3 SCOTLAND Broadcaster and journalist Lesley Riddoch will chair the Saltire Society Housing Design Awards 2013, alongside newly appointed convenor Jude Barber of Collective Architecture. Riddoch succeeds architect Dick Cannon as head of the jury for the prestigious Scottish awards

4 ROCHDALE Faulkner Browns has taken the wraps off this 17,000m² civic headquarters for Rochdale Council. The S-shaped building on a 1 hectare former car park includes a restaurant, café, library and offices for 2,000 council workers. The seven-story structure is part of masterplan to transform Rochdale riverside



5 SUFFOLK Charles Barclay Architects has completed this single-storey holiday home on the Suffolk coast. Built on a former pig farm near Minmere, it has been shortlisted for a RIBA Regional Award. The building is formed of two linked 'L' shapes: one space for the owner, the other for use by guests

PICTURE CREDITS: 01 NIALL McLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS 02 TATE LINDLE 03 SSHDA 04 HUFTON + CROW 05 DAVID GRANDORGE



CHAPEL FOR RIPON COLLEGE

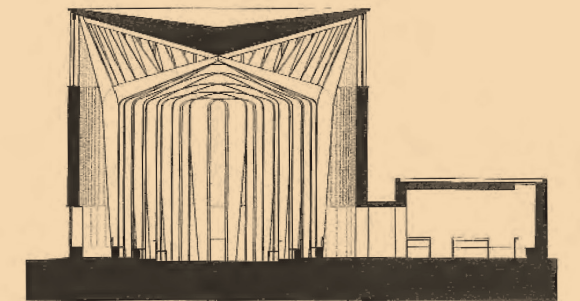
LOCATION
OXFORD, UK

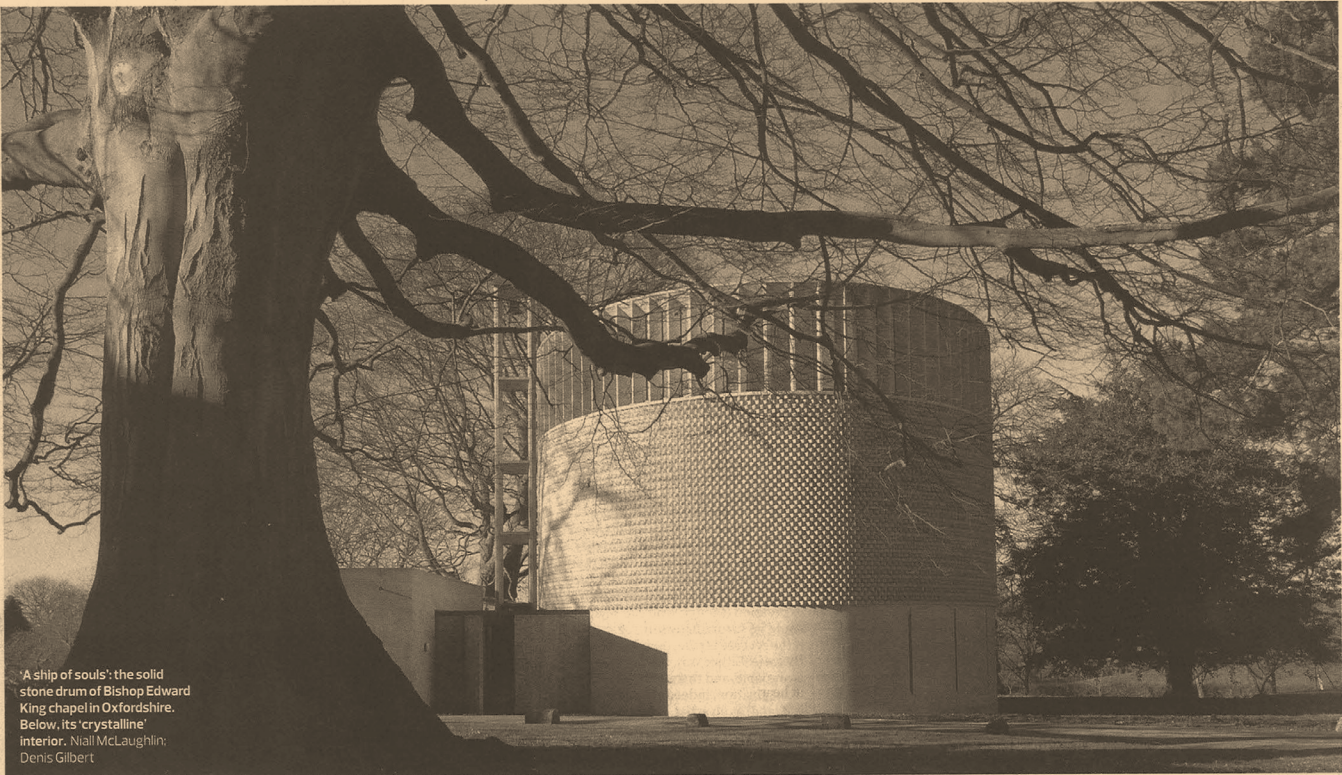
ARCHITECT
NÍALL MCLAUGHLIN

In July 2009, Níall McLaughlin won a competition to design the Bishop Edward King Chapel for Ripon College in Oxfordshire. The project is now on site and is due for completion in August 2012. The design synthesises two key architectural ideas. The first is a gentle hollow in the ground that acts as a meeting place for the community. The second is a delicate, hull-like structure that rises into the treetops to gather the light from the leaves. The first speaks of a rootedness, of meeting in the still centre; the second suggests a buoyancy. These two opposing forces play off each other to create a resonant whole.

Opposite page, top
Elevation of the
new chapel in its
college context
Bottom, Plan of
college campus
This page, left
Generative sketch

Middle, Plan detail
of external wall
Below, Cross section
Middle, Mock-up of
wall construction
Bottom, Model of the
hull-like structure
and internal space





'A ship of souls': the solid stone drum of Bishop Edward King chapel in Oxfordshire. Below, its 'crystalline' interior. Níall McLaughlin; Denis Gilbert

The answer to their prayers

The craft and care of Níall McLaughlin's elliptical, light-filled chapel for Ripon College could almost make believers of us all...



Rowan Moore

Bishop Edward King chapel, Ripon College
Oxfordshire

There is a view of architecture that it is religion by other means. The standard histories used to be dominated by churches and temples, and ideas on the subject have been shaped by proselytisers such as John Ruskin and Le Corbusier, whose books sound like prophetic tracts. "Visionary" is used to describe architects of above average wilfulness, and "vision" is applied to over-optimistic regeneration projects, as if they were something out of the Book of Revelations.

Things sometimes thought to be signs of serious architecture, like permanence, geometry and symmetry, are particularly characteristic of religious buildings. Also the idea of "integrity" or "truth" – that is that the structure that holds the building up is revealed and undisguised, that there are unities of thought, action, material, space and detail.

This version of integrity is now a dispensable luxury in most new construction, where the investment logic of developers and the commercial logic of contractors rule. It's easier to throw up standardised frames, wrap them in standardised cladding and not worry too much about how everything hangs together. And, as the forces of global capital pummel old ideas of architecture into submission, religious

buildings can look like their last refuge.

So it is with the Bishop Edward King chapel at Ripon theological college in Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, designed by Níall McLaughlin. It stands in an area soaked in absurd quantities of beauty, with a huge copper beech dating to 1710, other ancient trees, fields that it's obligatory to call rolling, and gothic revival collegiate buildings in a stone that can only be called honeyed. The £2m building itself is crafted and considered; it makes ideas physical; it has intentions and carries them out in its space and matter.

From the outside you see an elliptical drum in solid stone, smooth at the bottom, then corrugating into a texture of alternating rough and cut surfaces that looks like something woven, before finishing with a top layer of glass set behind fragile stone fins. It is paradoxically heavy and light, a bastion and a boat, a wall and a drape. It has presence, but doesn't dominate. It has affinities with the all-timber Saint Benedict chapel by the Pritzker-winning Peter Zumthor, although McLaughlin mentions a less famous influence, a postwar German architect of churches called Rudolf Schwarz.

