



SULTAN NAZRIN SHAH CENTRE

THE CHALLENGE

Perfectly positioned alongside a cricket pitch, near an ornamental lake and close to some of the most visited buildings in historic Oxford, the Sultan Nazrin Shah Centre marked one of our most ambitious projects.

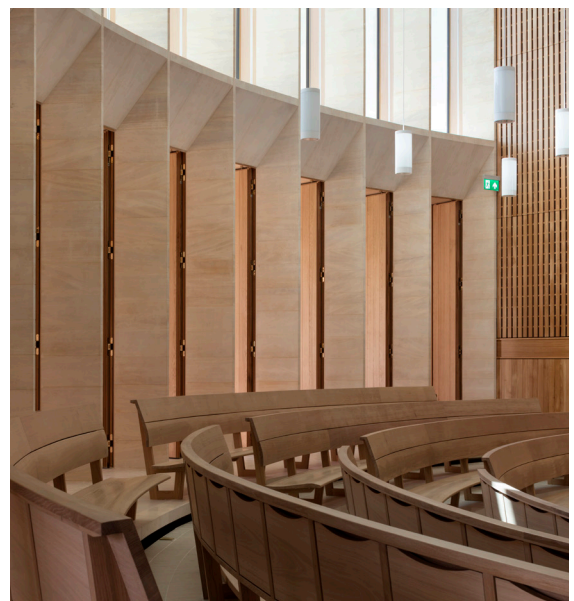
Costing a total of £8.8m to build, this 846sq m single storey auditorium and conference centre lies in the northern grounds of Worcester College at Oxford University.

Designed from the very beginning to harmonise beautifully with its environment, the building was constructed using natural materials, primarily limestone and timber. The Centre is home to a 170-seat theatre, two seminar rooms, a studio for teaching and performance and an e-hub social learning space, all linked together by a large foyer and bar area.

We supplied more than 500 tonnes of our masonry-grade Clipsham limestone, which was chosen for its

rough surface, variations in tone and existing local use. The masonry was laid in a 300mm-deep course across the elevations, changing to a 150mm course from the ground floor to the base of the structure for subtle differentiation. As the building is in a flood zone, the ground floor slab was raised up on concealed plinths, with holes in the base of the limestone walls allowing water to flow underneath.

Buildings on this scale aren't without their challenges – particularly when working with a mix of old and new materials. Some issues are also unforeseen - for example, there was a nine-week delay when the main sewer running through the site had to be replaced and then the glazing installer went into liquidation so stonework had to be installed out of sequence, before the windows, giving potential issues with tolerances. Thanks to an intricate planning process, and good knowledge of the design and materials, the team worked together to successfully manage the situation.



THE DIFFERENCE



The final result is stunning. Inside space is maximised and light is prioritised, with floor to ceiling doors leading to a terrace and views across the sports field towards the cricket pavilion. Similarly the exhibition space features dramatic windows that look out across the ornamental lake.

As well as being used by students for lectures, drama and music sessions, this impressive centre is now available for conferences and as a meeting space for local community groups.

The architects were inspired by another project, the Stirling Prize-nominated Ripon College - to which we also contributed – with its limestone facades, timber roof and ceiling structures and tapered stone mullions.

As well as limestone, timber was a key material, reflecting the architect's commitment to use natural materials. The floors and ceilings of the seminar rooms were built in exposed oak and the ceiling structure in the foyer area included a lattice of oak beams supported on slender oak glulam columns.

We're very proud of this project. It's a brilliant example of how the right planning, collaborating and flexibility can work together to great effect. The original intention was for this to be a landmark building which blended harmoniously with its surroundings, merging seamlessly with the other listed buildings in the grounds of Worcester College – and it's a complete success.

Dedicated by alumnus HRH Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak, Malaysia, this wonderful building is now enjoying its first visitors in a peaceful little corner of England.

“It was a challenge to get the stonework into its current state to make it appear as effortless as possible and a lot of hidden elements have been included that are not necessarily visible to the eye.

The limestone involved a real mix of modern and traditional techniques. The stonework was CNC cut from raw blocks but on site it was a case of three guys lifting large blocks of stone and fixing them in place.”

ALASTAIR CROCKETT, PROJECT ARCHITECT AT NÍALL
MCLAUGHLIN ARCHITECTS

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