


Women's religious communities and patronage in the UK: two case studies

Comunidades religiosas femeninas y mecenazgo en el Reino Unido: dos casos de estudio

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses women as architectural clients through an examination of Roman Catholic nuns as patrons, designers and in some cases builders of religious architecture. The paper offers two case studies to explore the roles that women assumed in religious communities: the first, a chapel commissioned and built by a community of Carmelite nuns in Wales during the 1950s and the second, a recently completed abbey in the North of England. The examples highlight the evolution of female agency in the built environment and how this has been impacted by the professionalisation of architecture.

KEYWORDS

Nuns; convents; monasteries; patronage; sacred architecture.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se analiza el papel de la mujer en la arquitectura a través del estudio de las monjas católicas romanas como mecenas, diseñadoras y, en algunos casos, constructoras de arquitectura religiosa. El artículo ofrece dos casos de estudio para explorar el papel que asumieron las mujeres en las comunidades religiosas: el primero, una capilla encargada y construida por una comunidad de monjas carmelitas en Gales durante la década de 1950; y el segundo, una abadía recientemente terminada en el norte de Inglaterra. Los ejemplos ponen de relieve la evolución de la intervención femenina en el entorno construido y cómo ésta se ha visto afectada por la profesionalización de la arquitectura.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Monjas; conventos; monasterios; mecenazgo; arquitectura religiosa.

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Fig. 01. Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Therese, Presteigne, Wales (UK), completed 1955.
Fig. 02. Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, Stanbrook Abbey, North Yorkshire (UK), completed 2015.



INTRODUCTION

The following paper explores women as architectural clients; a subject that is frequently overlooked in histories of the design and construction industry. Uncovering the varied contributions that women have made to the built-environment – not only as clients but as architects, builders and planners – is vital to ensuring that they are more effectively embedded in architectural discourse.

To build a nuanced picture of women as clients, requires us to look beyond the canon because women's historical roles were limited; until the second half of the twentieth century, the opportunity to commission buildings was largely confined to leisured or aristocratic women with considerable private means. However, one group of women have historically exercised significant agency in the commissioning, design and construction of major buildings: these women are nuns and religious sisters. In this paper I will examine the shifting nature of this agency, offering some historical context, from which I will then present a close examination of two case studies from the UK. The first of these is the church of The Assumption of Our Lady and St Thérèse, built in 1953, which was paid for and manually built by a community of Carmelite nuns in Presteigne, Wales (Fig. 01). The second is Stanbrook Abbey in North Yorkshire, which was commissioned by Benedictine

nuns and completed eight years ago (Fig. 02). The examples that I'll be looking at in exploring nuns as clients are comparable with sites across Europe, the US and probably beyond – such is the transnational nature of women's religious orders and indeed Roman Catholicism more broadly. But I will focus, in this paper, on the UK, where I've conducted most of my research on this subject. I would like to emphasise, however, that the points I make can almost certainly be extrapolated more widely.

My research into nuns and the building of convents has been informed by the women's own voices. This is important: the general assumption that women were not significantly involved in major building projects, means that the canon of religious architecture presents an inaccurate picture of Catholic building programmes throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To address this requires listening closely to the women who controlled their own buildings and positioning their stories within a more expansive architectural history.

In my work on historical sites, I have, therefore relied on primary sources held in convent archives, drawing from material such as letters, accounts, plans and drawings. But in the two case studies that I'll be discussing in detail, I had the opportunity to speak to the women involved in the projects. I communicated via telephone and written correspondence with



Fig. 03. Sisters outside Brentford Laundry and Preservation Home during construction c. 1894.

Sister Anne of Christ, who was then living in the Carmelite monastery in Stillorgan, Dublin, about the construction of the church of The Assumption of Our Lady and St Thérèse, in Presteigne. Sr Anne, who was in her late 80s when we were communicating in 2011-12, set down her memories in a series of letters that she sent to me over a period of several months. At Stanbrook Abbey, I spent a day in July 2018 with Sister (now Dame) Anna Brennan, who showed me the parts of the convent that are accessible to the public (the nuns' quarters are enclosed) and described the way that the nuns worked with the architects throughout the commissioning, design and construction process.