Smaller shapes gather about the drum, including an entrance that is deliberately low and dark, suppressing expectations before you reach the high, light-filled interior of the ellipse, within which a ring of 34 slender timber columns grow upwards, develop branches and intersect in a cross-crossing vault. McLaughlin calls this space "crystalline", meaning that it's symmetrical in two axes, but he then offsets it with less orderly extensions: an off-centre window to catch the view over fields, a space for the tabernacle, a half-enclosed chapel, horse-shoe shaped, for the sisters of



the Community of John the Baptist, who have recently sold their old home in another part of the county and come to share this site with the college.

The interior has several materials – stone, lime plaster, concrete, the laminated larch of the columns, furniture in ash – but they share a similar hue, a sort of (Caucasian) skin tone which, as on a human body, gives unity to multiple variations. It shows off the play of light which in the end is the chapel's main event. While designing it McLaughlin made a video of the way sunlight filters through surrounding trees, and the chapel attempts a constructed equivalent. Light comes through the upper ring of glass, and through oblique sources, and animates the chapel's layers and

As clouds move across the sky outside, the chapel's interior inhales and exhales sunshine

surfaces. As clouds move across the sky outside, the interior inhales and exhales sunshine. As it brightens and dulls, its features stand out from and then recede into their background.

McLaughlin tells stories to explain the architecture, as does the Rev Canon Professor Martyn Percy, the principal of the college. The building is a ship of souls, a retake of an old idea contained in the Latin origin of the word "nave". Then again, the ceiling above the timber branches dips slightly towards a central keel-like line ("carinated" is the technical term), as if there were another boat floating above, which McLaughlin says is prompted by a 1,000-year-old Celtic story.

He cites the writings of Richard Sennett on early Christians who struggled to reconcile a desire to wander, and give up fixed places, with the building of permanent churches. They created ambulatories, zones of walking, like the one McLaughlin has made between the ring of columns and the outer wall. The resemblance of the outer stonework to cloth refers to the writings of Gottfried Semper, a wiser and saner contemporary of Ruskin's, for whom every construction technique was an imitation of an earlier craft, with weaving one of the oldest of all.

Percy, for his part, talks about "the different spiritual textures people have to live with", which the physical textures of the building represent. For him it embodies a broad, moderate church, "not minimalist Protestant and not archi-tatty Catholic". The use of an ellipse, a geometrical figure with two centres, allows worship to focus on either the rituals of the eucharist or on the spoken word: the altar is placed on one centre, the lectern on the other. The seating plan is "antiphonal", with two banks of congregation facing each other; the chapel's layout and acoustic also allows conversational rather than declaratory voices.

The stories about boats and weaving have some charm, and help with a perennial difficulty for architects – how to justify a design, how to choose one approach over another – but they begin

to cloy. I'm glad when McLaughlin says that, in the end, "you have to leave these narratives behind. You have to abandon a building to the world and let it gather its own meanings. It's no good standing at the corner and telling people what it means." In other words, you don't have to know anything about Semper or boat myths to appreciate the spaces.

As someone as certain about the nonexistence of God as I can be about anything, I feel a touch disoriented by a new space devoted, with conviction, to making the opposite case. At the same time it speaks a spiritual Esperanto common to most churches built in modern times – reluctant to show damnation, miracles or apotheoses, or even a too-literal crucifixion, it works more abstractly with light, form, material and nature, in a quasi-gothic of soaring lines and tree-like structure. Can't it be more explicit? Can't it say exactly what it means? No, given the ambiguities of modern religion, it can't.

But the uncomplicated fact about this chapel is that it's lovely – as much as the copper beech, the rolling fields and the honeyed stone. It is poised, tuned, and well made, a close reflection of the desires of its users and the intentions of its architect. The clients were prepared to pay, for example, an extra £50,000 for concealed fixings in the roof structure, rather than visible bolts, because they realised that they were essential to the success of the whole.

It helped that the sisters did well by selling their old home, proceeds of which went to funding the new building. They took a tithe from the workings of the property market, of the speculations of capital, to achieve a kind of architecture that the market doesn't often permit. It's a pertinent question how its qualities might be transferred to a harsher outside world but, meanwhile, the main thing is just to enjoy them.

Online




Bishop Edward King chapel – more pictures: observer.co.uk/new-review

Sign into guardian.co.uk with Google

theguardian | TheObserver

Bishop Edward King chapel, Ripon College – review

The craft and care of Níall McLaughlin's elliptical, light-filled Oxfordshire chapel could almost make believers of us all...



Rowan Moore

The Observer, Sunday 28 April 2013



'A ship of souls': the solid stone drum of Bishop Edward King chapel in Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, designed by Níall McLaughlin. Photograph: Níall McLaughlin

There is a view of architecture that it is religion by other means. The standard histories used to be dominated by churches and temples, and ideas on the subject have been shaped by proselytisers such as John Ruskin and Le Corbusier, whose books sound like prophetic tracts. "Visionary" is used to describe architects of above average wilfulness, and "vision" is applied to over-optimistic regeneration projects, as if they were something out of the Book of Revelations.

Things sometimes thought to be signs of serious architecture, like permanence, geometry and symmetry, are particularly characteristic of religious buildings. Also the idea of "integrity" or "truth" – that is that the structure that holds the building up is revealed and undisguised, that there are unities of thought, action, material, space and detail.

This version of integrity is now a dispensable luxury in most new construction, where the investment logic of developers and the commercial logic of contractors rule. It's easier to throw up standardised frames, wrap them in standardised cladding and not worry too much about how everything hangs together. And, as the forces of global capital pummel old ideas of architecture into submission, religious buildings can look like their last refuge.

So it is with the [Bishop Edward King chapel](#) at Ripon theological college in Cuddesdon, Oxfordshire, designed by [Níall McLaughlin](#). It stands in an area soaked in absurd quantities of beauty, with a huge copper beech dating to 1710, other ancient trees, fields that it's obligatory to call rolling, and gothic revival collegiate buildings in a stone that can only be called honeyed. The £2m building itself is crafted and considered; it makes ideas physical; it has intentions and carries them out in its space and matter.

From the outside you see an elliptical drum in solid stone, smooth at the bottom, then corrugating into a texture of alternating rough and cut surfaces that looks like something woven, before finishing with a top layer of glass set behind fragile stone fins. It is paradoxically heavy and light, a bastion and a boat, a wall and a drape. It has presence, but doesn't dominate. It has affinities with the all-timber [Saint Benedict chapel](#) by the Pritzker-winning [Peter Zumthor](#), although McLaughlin mentions a less famous influence, a postwar German architect of churches called [Rudolf Schwarz](#).

Smaller shapes gather about the drum, including an entrance that is deliberately low and dark, suppressing expectations before you reach the high, light-filled interior of the ellipse, within which a ring of 34 slender timber columns grow upwards, develop branches and intersect in a cross-crossing vault. McLaughlin calls this space "crystalline", meaning that it's symmetrical in two axes, but he then offsets it with less orderly extensions: an off-centre window to catch the view over fields, a space for the tabernacle, a half-enclosed chapel, horse-shoe shaped, for the sisters of the Community of John the Baptist, who have recently sold their old home in another part of the county and come to share this site with the college.



The chapel's 'crystalline' interior. Niall McLaughlin

The interior has several materials – stone, lime plaster, concrete, the laminated larch of the columns, furniture in ash – but they share a similar hue, a sort of (Caucasian) skin tone which, as on a human body, gives unity to multiple variations. It shows off the play of light which in the end is the chapel's main event. While designing it McLaughlin made a video of the way sunlight filters through surrounding trees, and the chapel attempts a constructed equivalent. Light comes through the upper ring of glass, and through oblique sources, and animates the chapel's layers and surfaces. As clouds move across the sky outside, the interior inhales and exhales sunshine. As it brightens and dulls, its features stand out from and then recede into their background.

McLaughlin tells stories to explain the architecture, as does the Rev Canon Professor Martyn Percy, the principal of the college. The building is a ship of souls, a retake of an old idea contained in the Latin origin of the word "nave". Then again, the ceiling above the timber branches dips slightly towards a central keel-like line ("carinated" is the technical term), as if there were another boat floating above, which McLaughlin says is prompted by a 1,000-year-old Celtic story.

