

Alex Coppock

B.Sc. Dip Arch. AA Dipl. Grad Dipl Cons (AA). RIBA

An award-winning architect with a uniquely contemporary and participative perspective whose portfolio includes nationally important church re-orderings and breath-taking residential projects.

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Professional Review

Alex Coppock trained as an architect at the Schools of The Bartlett (University College London), Sheffield School of Architecture and the Architectural Association, London. During this time Alex studied under some of the key theorists and architects of our time including Peter Cook, Jeremy Till, Prue Childs and Sarah Wigglesworth.

Studying at the Bartlett and Sheffield has given him a valuable dual perspective that informs his work: the Bartlett is renowned for its contemporary take on architectural theory and practice while the Sheffield School focuses on participative architecture.

Alex began practising at Rod Robinson Associates, Hereford, where he worked on the renowned re-orderings of All Saints Church, Hereford; St Laurence Church, Reading and Ladywood Arc, Birmingham.

In 2008 Alex founded Communion Architects, a specialist practice working closely with clients on exceptional projects. Communion specialises in two areas: ecclesiastical and residential design. It has become known for its thoughtful and exciting re-imaginings of historic buildings, the most prominent of which is the re-ordering of St Peter's Church, Peterchurch. Other notable re-ordering projects include New Bridge Community Centre, St Andrew's Church, Bridge Sollars and St Peter's Church, Hereford. Current reordering projects include All Saints' Church, Harrow Weald; St Mary's Church, Maidenhead and other churches in Herefordshire. As well as church re-ordering, Alex also works on residential projects. He is passionate about the most important buildings in the world, and for him that starts with the home. He feels that working with people on their own homes is a privilege and enjoys creating spaces that reflects his clients' lives and the way they interact with the world that's around them.

Alex has recently completed post graduate studies at the Architectural Association and was subsequently awarded a Diploma in Building Conservation. The subject of his thesis was, 'What is the future for Herefordshire Churches?'

Alex is a Quinquennial Inspecting architect for the Diocese of London and has recently completed a feasibility study as part of the 'Shrinking the Footprint' campaign which seeks to reduce the Diocese's carbon footprint by 80% by the year 2040.

Key Projects

St Peter's Centre, St Peter's Church, Peterchurch, Herefordshire



St Peter's Church, an un-aisled, four cell Norman church; Listed Grade I, is situated at the centre of Peterchurch, a rural community in the heart of the Golden Valley in Herefordshire with a population of approximately 800 people. Although the building fabric was in a reasonable state of repair overall, the internal arrangements meant use of the building had become severely limited because of the lack of usable space, lighting and power installations and basic facilities such as a WC.

After careful thought, the PCC entered into a partnership with Herefordshire Council that allowed the church to be re-ordered to create a sustainable, multi-use community building designed to function as a service delivery centre for children's services, a public lending library, a worship space for Anglican services and a community event space.

Alex worked with the PCC, Herefordshire Council, the community and external stakeholders to develop a solution that provided all the facilities needed while changing as little as possible about the existing building.

The project is an overwhelming success.

Locally, it has become known by providing a hugely popular lending library. The Sure Start centre is achieving its full service delivery outcomes and more. The church is continuing to be used as a place of worship for midweek and Sunday services. The church is being regularly hired by many community groups from Tai Chi to Voluntary Action Workers, and for conferences.

Nationally it has won a number of awards including the Art and Christianity Enquiry / Royal Institute of British Architects Award for Religious Architecture 2011. It has also been widely published including as a case study in 'Conservation Basics', published in 2012 by English Heritage. It was also highlighted in a report about the contemporary use of church spaces by the Church Heritage Forum, and recently featured on 'Our Libraries: The Next Chapter' on BBC Radio 4.

New Bridge Community Centre, St Andrew's Church, Bridge Sollars, Herefordshire



St Andrew's Church overlooks the River Wye as it meanders its way through the beautiful Herefordshire countryside. The church dates from the 12th century as its Norman architecture indicates. Notable features include the Herefordshire School carvings on either side of the south door and the carved Romanesque door arch. Internally, the building comprises a chancel, nave, north aisle and tower.

Although the church has a significant history and a beautiful setting, a dwindling congregation was making the church unviable as a place of worship.

Communion was approached by the New Bridge Community Committee to work with them to design and deliver a unique event space for five parishes that had no public meeting space.