Writing this paper allowed me to revisit these two women's accounts, placing them side by side and within their historical context. In doing so, it became clear to me that the nature of agency has shifted considerably over the 60 years that separated these two projects. This is partly due to the increasing professionalisation of architectural practice, but it also reflects the evolving status of women. What remained unchanged from the 1950s and the 2010s, however, was the way that nuns as clients were often regarded as something of a novelty: surprisingly capable and yet somewhat eccentric. I hope that this paper will go some way to expanding the limited

view of women's religious communities that often underpins secular discussion of their lives, culture and work.

To understand the case studies, it is necessary provide a brief account of the historical context within which they are situated. The following sheds some light on why and how nuns and religious sisters were able to take control of their own building projects.

NUNS AND CONVENT BUILDING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW

Though there is a long tradition of nuns as clients, this became considerably more visible in the nineteenth century, during the boom in Catholic building programmes in the UK, which followed the lifting of the ban on Catholicism in 1829 (Fig. 03). The growth of convent building was driven by what was effectively a missionary programme, designed by the Catholic hierarchy to embed Catholicism in the British religious landscape. Many parishes were initially established and managed by nuns, who not only founded convents but also built schools, hospitals, refuges, orphanages and laundries. In the early days of a newly founded parish, these were generally incorporated within the curtilage of the convent but as money was raised, such buildings (particularly

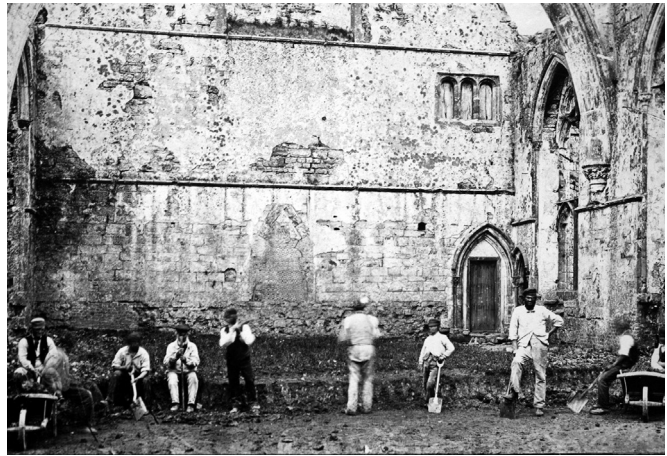


Fig. 04. Builders at the site of the Old Palace, Mayfield (UK), c. 1864.

schools and hospitals) were often rebuilt within the parish so that the Catholic community could use them without entering convents. Similarly, chapels for lay worship generally began within convents but were rebuilt in the community when funds emerged (Jordan 2023a).

Nuns were (and still are) almost exclusively responsible for raising their own funds and managing their finances. Sources of income varied between different orders and according to their particular ministries. For example, orders who rehabilitated former prostitutes often opened commercial laundries while others founded fee-paying schools. Decisions, such as those concerning the purchasing of property, the commissioning of architects and the negotiation of loans and mortgages, were in most cases, taken by the superior general who then delegated responsibility for the supervision of works to the mother superior of each convent (Mangion 2014).

The design of purpose-built convents in the nineteenth-century as now, began with a detailed brief drawn up by the sisters. Since there was no historical precedent for the type of convents that were being built for 'modern' orders in Victorian Britain, this was a critical first stage in which only the foundresses and nuns were equipped with the knowledge to specify the brief. Spaces would have been divided

according to practical and spiritual needs and guidance for this would have been drawn from the rules and constitutions. Although there was no overarching ideology governing the design of convents there were recurring themes that reflected new devotional practices common to all orders. For example, cloisters were an extremely common feature, designed for a combination of processional and contemplative purposes but probably also, being culturally reminiscent of monastic buildings (Brittain Catlin 2006).

The commissioning of these building programmes inevitably brought nuns into contact with architects, including some of the most celebrated of the day. Frequently there were differences of opinion and occasionally there were major disputes which resulted in nuns firing architects.