He cites the writings of [Richard Sennett](#) on early Christians who struggled to reconcile a desire to wander, and give up fixed places, with the building of permanent churches. They created ambulatories, zones of walking, like the one McLaughlin has made between the ring of columns and the outer wall. The resemblance of the outer stonework to cloth refers to the writings of [Gottfried Semper](#), a wiser and saner contemporary of Ruskin's, for whom every construction technique was an imitation of an earlier craft, with weaving one of the oldest of all.

Percy, for his part, talks about "the different spiritual textures people have to live with", which the physical textures of the building represent. For him it embodies a broad, moderate church, "not minimalist Protestant and not archi-tatty Catholic". The use of an ellipse, a geometrical figure with two centres, allows worship to focus on either the rituals of the eucharist or on the spoken word: the altar is placed on one centre, the lectern on the other. The seating plan is "antiphonal", with two banks of congregation facing each other; the chapel's layout and acoustic also allows conversational rather than declamatory voices.

The stories about boats and weaving have some charm, and help with a perennial difficulty for architects – how to justify a design, how to choose one approach over another – but they begin to cloy. I'm glad when McLaughlin says that, in the end, "you have to leave these narratives behind. You have to abandon a building to the world and let it gather its own meanings. It's no good standing at the corner and telling people what it means." In other words, you don't have to know anything about Semper or boat myths to appreciate the spaces.

As someone as certain about the nonexistence of God as I can be about anything, I feel a touch disoriented by a new space devoted, with conviction, to making the opposite case. At the same time it speaks a spiritual Esperanto common to most churches built in modern times – reluctant to show damnation, miracles or apotheoses, or even a too-literal crucifixion, it works more abstractly with light, form, material and nature, in a quasi-gothic of soaring lines and tree-like structure. Can't it be more explicit? Can't it say exactly what it means? No, given the ambiguities of modern religion, it can't.

But the uncomplicated fact about this chapel is that it's lovely – as much as the copper beech, the rolling fields and the honeyed stone. It is poised, tuned, and well made, a close reflection of the desires of its users and the intentions of its architect. The clients were prepared to pay, for example, an extra £50,000 for concealed fixings in the roof structure, rather than visible bolts, because they realised that they were essential to the success of the whole.

It helped that the sisters did well by selling their old home, proceeds of which went to funding the new building. They took a tithe from the workings of the property market, of the speculations of capital, to achieve a kind of architecture that the market doesn't often permit. It's a pertinent question how its qualities might be transferred to a harsher outside world but, meanwhile, the main thing is just to enjoy them.

More from the Guardian [What's this?](#)

Fiona Rae: New Order: British Art Today – review 28

More from around the [What's this?](#)

web

Ripon's touching work of art

Reg Little on the opening of a new chapel at Ripon College, one of Europe's foremost theological schools

The brief was challenging to say the least, with the architect required to create "not just a building but a work of art, and one which would touch the spirit".

For the new chapel at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, needed to reflect the importance of the historic theological college five miles outside Oxford, where generations of men and women have trained for ordination into the Anglican Church.

When the new Edward King Chapel was blessed last Friday afternoon, and the keys ceremonially handed over outside the new chapel doors, not one but three bishops were in attendance — with the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev John Pritchard joined by the Bishop of Dorchester, the Rt Rev Colin Fletcher, and the Bishop of Gloucester, the Rt Rev Michael Perham.

With its modern design, the chapel, one of the first of the new century in England, is an unusual oval shape, with curved laminated columns and beams supporting the roof. Holding some 120 people, it has taken 18 months to complete.

The college, founded in 1854 by Bishop of Oxford Samuel Wilberforce, can claim to have trained a third of the current bishops, deans and archdeacons in the Church of England.

And the dedication of the chapel marked the end of a £6.5m building programme to meet the needs of Christian education in the 21st century.

Another new building, Harriet Monsell House, incorporating a lecture theatre and student accommodation, opened last autumn.

A new home has also been created for the Sisters of the Community of St John the Baptist, who recently moved from Begbroke Priory to live in the college community.

The Begbroke sisters in fact provided much of the funding for the new chapel, which will become the centre of worshipping life for students, staff and the sisters themselves.

The college is based within a set of impressive historic buildings, but with increasing numbers of students, lack of space had become an increasingly pressing problem.

As the largest provider of ordination training into the Anglican Church, it has 150 students with another 100 students training for other forms of ministry and further theological education, while the college also has a renowned research and consultancy centre.

A further problem was that the old chapel was located on the first floor, making it inaccessible for the disabled and some elderly.

The fact it could only seat about 50 people, meant there was insufficient space for the community to be able to worship together.

A RIBA competition in 2009 to

design the chapel was won by the Irish architect Niall McLaughlin who has previously worked to designed accommodation for Somerville College, Oxford, and at the Olympic Village in London, where he famously replicated the Elgin Marbles as a facade for Olympic Village housing.

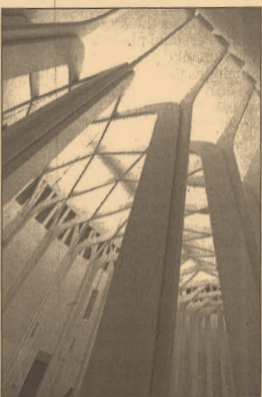
The sisters' spokesman, said: "Our brief to the architect was for the chapel to be foremost a place for the cultivation of personal prayer as well as of public worship. "We knew that what was needed was not just a building but a work of art which would touch the spirit. We are thrilled that this is what Niall McLaughlin has delivered."

The architect said guidance had proved inspirational: "We had a beautiful site. We went back to first principles, thinking of an appropriate setting for prayer and community."

The locally-based contractor, Beard Oxford, was also engaged in the building programme to create the new chapel.

Project manager Martin Wareham said it had proved a complex task.

"It is a stunning building, the elliptical shape is unusual and it is very intricate. Each stone had a place where it had to go, which meant each stone had to be cut to the exact millimetre.



"The wonderful lattice-work timber frame was a real test of craftsmanship. A series of windows go around the top of the walls all the way around the ellipse so it has a lovely airy light feel to it."

The reflection of surrounding trees, through the high level windows, on to the chapel's plain walls adds to the impressive lighting effects, with the aim that chapel goers are rooted to the ground, while 'lifted by the light'.

One of the additional challenges



Landmark design: The new Ripon College chapel building, above, with the interior lattice-work timber frame

Pictures: Andrew Walmsley

We know that what was needed was not just a building but a work of art which would touch the spirit

was to allow the college with its historic listed buildings to carry on business as usual while work was under way, with builders having to be sensitive to the life of a religious community around them.

The college principal, Prof Martyn Percy, said: "It is wonderful to be able to celebrate such a dynamic, new education centre, alongside one of the first new chapels to be built in the 21st century."

The chapel is named in honour of Edward King, a curate in Wheatley, who became principal and vicar of Cuddesdon from 1863 until 1873, when he was appointed first professor of pastoral theology

at Oxford. Later, as Bishop of Lincoln, he returned to speak at the college festival in 1900, telling his audience "my life here gave me hope of a higher life for myself, and a higher life for other people too".

The founder of the college, 'Soapy' Samuel Wilberforce, can be counted as one of Oxford's most widely known bishops of Oxford, not least for his involvement in the legendary 1860 debate about Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution, with the scientist T.H. Huxley. His idea was to create a college independent of any specific church faction, and with a focus on the discipline of daily prayer and spiritual formation.

A merger took place with Ripon Hall in the 1970s, bringing in new resources and fresh thinking, to help develop a new approach to theological study.

The Bishop of Oxford said after the dedication: "Having followed the project with great interest, I'm delighted to see how this imaginative joint venture has taken shape and flourished.

"Both chapel and education centre are inspiring buildings, and represent an exciting new chapter for both the college and the sisters.

"I'm sure each community will see their life hugely enriched in this coming together."

More pictures: Page 48

Week in pictures: Ripon College's new chapel



Grand opening: The stunning new chapel at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, was officially opened last Friday. Andrew Walmsley was there to take photographs



news

Bishop Jones to retire from Liverpool

THE Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Revd James Jones, will retire on his 65th birthday in August, it was announced on Monday. Bishop Jones was appointed to the post in 1998, and is a member of the House of Lords. In a letter to the diocese, Bishop Jones said that the willingness of parishes to "rethink and to reshape our common life for the service of others" had been "inspiring". It had been a "privilege" to serve the wider community, "not least in chairing the Hillsborough Independent Panel" (News, 14 September; Comment, 21 September). After a farewell service at Liverpool Cathedral on 3 July, the Bishop will move to Yorkshire.