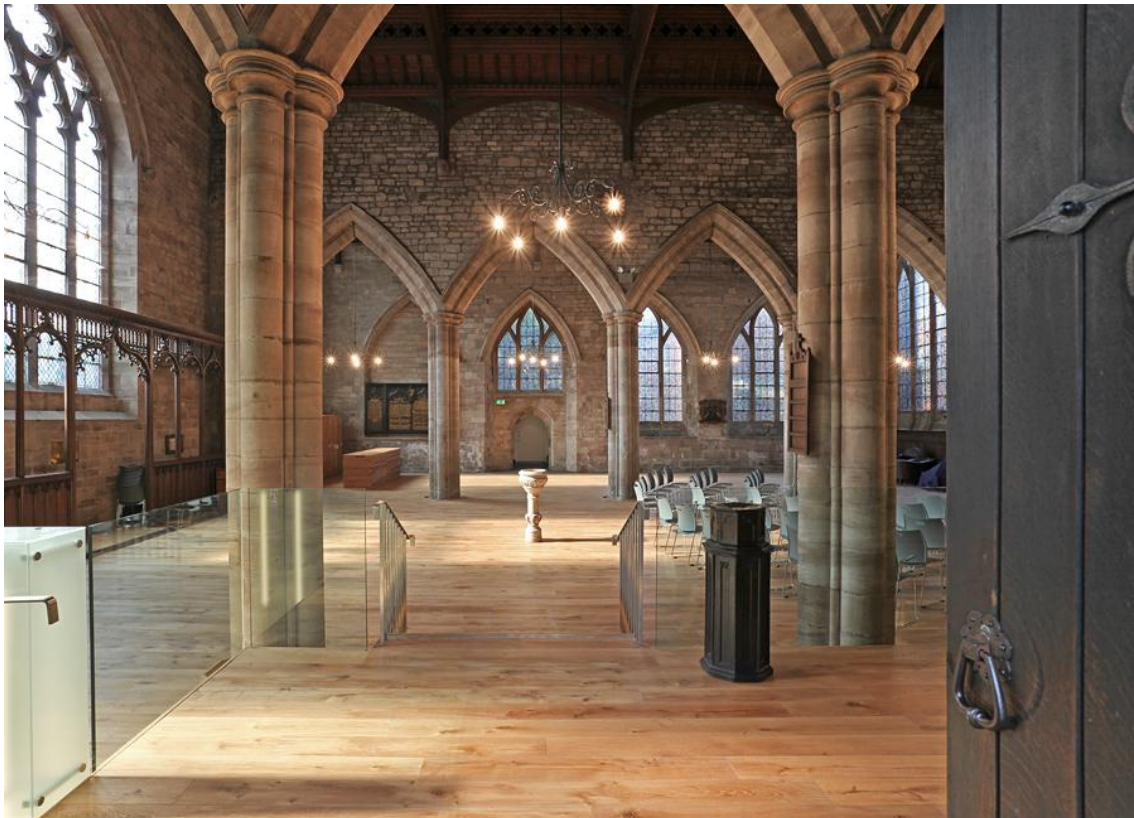
With limited internal space and budget, Communion reduced the build requirements to an absolute minimum, compressing all new architecture into a simple cube and heated floor.

The cube, which is clad in local Herefordshire oak, opens out to provide a kitchen facility and meeting spaces. It also houses a universally accessible toilet and a ground source heat pump.

The suspended floor, also in oak, provides heat to the building via an underfloor heating system. It also provides disabled access to the whole building, and protects and reveals the former floor which comprises carved flagstones.

Our clients are delighted with their event space. After seven years of hard work, their vision to transform an underused church into a space that the whole community can enjoy has been realised.

St Peter's Church, Hereford



St Peter's Church, founded in 1087, has a rich history. It is located in the historic core of Hereford City next to the Shire Hall, the Town Hall and the Memorial to the fallen dead of Hereford. It has a historic appointment to be the City's Civic Church. The church community also reaches out into the immediate community, especially working with the under privileged. However, St Peter's also had a reputation for being cold, dark and difficult to access.

The Parochial Church Council took the decision to reorder the building to give a welcoming and accessible entrance, provide a flexible space that could be used for any activity and create a warm, comfortable and useable building.

Alex worked with the PCC to seek funding and develop a plan to bring warmth and life to the building, through underfloor heating and subtle LED lighting and to provide a utility with a discreet kitchen.

The immediate results were dramatic. Access is now easy for everyone and the space is warm. There is a discreet kitchen facility which is used to serve the needs of visitors with refreshments. The church is an open contemporary building, full of social interaction and thriving each day.

Within a month of the opening of the building, the church hosted a national theatre company, a national music festival and welcomed children in for art and craft workshops.

The character of the building has been subtly re-ordered and now is visibly associated with the mission of the church community. The building is active and vital for the citizens of Hereford, and it can now provide a place that enables the true civic nature of the church to be experienced by all.

Lower Turnant Farm, Herefordshire



A Grade II listed 14th century cruck frame longhouse, rich with history but now dilapidated and in need of urgent repair and upgrading to meet the needs of contemporary life. Due to its significance, all repairs required listed building consent.

The client wanted the property to repair and conserve the longhouse to preserve the historical significance but also create a comfortable, sustainable home.