An illuminating example of this is captured in the relationship between Cornelia Connelly, founder of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and the architect, A.W.N. Pugin (Fig. 04). Connelly initially employed the noted Catholic architect George Goldie to design the chapel at Mayfield Convent in the early 1860s but then sacked him (he subsequently unsuccessfully sued her) and engaged A.W.N. Pugin. The relationship between the two was productive, as an anonymous sister noted:

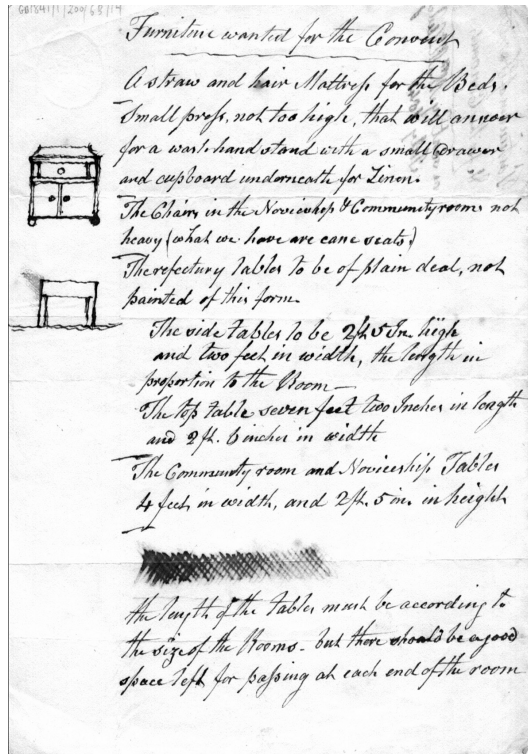
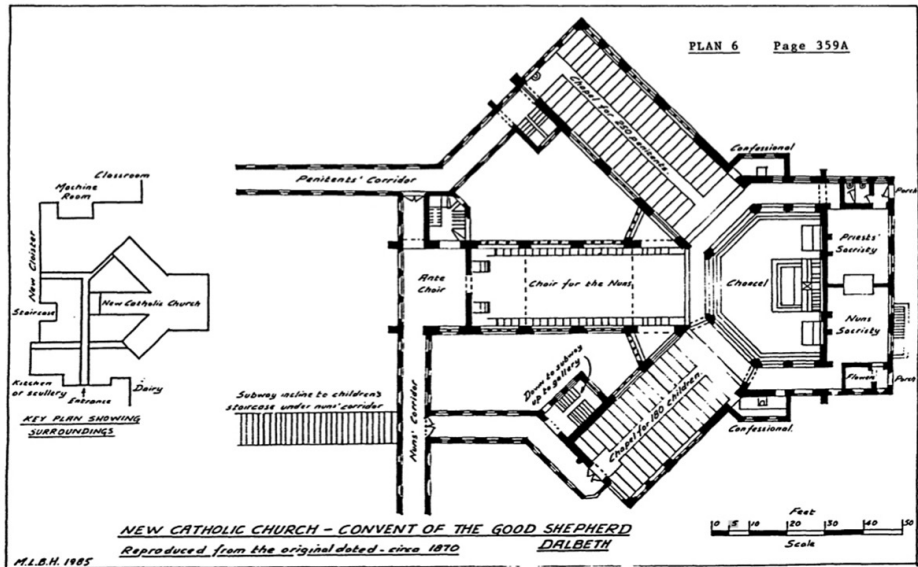


Fig. 05. List and sketch of furnishing required for Handsworth by Catherine McAuley.

Fig. 06. Plan of 'fan-shaped' chapel at the Good Shepherd Convent, Dalbeth, Glasgow (UK).



A story is told of Pugin presenting [Connelly] on one occasion with some drawings for her approval. She studied them for a few minutes and then, without speaking, took her pencil, made several alterations, and then said 'would that be more artistic?'. The architect was delighted with her candour and courage in correcting his drawings, and, in reporting this very novel experience, spoke of her with admiration, adding 'and what is more, she was right!' (A Member of the Society 1922, 249).

Such direct intervention would have been unusual for a male client in the 1860s but was virtually unheard of for a woman. Unsurprisingly, the relationship, though productive, could also be fractious, as Connelly's biographer, Julia Wadham describes:

Pugin and Cornelia understood each other. Their arguments and fierce discussions were based on good-humoured regard and the insults which flowed amiably between them were carried on in the knowledge that they would be mutually stimulating and provoking (Wadham 1957, 253).

Though mutually stimulating for a while, the relationship deteriorated in the 1870s with Connelly eventually sacking Pugin and re-engaging Goldie.

A similar example is offered by the negotiations between Catherine McCauley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy and A.W.N. Pugin, in the construction of the Mercy Convent in Birmingham in 1838. Though Pugin's designs drew praise from his peers, his insistence on medieval purity baffled McCauley, who complained that the Mercy convent was:

not well suited to the purpose... the sleeping rooms are too large... the other rooms too small... the corridors confined and not well lighted. All the gothic work outside has made it expensive (Letter from Catherine McCauley to M. Josephine Warde, Cork, December 24th, 1839; in Sullivan 2004, 227).