Jail for woman who assaulted Exeter Canon

A WOMAN who assaulted the Canon Precentor of Exeter Cathedral, Canon Carl Turner, was sentenced to 18 weeks in prison last week for assault and criminal damage. Exeter Magistrates' Court heard that the woman, Sharon Thornton, 39, had been drinking, shouting, and swearing on the cathedral green in August. She hit Canon Turner in the face after he went to speak to her.

Government to appeal against CRB ruling

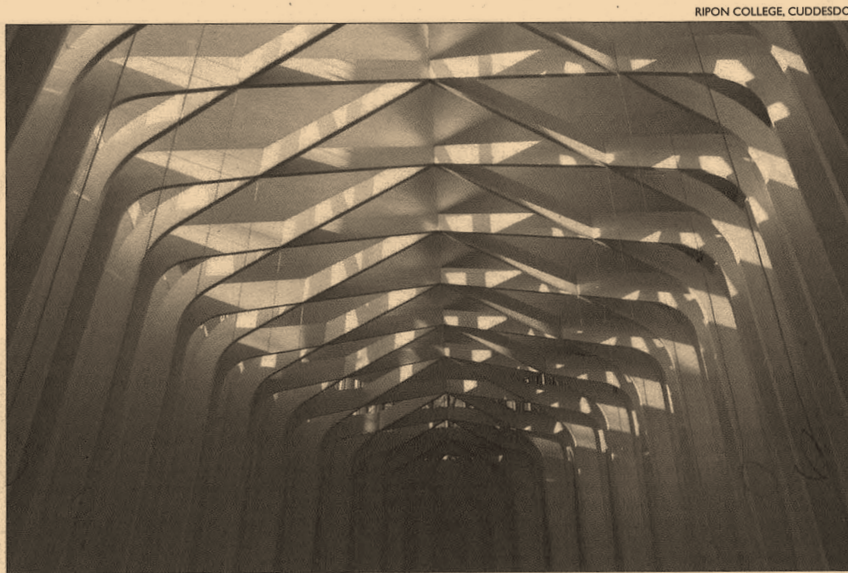
THE Court of Appeal has ruled that a law that requires people to disclose previous convictions to employers is a breach of human rights. A spokesman for the Government said: "We are disappointed by this judgment, and are seeking leave to appeal to the Supreme Court." Earlier this month, the Home Office announced that a new "portable" criminal-records check would be brought in by the end of this year (News, 11 January).

St Michael's College, Llandaff, appoints new Dean

THE Revd Dr Mark Clavier, who has dual British-US citizenship, has been appointed Dean of Residential Training at St Michael's College, Llandaff. Dr Clavier, who is 42, served in parishes in Maryland and North Carolina before moving to England five years ago. Since then, he has served as a house-for-duty priest in County Durham, and as Priest-in-Charge of three churches in Oxford diocese. Dr Clavier will take up the post after Easter.

Professor Robin Gill appointed editor of *Theology*

THE Revd Professor Robin Gill has been appointed editor of the journal *Theology*, SPCK announced last Friday. "The November/December 2013 issue will complete a five-year editorship under the Revd Dr Stephen Plant, with Professor Gill's first issue appearing in January 2014," a statement said. Professor Gill said that he hoped to encourage "links between theology and the arts", and to publish articles "by younger as well as more experienced authors". He said that he hoped "to have regular features on the latest trends in various disciplines within theology".



Honeycomb: the new Bishop Edward King Chapel, at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, to be dedicated today by the Bishops of Oxford, Gloucester, and Dorchester. It was funded by the Sisters of the Community of St John Baptist who have recently moved from Begbroke Priory to live at the college

CAP report dispels 'myths'

by Ed Thornton

PEOPLE in poverty are being stigmatised by "myths and distortions" peddled by the media and politicians, a report published this week by Church Action on Poverty (CAP) argues.

The Blame Game Must Stop: Challenging the stigmatisation of people experiencing poverty, which draws on reports and research by a number of organisations, says that "a constant stream of messages . . . encourages distrust and an attitude of blame towards people on low

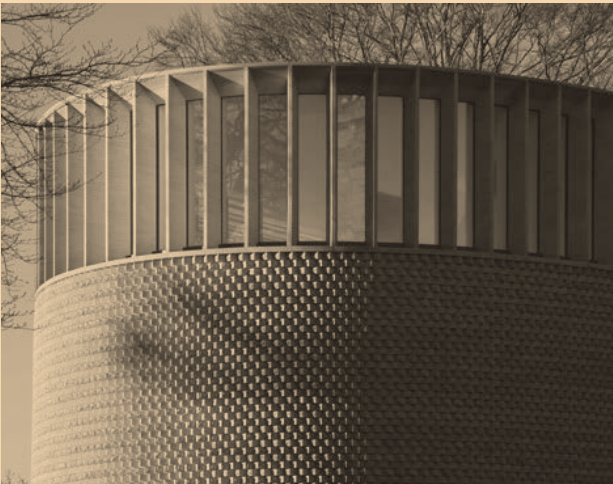
incomes". It says that "people increasingly feel ashamed, as judged by others, if they are poor — particularly if they are receiving benefits." One of the "myths" singled out in the report is the "false dichotomy between 'deserving poor' (strivers, children, pensioners) and 'undeserving



This elliptical chapel near Oxford by London studio Niall McLaughlin Architects contains a group of arching timber columns behind its textured stone facade (+ slideshow).



The Bishop Edward King Chapel replaces another smaller chapel at the [Ripon Theological College](#) campus and accommodates both students of the college and the local nuns of a small religious order.



[Niall McLaughlin Architects](#) was asked to create a building that respects the historic architecture of the campus, which includes a nineteenth century college building and vicarage, and also fits comfortably amongst a grove of mature trees.



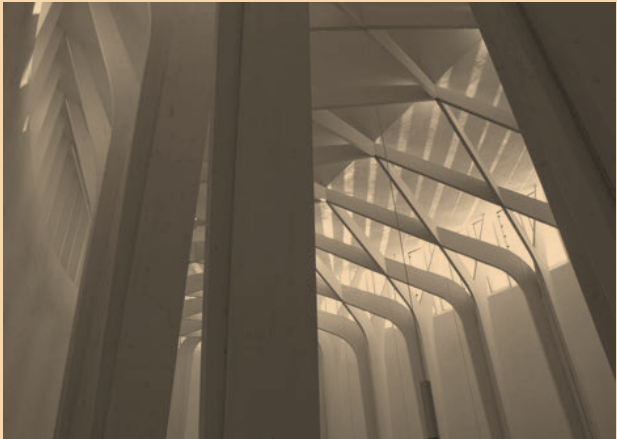
For the exterior, the architects sourced a sandy-coloured stone, similar to the limestone walls of the existing college, and used small blocks to create a zigzagging texture around the outside of the ellipse. A wooden roof crowns the structure and integrates a row of clerestory windows that bring light across the ceiling.



Inside, the tree-like timber columns form a second layer behind the walls, enclosing the nave of the chapel and creating an ambulatory around the perimeter. Each column comprises at least three branches, which form a latticed canopy overhead.



Niall McLaughlin told Dezeen: "If you get up very early, at sunrise, the horizontal sun casts a maze of moving shadows of branches, leaves, window mullions and structure onto the ceiling. It is like looking up into trees in a wood."



A projecting window offers a small seating area on one side of the chapel, where McLaughlin says you can "watch the sunlit fields on the other side of the valley".



Photograph by [Denis Gilbert](#)

A small rectilinear block accompanies the structure and houses the entrance lobby, a sacristy, storage areas and toilets.