Working with our client, Alex sought to take a pragmatic approach: existing features that did not need repairing remain untouched while new installations are lightweight and freestanding. Any repairs that were needed were made using traditional methods and materials.

Sustainability was achieved through the installation of a ground source heat pump and the use of sustainable and locally sourced materials throughout.

Seventeenth Century Barn Conversion, Herefordshire



The barn dated from the 17th century and had inspiring views over the Herefordshire countryside. However, a lack of recent maintenance meant it was in a very poor - and potentially dangerous - state of repair.

The clients wished to transform the barn into a contemporary open plan and sustainable home using the skills of local crafts people working with local materials.

Working with the clients, Alex took a sensitive approach that retained the integrity of the existing fabric and structure whilst accommodating new and unique spaces.

Where possible, original features were conserved and repaired using the latest conservation techniques. Where the original structure was completely lost, innovative structures were designed to secure the historic fabric. Finely detailed 'screens' complete the building envelope, while the interior is separated into clearly defined spaces with the use of freestanding and free hanging structures.

The house has been wired so it can function as an office while heating is provided by an underfloor heating loop connected to a remote heat pump.

The project was named the Best Conversion or Extension in the 2011 Local Authority Building Control Regional Awards. The jury's citation said:

"The judges felt that this project was the clear winner. The quality of the finish and confidence of approach really stood out and they felt the project team had shown respect for the history and setting of the building."

Education

2010-12: Diploma in Building Conservation – Architectural Association, London

2006: Professional Studies ARB/RIBA – Architectural Association, London

2003: Diploma in Architecture (Distinction) – School of Architecture, Sheffield

1999: Bsc (Hons) Architecture – Bartlett School of Architecture, London

Academic Work

Alex's thesis for his Diploma in Building Conservation looked at the future for Herefordshire churches and drew on Alex's direct experience of working with Herefordshire Diocese on re-ordering projects at St Peter's Church, Peterchurch; St Andrews Church, Bridge Sollars and St Peter's Church, Hereford.

The work considers the issues affecting the future viability of Herefordshire churches. The Diocese is a rural one and has 423 churches serving a population of 285,000 people. While some churches have a regular congregation in the 100s, the sad truth is that the average weekly congregation for the vast majority of churches in the Diocese is in single figures.

Many voices are calling for the closure of up to a third of the buildings, but Alex's thesis argues that the vast majority have a viable future and goes on to examine three key areas that need to be considered in the creation of a successful solution.

Belief

The thesis highlights the sensitive nature of ideas of belief in ecclesiastical circles, but argues that addressing this sensitivity is vital. Asking and answering the question of why a project is necessary is essential in a church re-ordering. Evidence suggests that projects that are particularly successful have a church community with a practical theology that can appeal to both church goers and members of the wider community.

Business

From considering the "why", the thesis moves to the "how". Alex argues that once convinced of the need to take action, it is important to consider the needs of the church community, the wider community and the church building before it is possible to develop a solution that answers these diverse needs sustainably and viably.

Buildings

The last area to be considered is the "what". All church buildings are a well-loved part of their local community and many are historically significant, so a great deal of sensitivity is required in

the development of solutions. Alex argues that a good understanding of English Heritage principles is useful for engaging both the church community and the local community in the common purpose of creating a successful project.

Awards

St Peter's Church, Peterchurch: Private/Best Small Project, The Wood Awards 2010

St Peter's Church, Peterchurch: ACE (Art and Christianity Enquiry) / RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Award for Religious Architecture 2011

17th century Barn Conversion: Best Conversion. Building Excellence Awards 2011

St Peter's Church, Hereford: Best Community Project, Building Excellence Awards 2013

Lectures and papers

Selected lectures and papers include:

Sweating the Asset, Gloucester and Worcester Diocesan Advisory Committees Architects' and Surveyors' Conference, Wednesday 24 June 2009

Crossing the Threshold, Hereford Diocese Conference, 10 June 2010

Herefordshire 'tool kit' – working with architects, project development, Salisbury Diocesan Advisory Committee Architects and Surveyors Conference, 7 October 2010

Works to date, Communion Design, North Wales Society of Architects, 19 March 2011

Why New Work? – Church Care New Work in Churches and Cathedrals Conference, 31 October 2012

Change or Decay, Hereford Civic Society, 17 April 2013

Alex's re-ordering of St Peter's Church, Peterchurch is referenced in several publications including Conservation Basics, published in 2012 and part of the ten volume Practical Building Conservation series from English Heritage.

Communion's work was also highlighted in a report about the contemporary use of church spaces by the Church Heritage Forum. Part of the Building Faith in our Future policy, the report was presented to representatives from Government departments on 24 March 2011 at St Martin's in the Field, London.

Other Appointments

Quinquennial Inspecting Architect, Diocese of London.

Governor at Ashperton Primary Academy School, Herefordshire and member of the Resources Committee.