McCauley demanded that Pugin go back to the drawing board and redesign the interior according to her specifications (Fig. 05). Pugin relented and produced a building which more or less served the needs of an active congregation who placed work and practicality above all other considerations.

This example highlights the particular problem that nuns encountered in commissioning architects.

Covent buildings were vital tools in the operation of their missions and had to operate with precision. Few nuns cared greatly what the building looked like – most were concerned with the way it functioned. This was especially important in sites that incorporated lay women. In such examples, the community had to design highly complex buildings that allowed for separate circulation routes for lay women and nuns. Since men were not permitted to enter these sites (and even if they had been, they could hardly be expected to grasp the intricacies of convent work, life and spirituality) nuns were often required to produce their own designs, which they then supplied the architect with.

This practice is evident in the chapels designed for orders of nuns involved in work with former prostitutes or women who had children out of wedlock, known as penitents. Here the chapels had to be designed to allow different routes of access. In some cases, churches were designed with three separate naves angled so that the nuns and lay women were unable to see each other. This distinctive configuration was used, in particular, by the Good Shepherd Sisters and the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge (OLC). When the sisters of the OLC community in Waterlooville, Hampshire embarked on designs for a new church in the early 1920s, they travelled to Scotland to inspect a church of a similar design at a Good Shepherd Convent in Dalbeth, Glasgow (Fig. 06). A note by one of the sisters in the OLC annals describes the visit:

...it was there that they found exactly what they required, at least the idea of three in one, and the Sisters part completely private and enclosed. Though the journey was tiring, it was worth it. After a few hours with these dear Sisters, the visitors returned to High Park, quite pleased with the place. It is practically on these lines that the present beautiful church is built in our monastery, with many improvements and additions to suit the needs of the children and the public (Annals of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, 28).

Armed, undoubtedly, with notes and sketches, the sisters wrote a brief for the architect Wilfred Mangan, who designed the Church of the Sacred Heart, com-



Fig. 07. Carmelite nuns constructing the choir at the Carmelite Monastery in Presteigne (UK), 1954.

Fig. 08. Nuns at work on the building site of the Carmelite Monastery in Presteigne (UK), 1954.



pleted in 1923. The church served the nuns, lay women and local congregation until it closed for worship in 2011. At one stage there were at least three churches of this configuration in the UK but the Church of the Sacred Heart at Waterlooville is, to the best of my knowledge, the only remaining one (Jordan 2016).

The issue of privacy also lies at the heart of the first of my case studies: the church of The Assumption of Our Lady and St Thérèse, in Presteigne, Wales, completed in 1953 to designs by the Catholic architect, Francis Pollen. Both this church and my second case study, were built by solemn-vowed, cloistered nuns who had little contact with the outside world and sometimes struggled to balance privacy with the necessity of engaging with the public. It should be noted that, in this example, the nuns did not, strictly speaking, engage the services of the architect, as the designs were donated after the building had begun. This informal arrangement is, however, typical of the way that nuns designed and built on an ad hoc basis, relying on whatever funds and resources became available.

THE CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY AND ST THÉRÈSE

The following account of the 'building nuns of Presteigne', as they were described by the local newspaper, draws extensively on the recollections of Sister Anne of Christ. Sr Anne joined the community as a novice in 1951, joining six other novices from the Carmelite monastery in Birkhamstead and seven older sisters from the monastery in Notting Hill. She worked with the community on the building projects at Presteigne (Jordan 2018).

In 1951, Bishop John Petit invited 14 Carmelite sisters (including Sister Anne of Christ) to the small town of Presteigne, Wales to establish a centre of prayer and provide a church for the emerging parish. The sisters settled on a large nineteenth-century house that had recently been vacated by the army to found a small monastery, which they extended by erecting huts on the site that could operate as individual cells. To generate an income, the sisters installed an altar bread bakery. They also began drawing up plans and

accumulating the materials necessary for building a chapel.