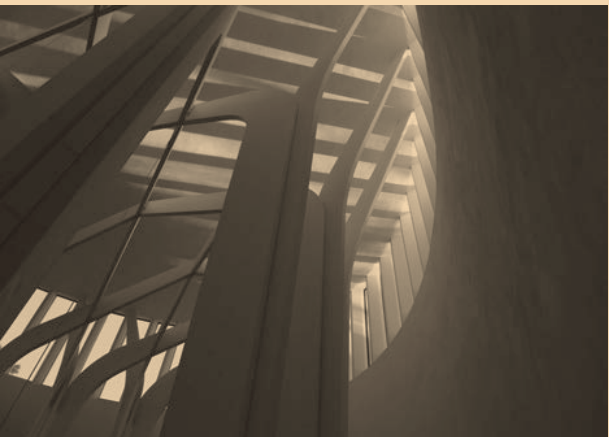
Photograph by Denis Gilbert

The Bishop Edward King Chapel was [one of 52 projects to recently win an RIBA Award](#).



Photograph by Denis Gilbert

Other projects by Niall McLaughlin Architects include [four mono-pitched extensions to a rural cottage in Ireland](#).

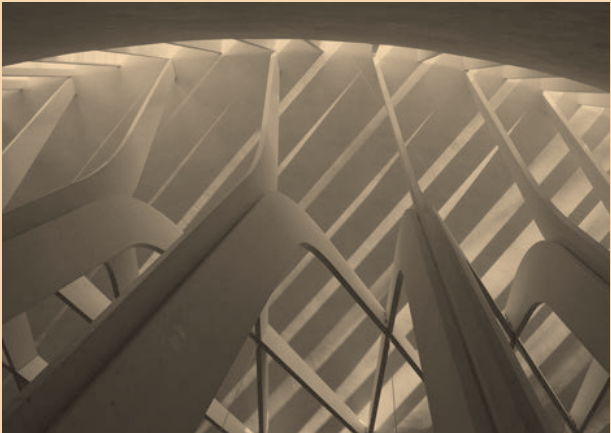


Photography is by the architects, apart from where otherwise stated.

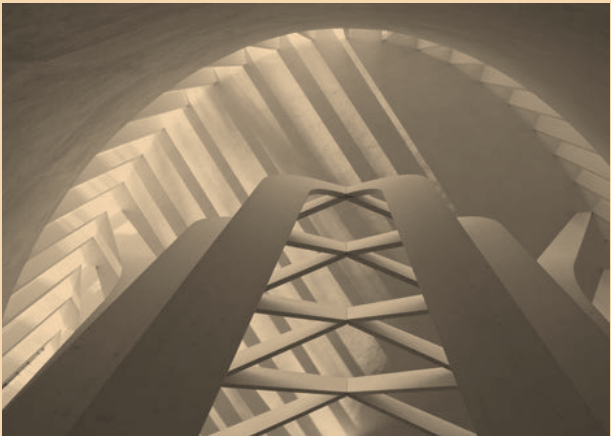
Here's a detailed project description from Niall McLaughlin Architects:

Bishop Edward King Chapel

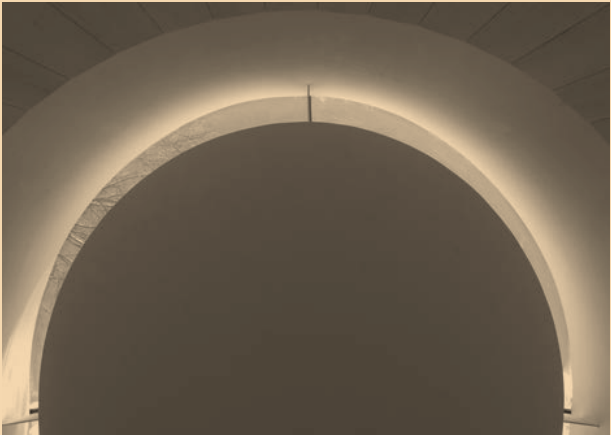
The client brief sought a new chapel for Ripon Theological College, to serve the two interconnected groups resident on the campus in Oxfordshire, the college community and the nuns of a small religious order, the Sisters of Begbroke. The chapel replaces the existing one, designed by George Edmund Street in the late nineteenth century, which had since proved to be too small for the current needs of the college.



The brief asked for a chapel that would accommodate the range of worshipping needs of the two communities in a collegiate seating arrangement, and would be suitable for both communal gatherings and personal prayer. In addition the brief envisioned a separate space for the Sisters to recite their offices, a spacious sacristy, and the necessary ancillary accommodation. Over and above these outline requirements, the brief set out the clients' aspirations for the chapel, foremost as 'a place of personal encounter with the numinous' that would enable the occupants to think creatively about the relationship between space and liturgy. The client summarised their aspirations for the project with Philip Larkin's words from his poem Church Going, 'A serious house on serious earth it is... which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in...'.



On the site is an enormous beech tree on the brow of the hill. Facing away from the beech and the college buildings behind, there is ring of mature trees on high ground overlooking the valley that stretches away towards Garsington. This clearing has its own particular character, full of wind and light and the rustling of leaves.



These strengths of the site also presented significant planning constraints. The college's existing buildings are of considerable historical importance. G.E. Street was a prominent architect of the Victorian Age and both the main college building and vicarage to its south are Grade II* listed.



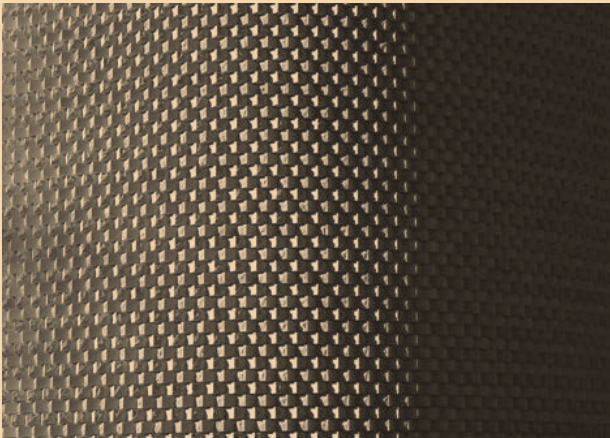
The site is designated within the Green Belt in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan and is also visible from a considerable distance across the valley to the west. The immediate vicinity of the site is populated with mature trees and has a Tree Preservation Order applied to a group at the eastern boundary. The design needed to integrate with the character of the panorama and preserve the setting of the college campus and the surrounding trees.



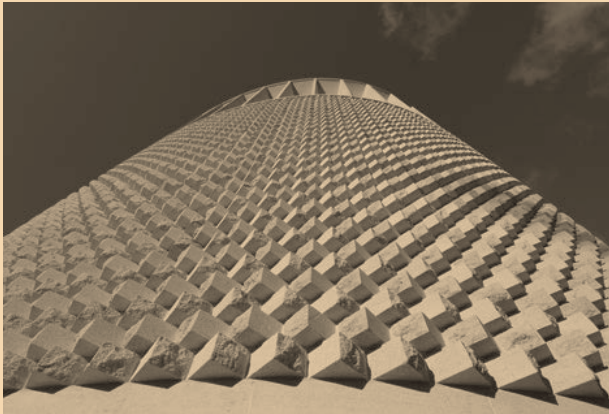
The mediation of these interlocked planning sensitivities required extensive consultation with South Oxfordshire District Council, English Heritage and local residents.



The starting point for this project was the hidden word 'nave' at the centre of Seamus Heaney poem Lightenings viii. The word describes the central space of a church, but shares the same origin as 'navis', a ship, and can also mean the still centre of a turning wheel. From these words, two architectural images emerged. The first is the hollow in the ground as the meeting place of the community, the still centre. The second is the delicate ship-like timber structure that floats above in the tree canopy, the gathering place for light and sound. We enjoyed the geometry of the ellipse.



To construct an ellipse the stable circle is played against the line, which is about movement back and forth. For us this reflected the idea of exchange between perfect and imperfect at the centre of Christian thought. The movement inherent in the geometry is expressed in the chapel through the perimeter ambulatory. It is possible to walk around the chapel, looking into the brighter space in the centre. The sense of looking into an illuminated clearing goes back to the earliest churches. We made a clearing to gather in the light.



The chapel, seen from the outside, is a single stone enclosure. We have used Clipsham stone which is sympathetic, both in terms of texture and colouration, to the limestone of the existing college. The external walls are of insulated cavity construction, comprising of a curved reinforced blockwork internal leaf and dressed stone outer leaf.