The Prioress of the community, Mother Michael Dawes, oversaw the project. In common with most female religious orders, the community was largely autonomous from diocesan control and all the major decisions concerning the building programme at Greenfield were taken by Mother Michael. The community was largely self-sufficient, owning little more than a small amount of livestock and building funds were limited. The prospect of employing professional tradesmen to build the chapel was out of the question and so Mother Michael decided that the sisters would undertake the building work themselves (Fig. 07). This meant that the community would require a temporary dispensation from enclosure until the work was completed, removing them from other tasks. A more significant obstacle was that none of the sisters had any formal construction training or experience. Sister Anne recalls that:

One of the younger nuns had shown aptitude in construction work by turning an outhouse into a goat stable, using discarded planks, so M. Michael gave her some E.V.P. 'Do it yourself' books, 'Teach yourself Brickwork', 'Teach yourself Roofing' etc., and asked her to become forewoman and learn the Building Trade. She would be joined by all those who were strong enough. A priest friend taught some carpentry skills and bought tools for us (Letter from Sr Anne of Christ to the author, 20th July, 2011).

In 1952 work began on a temporary chapel. The sisters dismantled a conservatory and built a brick wall with asbestos sheeting for a roof. This rudimentary structure provided a place of worship for the laity, with the sisters worshipping in the adjoining 'best room' of the main house. With the temporary chapel completed, the sisters began planning for a permanent one. They bartered the glazing bars and glass from the conservatory for five iron windows from an army hut. Mother Michael traded the community's flock of geese for a solid oak door from the cellar of Greenfield and used the community's limited funds to purchase some reclaimed African hardwood flooring.

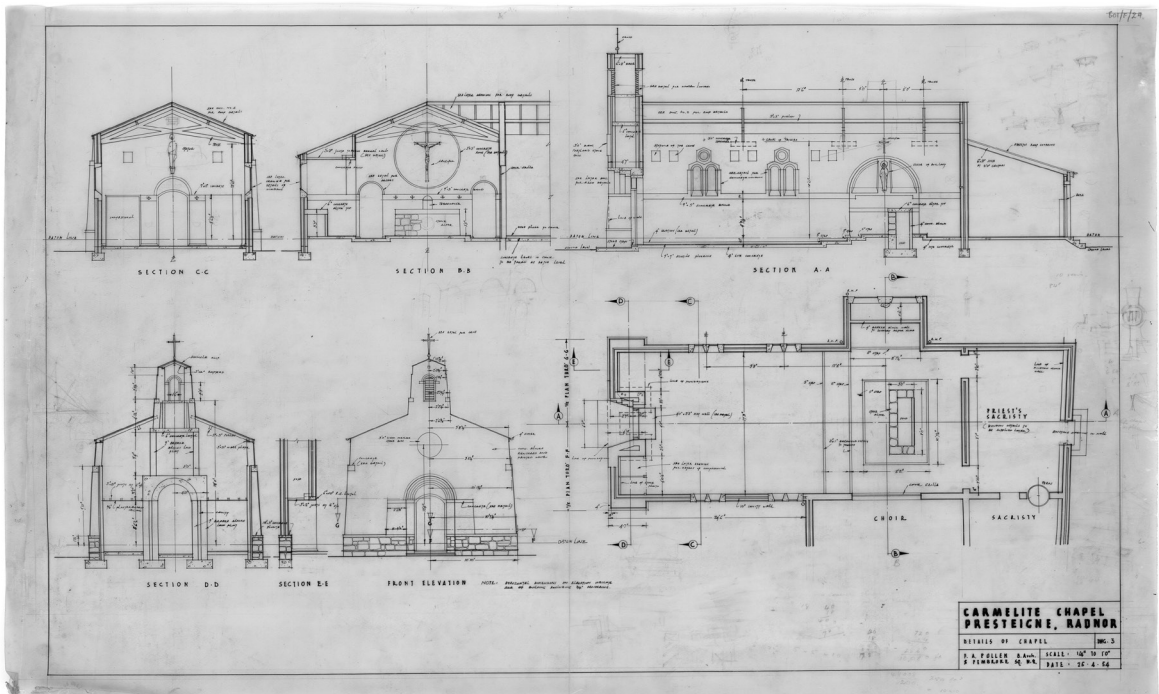


Fig. 09. Francis Pollen's designs for the church of The Assumption of Our Lady and St Therese, Presteigne (UK), 1954.
Fig. 10. Altar at the church of The Assumption of Our Lady and St Therese, Presteigne (UK).