The base of the chapel and the ancillary structures are clad in ashlar stone laid in regular courses. The upper section of the main chapel is dressed in cropped walling stone, laid in a dog-tooth bond to regular courses. The chapel wall is surmounted by a halo of natural stone fins. The fins sit in front of high-performance double glazed units, mounted in concealed metal frames.



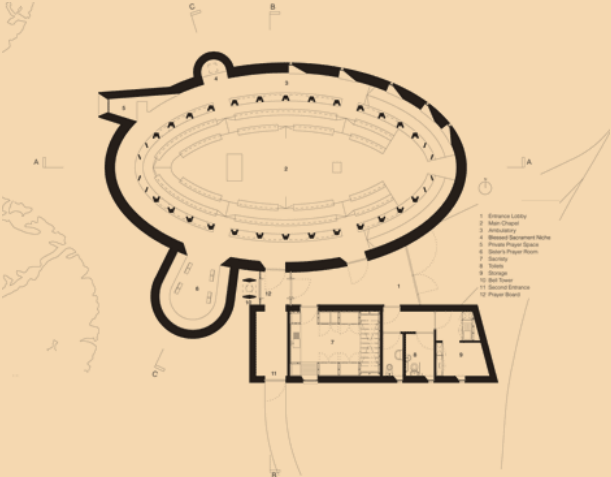
Photograph by Denis Gilbert

The roof of the main chapel and the ancillary block are both of warm deck construction. The chapel roof drains to concealed rainwater pipes running through the cavity of the external wall. Where exposed at clerestory level, the rainwater pipes are clad in aluminium sleeves with a bronze anodised finish and recessed into the stone fins. The roof and the internal frame are self-supporting and act independently from the external walls.



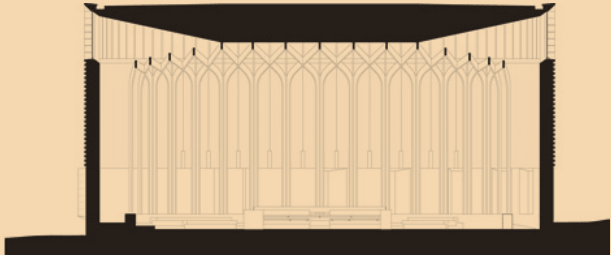
Site plan - [click for larger image](#)

A minimal junction between the roof and the walls expresses this. Externally the roof parapet steps back to diminish its presence above the clerestory; inside the underside of the roof structure rises up to the outer walls to form the shape of a keel, expressing the floating 'navis' of Heaney's poem.



Floor plan - [click for larger image](#)

The internal timber structure is constructed of prefabricated Glulam sections with steel fixings and fully concealed steel base plate connections. The Glulam sections are made up of visual grade spruce laminations treated with a two-part stain system, which gives a light white-washed finish.



Long section - [click for larger image](#)

The structure of roof and columns express the geometrical construction of the ellipse itself, a ferrying between centre and edge with straight lines that reveals the two stable foci at either end, reflected in the collegiate layout below in the twin focus points of altar and lectern. As you move around the chapel there is an unfolding rhythm interplay between the thicket of columns and the simple elliptical walls beyond. The chapel can be understood as a ship in a bottle, the hidden 'nave'.

Bishop Edward King Chapel by Niall McLaughlin Architects

10/07/2013 12:47



Cross section - [click for larger image](#)

RIBA competition won - July 2009
Planning Consent - June 2010
Construction - July 2011
Practical Completion – February 2013
Construction Cost - 2,034,000

Kapelle in Mittellengland fertig / Lichtung aus Holz und Stein – Arc...ktur und Architekten – News / Meldungen / Nachrichten – BauNetz.de

10/07/2013 12:58



halb 4

http://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen-Kapelle_in_Mittelengland_fertig_3188961.html

21.05.2013

Lichtung aus Holz und Stein Kapelle in Mittellengland fertig

Die Umgebung ist unglaublich idyllisch: Die sanft-hügelige Topographie Mittellenglands, zahllose alte Bäume und die typischen Gebäude aus warmem Sandstein sind überall in und um die alte Universitätsstadt Oxford zu finden. Am Rand dieses universitären Idylls, im Ripon College im Dörfchen Cuddesdon, haben nun **Niall McLaughlin Architects** eine Kapelle fertiggestellt, die zum neuen Mittelpunkt des Alltagslebens der theologischen Fakultät werden soll.

Hinsichtlich Farbigkeit und Materialwahl orientieren sich die Architekten an der Umgebung, machen aber gleichzeitig in ihrer Architektursprache auch das Neue deutlich. Fast sieht ihre Kapelle nach einer technischer Einrichtung aus, ein Lüftungsturm vielleicht oder ein Transformatorenhaus, abweisend und im unteren Teil fensterlos, aber auch, dank der feingliedrigen Fassade aus verzahntem Natursteinmauerwerk, ganz eindeutig von gewisser Wertigkeit.

Das abweisende Äußere ist dabei wesentlicher Aspekt des Entwurfs, wird es so doch möglich, im Inneren der Kapelle einen besonders geschützten Raum zu schaffen. Und nicht Stein überwiegt hier, sondern warmes Holz. Das Dach wird getragen von einer schlanken Konstruktion aus einfachen Brettern, die jedoch so kunstvoll verkreuzt und verschachtelt sind, dass das Ergebnis fast wie ein gotisches Netzgewölbe wirkt.

Auch die Lichtführung erinnert an gotische Finesse. Durch das Fensterband wird die Kapelle von oben, durch die Holzkonstruktion hindurch, mit Licht geflutet. So entsteht der Eindruck einer Lichtung im Wald, und die Versammlung der Gläubigen wird dadurch räumlich und sinnlich erfahrbar.

Auf Karte zeigen:

[Google Maps](#)

Kommentare:



[Bildergalerie ansehen: 22 Bilder](#)

[BauNetz Media | Meldungen](#)

bdonline.co.uk

Wednesday01 May 2013

Ripon College Cuddesdon chapel by Niall McLaughlin Architects

24 April 2013 | By Ellis Woodman



Niall McLaughlin’s new chapel for a theological college represents a triumphant combination of poetic form and Christian symbolism

Among the first commissions that Niall McLaughlin secured on setting up his practice in 1990 was the remodelling of a Carmelite monastery in west London. Comprising scarcely more than two rooms – a chapel and its associated sacristy – it nonetheless offered ample evidence of McLaughlin’s skill at mobilising light, space and materials to atmospheric and symbolic effect.

There followed a long–gestating but ultimately unrealised project for an ecumenical church in Peckham, but it is only with the completion of the new chapel at Ripon College Cuddesdon that the architect has succeeded in adding a second religious building to his oeuvre. One has to hope it is not the last, as this marvellous building makes clear that the challenges of an ecclesiastical brief bring McLaughlin’s talents into particularly sharp focus. If a more architecturally accomplished church has been built in Britain since the heyday of Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, I fail to bring it to mind.

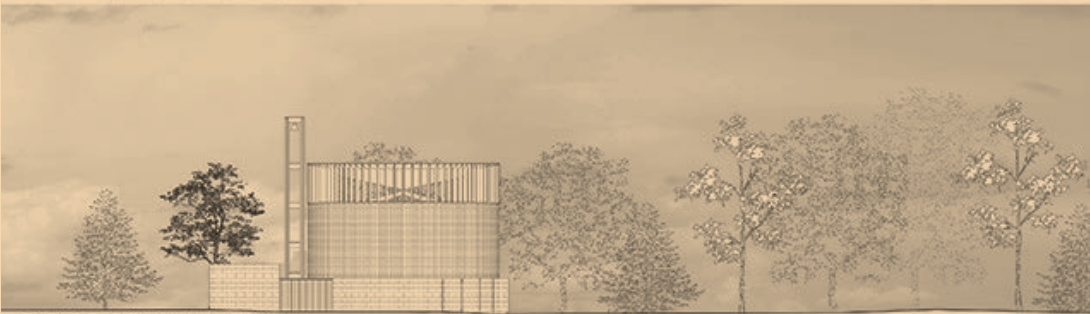
That achievement has been aided in no small part by a remarkable site and client. Ripon College Cuddesdon is a Church of England theological college in rural Oxfordshire that dates from the 1850s, when its site was chosen — in part on account of its distance from the fleshpots of Oxford — as the location of a seminary.