Construction of the choir, which would annex the monastery, commenced in 1953 (Fig. 08). The determined sisters learned as they worked, drafting advice as needed. However, the limited budget meant that they lacked many of the most basic tools. As Sister Anne recalls, «We had no scaffolding but managed with trestles and planks, carrying up blocks in our aprons and cement in buckets until we reached roof height» (Letter from Sr Anne of Christ to the author, 20th July, 2011).

The sisters were visited in March 1951 by the architect Francis Pollen, then an undergraduate architecture student. Pollen had been commissioned to alter the interior of a neighbouring house belonging to Lord Rennell of Rodd, whose wife was keen to introduce Pollen to the Carmelite community. On visiting the building site, Pollen was immediately impressed by the nuns' endeavours and offered to donate plans for a parish church that would adjoin the nun's choir. This building was to be Pollen's first executed design.

In early 1954, the sisters received Pollen's finished plans and construction of the church began (Fig. 09). M. Michael's preference was to use local stone but this proved too expensive and so it was reserved for the porch and plinth only. The primary building material was recycled stone from local 'ruined buildings', that the sisters sourced themselves and brought back by lorry.

Constructing the church proved to be more costly and time-consuming than the sisters had initially anticipated. Funds were drawn from the small income generated from baking altar bread and augmented by donations from local people. However, as their work attracted the attention of the press (in particular *Pathe News*), the donations began to mount in both number and value, enabling the sisters to continue their work. Despite this, the community was still obliged to secure a bank loan to complete the project. The church could not be consecrated until the loan was finally settled in 1976.

As with most convents and monasteries, the buildings emerged piecemeal as funds became available. Though the church was not consecrated until 1976, it was in use as soon as construction was completed and

in November 1954, Mass was said for the first time at a temporary altar, with the permanent altar installed the following year (Fig. 10). The annals record:

Early in 1955, we built the stone altar, our greatest privilege of all. Deep into the ground its foundations had long been laid, and stone by stone it rose – some of the stones being relics of ancient monastic churches, collected for us by our friends.¹

By the end of 1955, the doors into the sacristy were hung, the side chapel was completed, statues installed and the grille between the nun's choir and the sanctuary was put in place. Further additions to the interior continued intermittently over successive years, with a stone plinth for the tabernacle, designed by Francis Pollen, finally installed in 1975.

STANBROOK ABBEY

In terms of the media attention that it generated, the story of the 'Building nuns of Presteigne' had much in common with the construction of Stanbrook Abbey in North Yorkshire, commissioned by a community of Benedictine women.

The award-winning Stanbrook Abbey (properly named the Conventus of Our Lady of Consolation), completed in 2015 to designs by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios (FCBS) has drawn much acclaim for its environmentally sustainable design (Fig. 11). The new Abbey was founded after the nuns sold their large nineteenth-century convent (also named Stanbrook Abbey) in Worcestershire. This building, designed by A.W.N. Pugin and set in a 20-acre site, had become too large and expensive to maintain so it was decided to downsize to a site that would enable a degree of energy self-sufficiency. The decision to foreground sustainability was more than a matter of economy, however: environmental stewardship is central to the spirituality and vocation of Benedictines, so the use of sustainable technology in the design was a high priority.

As with the church in Presteigne, the opening of the monastery and chapel gained much attention, not simply because of the design but also because it offered rare insights into the private world of Benedictine nuns, a strictly enclosed order who rare-