The work of GE Street, the college’s original buildings are ranged around a wide expanse of open ground, liberally populated by mature trees and enjoying magnificent views towards Garsington, which lies a kilometre to the west.

The college community has recently been expanded through the introduction of the members of an Augustinian order of nuns, the Community of St John Baptist, who were previously based at nearby Kidlington in accommodation that had become too large for their present numbers.

In relocating, they have initiated a substantial building programme at the college. An education block has recently been completed by architects Hopper Howe Sadler and there are plans to build a convent in the not too distant future. The sisters conceived the chapel, however, as a facility that would be shared between themselves and the members of the college: a gift that would effectively cement the two communities into one.

Standing opposite the main entrance on a site defined by the root protection areas of closely encompassing trees, the chapel enjoys a privileged location within the campus.



Its design responds very directly to the character of that site, adopting the image of a clearing in a wood as a generative metaphor. Its principal volume is elliptical in plan, with seats distributed around an altar and lectern located on this form’s twin foci. The usual

distinction between chancel and nave is therefore negated, reflecting the fact that, as a place of worship for a religious community, the building faces no requirement to demarcate separate territories for the clergy and laity.

McLaughlin cites Rudolf Schwarz’s Church of St Michael in Frankfurt (1954) as an inspiration for his use of the ellipse, a debt that Peter Zumthor has also acknowledged in relation to his similarly formed St Benedict Chapel, Sumvitg (1989). The tectonic logic of the three projects also bears comparison. In each case the enclosing wall is tracked by a ring of slender piers that ultimately rises above it to support the roof. In the case of Schwarz’s building the piers are external to the wall, whereas in Zumthor’s they stand hard against its internal face.

McLaughlin introduces a third variation by pulling them still further into the plan so as to establish a continuous ambulatory. The threshold to the space of worship that results is further strengthened by a level change between the peripheral zone and the lower central one. While permeable, the line is highly charged — an architectural embodiment of the choice the Christian makes in embracing faith.

The piers are constructed in a light-stained glulam timber and ultimately strike off to form an elaborate cat’s cradle that engages with the roof both around its perimeter and along its central inverted ridge. This form echoes the surrounding trees — the upper branches of which are visible through the clerestory that crowns the encircling wall — but also suggests the image of an upturned hull. As is shown by the story of Noah’s Ark — a vessel built by the faithful to secure their salvation — an association between ship and church is deep-rooted in Christian iconography.

During the competition for the project McLaughlin referenced Seamus Heaney’s poem, Lightenings, which describes the legendary appearance of an air-bound ship above the monastery of Clonmacnoise.

McLaughlin’s drawing describing the church as a clearing in a wood.

The soaring, filigree structure that he has set above the heads of the congregation at Cuddesdon certainly shares something of the poetry of that image.

As integrated as the timber frame is with the building’s governing geometry, it nonetheless maintains a strongly autonomous reading. This is in line with McLaughlin’s overarching attitude to the building’s tectonic expression, which derives from a long-standing interest in the principles detailed in Gottfried Semper’s 1851 treatise, The Four Elements of Architecture.

Semper’s book offered a radical reframing of Laugier’s primitive hut, locating the origins of architecture not in a mimetic re-enactment of nature but in the deployment of the four craft skills that he believed characterised “the primordial state of human society”. The elements of the book’s title, he proposed, are the constituent elements of any work of architecture: the hearth, the embankment, the roof and the enclosure. The origins of each he ascribed to a different handicraft: “Ceramic and later metallurgical works and art to the hearth, water technology and masonry to embankments, woodworking to the roof and its accessories.” Most provocatively, he identified the enclosure’s origins in the art of weaving — an association that would impact powerfully on the work of architects of the subsequent generation such as Louis Sullivan.

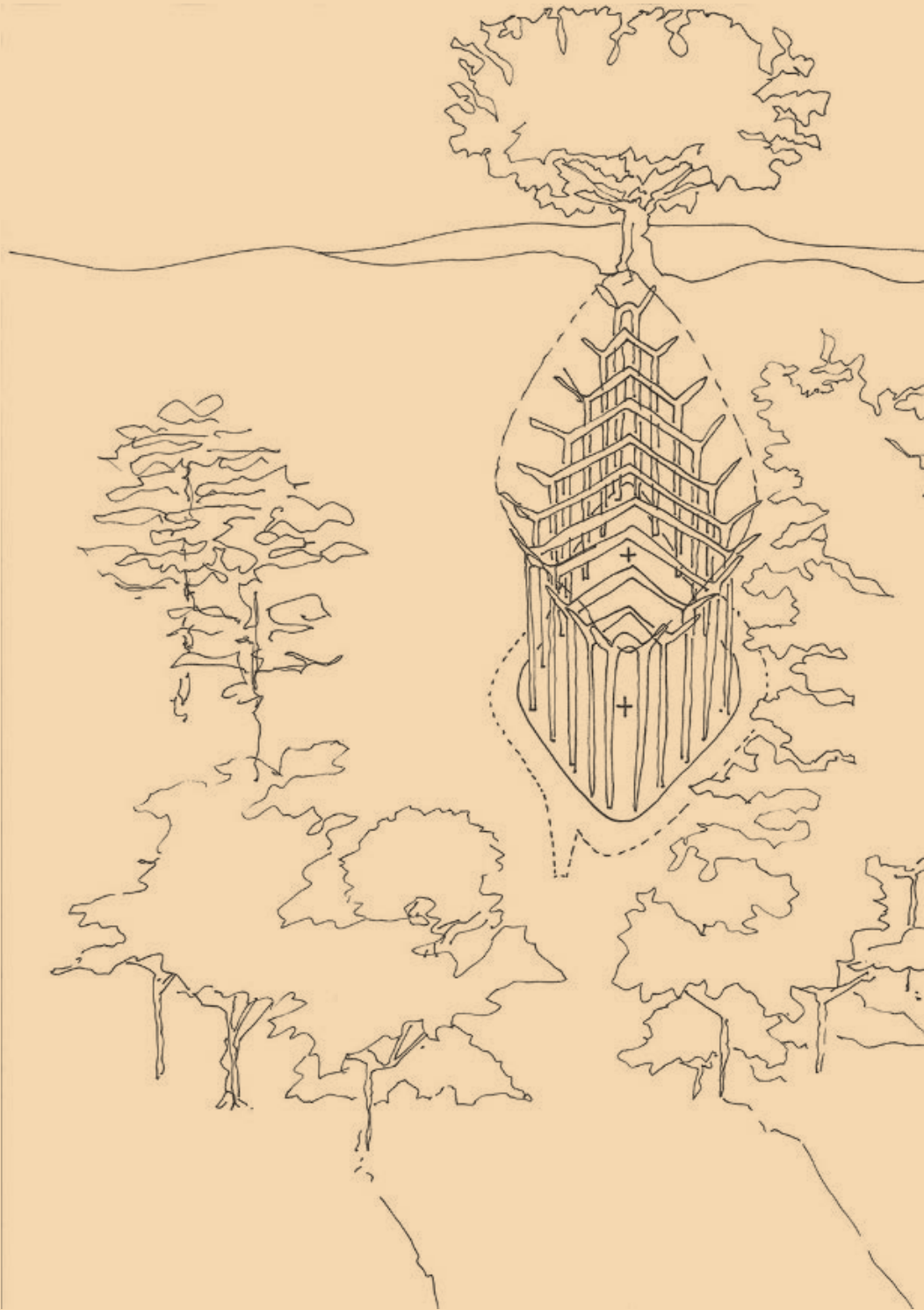
SECTION LOOKING EAST

SECTION LOOKING SOUTH

McLaughlin’s design makes the distinction between Semper’s elements overt, but arguably did so more explicitly still at the competition stage when its external wall was depicted as a woven timber screen mounted above an ashlar base. English Heritage, however, stipulated that the facade should be entirely in stone — a frustratingly petty requirement but one that McLaughlin has answered without significant injury to the clarity of the building’s conception.