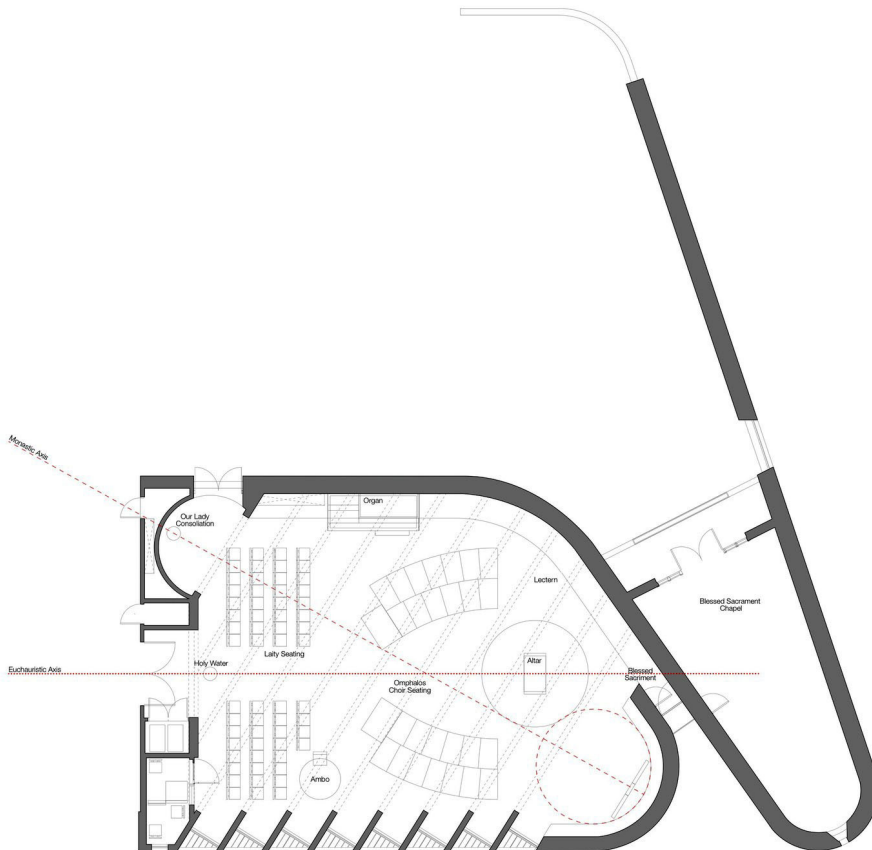


Fig. 11-13. Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, Stanbrook Abbey (Conventus of Our Lady of Consolation), North Yorkshire (UK), completed 2015.

ly permit access to or venture beyond the confines of the monastery. The newspaper articles perhaps inevitably focused on the novelty of 'eco nuns' and the women's role in shaping the new convent. Before visiting Stanbrook myself, I had read a number of articles on the nuns' role in the design of the building. What interested me was the tone that many of these took, commenting for example on how surprisingly 'clued-up', 'amusing' and 'delightful' these women were (Butt 2008). The articles featured pictures of smiling nuns in hard hats and marvelled at the fact that these 'innocents' were able to use computers to look up sustainable building techniques. I was struck by how similar this was to the affectionate but rather condescending press reports of the nuns at Presteigne in the 1950s.

In July 2018, I spent a day at Stanbrook and was given a tour of the chapel and the 'parlours', (the rooms where nuns meet outside visitors) by Sister Anna Brennan, who is now the Abbess of Stanbrook. As Sr Anna explained, a great deal of thought had gone into the design of the chapel and it was important to the sisters that they chose the right architect to work with. FCBS had been selected for their expertise in environmentally-sustainable architecture but the nuns were keen to work with an architect from the practice who would be sensitive to what they wanted. The two architects who worked most closely with the sisters on the chapel were Gill Smith and Louise Wray and the sisters found the experience of working with women overwhelmingly positive - Sr Anna mentioned Louise Wray, in particular, who she described as 'dynamic and engaging' and, most importantly, willing to listen. As Sokol-Gojnik et al. have suggested (2003), the completion of a successful church scheme requires the «theological and architectural professions to work together in openness to the long and complex process» (83).

I was interested to learn that the sisters chose to work with women who did not share their faith. Sr Anna told me of an architect, rejected at an early stage, who had produced designs for the chapel but had come with a set of inflexible preconceived ideas about what it should look like. Wray and Smith, in contrast, made no assumptions about how the space

should function and what the sisters needed. The architects spent two days with the nuns in order to understand how day to day life worked – in particular, observing the divine offices which take place five times a day in the church (Fig. 12). It is, naturally, difficult to understand how an unfamiliar building type should work, without experiencing it: as Sr Anna put it, 'living in a building determines how you live'. Watching the sisters at prayer, gave the architects the idea of positioning the windows in the chapel so that light changes the space throughout the day, giving a different character to each of the five daily offices.

One of the challenges of the design of the church was the liturgical orientation, which allowed for both contemplative prayer and participative worship (Pizarro Miranda 2015). The nuns employed Fr Daniel McCarthy who is a liturgical consultant to advise on the layout of the church, which had to be configured around both the liturgical and monastic axes (Fig. 13). It was also important for the sisters to bring something of their heritage to the chapel. Set into the limestone flooring is a Minton tile from the old Stanbrook Abbey (Fig. 14). A statue of Our Lady of Consolation, also from the former Abbey has been installed. Taking pride of place in the church is a large wooden painted calvary designed and executed by the noted Benedictine artist, Dame Werberg Welch in the mid-1930s (Fig. 15). The Stanbrook nuns are particularly proud of Dame Werberg Welch, whose work appears in Catholic churches and abbeys across the UK. She received some training in the 1930s from the artist and typographer, Eric Gill and regularly exhibited at the prestigious Guild of Catholic Artists and Craftsmen (Jordan 2023b).