The tripartite composition of base, middle and clerestory has been retained but the middle element has now been transformed into a screen of dog-tooth bonded masonry rods. Of narrow square section, these are in the same Clipsham as has been used for the base but specified so as to present a broken surface on their leading face. It is an ingenious and captivating treatment, the combination of precision and roughness deftly maintaining the textile association that the original design sought to convey.

Four appendages are distributed around the church’s primary volume. The two largest — a rectangular block accommodating back-of-house spaces and a horseshoe-shaped volume housing a prayer room for the sisters —



Source: Dennis Gilbert

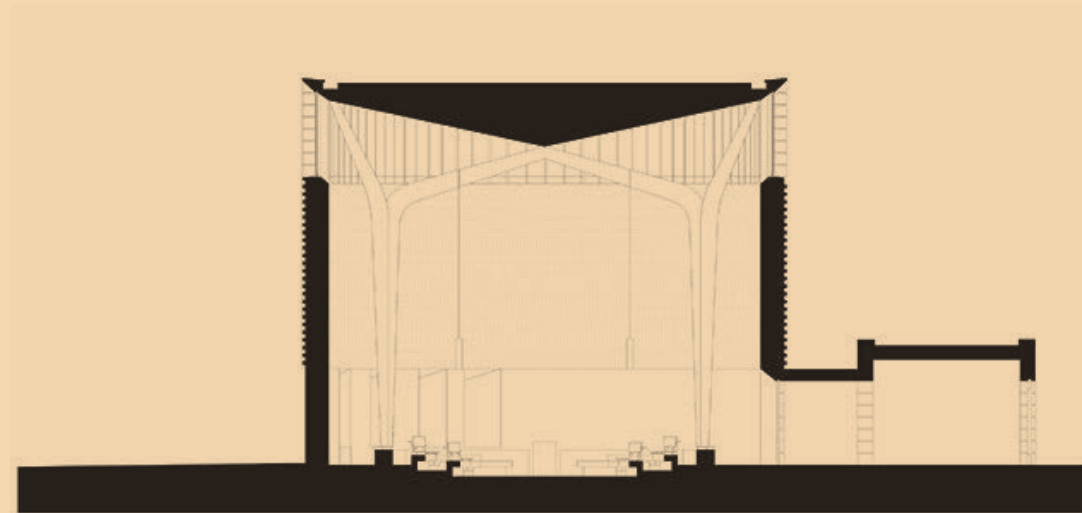
A niche for private prayer.

The back-of-house block, which incorporates an immaculately detailed timber-lined sacristy, is laid out parallel to the ellipse’s main axis but detached so as to frame an entrance lobby in the gap between the two volumes. This

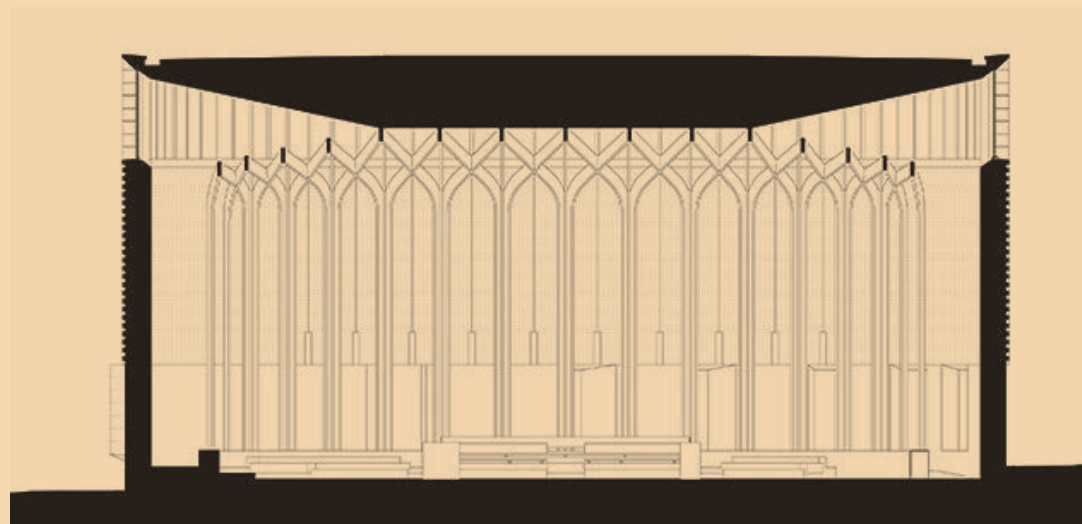
lie to the south and are rooted squarely in the ground. In contrast, the two smaller bolt-ons to the north — a more intimately dimensioned space for private prayer and a niche housing the tabernacle — are cantilevered out as if flung away from the church by centrifugal action. The effect is to confirm McLaughlin’s sense of the building as a structure aspiring to levitation while offering too an echo of the stone oriel windows of Street’s opposing facades.

Ripon College Cuddesdon chapel by Niall McLaughlin Architects | Building Studies | Building Design

01/05/2013 09:40



arrangement establishes two ways into the chapel, a primary route for use by most of the college community and a more discrete one, set



perpendicular to it, for use by the sisters. A slender timber bell tower set at the intersection of these routes effectively advertises the presence of both axes deep into the landscape.

The sisters' prayer room is a top-lit space that stands adjacent to their designated entrance, and from which they enjoy a carefully framed view towards the altar that extends beyond to the niche housing the tabernacle on the far wall. This orientation reflects the order's high church leanings but that affiliation is not shared by all the members of the college community. The elliptical plan tactfully enables each individual to find a place of worship that best reflects his or her beliefs.

In his Semperian conception of the building McLaughlin identified the altar, tabernacle and lectern as belonging to the family of hearth elements and hoped to realise all three as metalwork items. His clients, however, were not fully persuaded, leading to the altar and lectern being designed in timber, save for a brass floor-plate located below each one. This represents no disaster, but to see the architect's ambitions more fully embodied by the tabernacle — a vertically hinged box which opens to reveal a brass-lined interior — is to regret that he was not extended a freer hand. That the objection arises at all is testament to the fact that the building has been developed so determinedly as a totality. Few projects built this year will offer as convincing a claim to be considered a

Ripon College Cuddesdon chapel by Niall McLaughlin Architects | Building Studies | Building Design

01/05/2013 09:40



gesamtkunstwerk.

The sisters' entrance is not currently in use, having been provided in expectation of the construction of their convent immediately alongside the chapel. This is not yet a live commission but McLaughlin has produced a

schematic design comprising a single-storey, three-sided cloister, which would share the language of its neighbour's ashlar base. Offering a ground-hugging counterpoint to the chapel's verticality, it promises to bind the building still further to its landscape setting.

That is an exciting prospect, but fragmentary as it may be, the built work represents a highly convincing performance in its own right. McLaughlin has risen to the challenge of a remarkable brief, creating a building that mediates between the earthly and the celestial to unique poetic effect.

PROJECT TEAM

- Architect Niall McLaughlin Architects
- Building contractor Beard Construction
- Client Ripon College Cuddesdon and the Community of St John Baptist
- Structural engineer Price & Myers
- M&E engineer Synergy Consulting Engineers
- Quantity surveyor Ridge & Partners
- Stone consultant Harrison Goldman



Niall McLaughlin Architects win chapel competition



Niall McLaughlin Architects' proposal for Ripon College Chapel synthesises the 'acoustic and the luminous'

London-based Niall McLaughlin Architects has designed Ripon College Chapel 'as a place for listening to the human voice, both speaking and singing, in a space full of light gathered from the surrounding trees.'

The designers used a site-specific tool to experiment with this combination of acoustic and luminous conditions. Acoustic engineer Paul Gilleron built a digital model of the particular acoustic of the space, which can be played through earphones, and the architects combined this with a wearable headpiece.

'If you wear the whole object on your head, you can stand beneath the trees on the site and listen to the precise acoustic of the space while experiencing light flooding through high windows,' said McLaughlin. 'It is filtered through the tree canopy giving it a fugitive, dappled quality,' he continued.

www.niallmclaughlin.com



Bartlett Research Folios

Visual material:
© Niall McLaughlin Architects
unless otherwise stated

Graphic design:
objectif

Typesetting:
Axel Feldmann
Siaron Hughes

Printing:
Shades of Colour
Digital Print

© 2013 The Bartlett
School of Architecture