The design of the chapel was not the only element of the site that the nuns contributed to. One of the main features of Stanbrook is the environmental technology that is employed to ensure that it is almost energy self-sufficient: the rainwater harvesting and seedbed sewage systems; solar panels etc. Sr Anna explained that the conditions of planning permission for a building in the North York Moors National Park were that the design of the building had to be outstanding, using natural materials, such as the sedum roof,



Fig. 14. Minton tile from former Stanbrook Abbey (Worcestershire, UK) set into the new chapel floor.
Fig. 15. Dame Werburg Welch, Crucifix, Stanbrook Abbey Chapel, c. 1935.

that would sit sensitively in the natural landscape. The nuns had given a great deal of thought to this, prior to engaging the architects. Indeed, project architect Gill Smith noted that the nuns had been proactive in researching materials and technology and had, in fact, made some suggestions themselves, which the architects had taken forward. The completed site is an exemplar of both sustainable and contextual architecture and this can be largely attributed to a highly successful relationship between the architects and client, which was built on open dialogue and sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

What interested me in revisiting these examples and looking at them side by side was the notable difference in the way that the nuns worked with the architects. As discussed, plans for the Carmelite church of The Assumption of Our Lady and St Therese, were donated by Francis Pollen free of charge because, as a Catholic, he was moved to help the nuns. But it should also be noted that he was, at the time, a student and the building work already underway at Presteigne offered an opportunity to see his first design executed. Better still for Pollen, donating the plans meant that there were none of the negotiations and compromises demanded by a paying

client and he was, therefore, relatively free to design what he wanted. What remains unclear is whether this was exactly what the nuns themselves wanted, whether there was any discussion or whether they had any role in the design at all, beyond physically building it. What is clear, however, is that the nuns carried the immense burden of raising additional funds for Pollen's scheme and it took until 1976 for the church to be completed – indeed consecration of the church was held up until the loan that they had to take out had been paid off. It is also clear from Sister Anne's account that the execution of Pollen's designs required the nuns to invest considerable time and effort in developing new building skills. This may have been something that they were willing - and perhaps even happy - to do. Or it may have been something that took them away from other important work. Sr Anne's account of the building of the church did not address a key question: whether the nuns considered Pollen's plans a blessing or an extra burden.

By the twenty-first century, the nuns at Stanbrook engaged with the architects through the formal processes, providing a detailed and well-researched brief and a budget. Though they did not undertake any manual work, they maintained dialogue with the architects throughout the process, advising on the designs as they progressed. It is notable that

they chose not to work with a religious architect but instead selected someone who was willing to listen and learn. Thinking back to some of the Catholic architects that I have mentioned in this paper, it is clear that pre-conceived ideas can bring unwelcome baggage – especially when the architect is designing a complex space that they have no experience of.

A final and important note in the examples that I have explored, is the issue of respect. What the media coverage of the nuns at Stanbrook failed to capture was that the project architects, Gill Smith and Louise Wray, took these women seriously. Indeed, this was probably the first major project in the UK where nuns were finally accepted on their own terms as intelligent, well-informed, creative clients.

My research over the last fifteen years on the role of nuns in convent architecture has been a revelation. Spending time with nuns and sisters and listening to them talking about their own buildings – how they use them, pay for them, decorate them, worship in them – has swept away many of my own assumptions about these women. I hope this account of nuns as clients has shed some light on a story that deserves much greater elaboration.

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- Fig. 01. Lee Holland.
 Fig. 02, 12-14. Sirj Photography.
 Fig. 03. SMG Archive (ref IIG/2/1).
 Fig. 04. Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.
 Fig. 05. RSM Archives.
 Fig. 06. Peter Hughes.
 Fig. 07-08, 10. Menevia Diocesan Archives.
 Fig. 09. RIBA Drawings and Archives Collection.
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 Fig. 13. Author.

NOTES

1. «The establishment of Papal Enclosure at the Carmelite Convent, Presteigne, Radnorshire, 24th November 1956, Feast of St John at the Cross», Menevia Diocesan Archives (supplied by Alan Randall).