The Restoration of St Mark’s

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St Mark’s Parish Church will host a special service of thanksgiving and celebration on Friday evening to mark the completion of the four and a half year project to carry out urgent repairs to the Grade A listed building.

The £1.9 million programme of works included major repairs to the building’s distinctive exterior Scrabo stone, which had been deteriorating for some time and was in very poor condition. The project team had a painstaking task in deciding upon the most appropriate materials to use to complete the significant and necessary repairs as Scrabo stone is no longer available in the quantities required for the job. A matching stone was eventually sourced but the already slow and complex process was made even more laborious by St Mark’s characteristic fine masonry joints, which are less than 2mm wide.

Other necessary works including measures to improve drainage and prevent water damage and repairs to the glazing, tower and main door have also been completed.

The restoration was funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £954,500, a Northern Ireland Environment Agency-listed building grant of £434,000 and the Representative Church Body Fabric Fund, with the remaining monies coming from the fundraising efforts of the parishioners.

“St Mark’s has undergone many repairs during the last 15 years, but the scale of this restoration has been unprecedented”, said the Rector Canon Ken Smyth.

“Due to the high costs involved, this project was beyond the capacity of the church itself and without the support of our funders the building would have continued to decline. On behalf of the parish I would like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency for their support in helping to restore St Mark’s to its original splendour”, he concluded.

Jane Williams, member of the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee for Northern Ireland, said: “St Mark’s has been at the heart of the local community for 192 years and we are delighted to be involved in helping to preserve this wonderful building and ensure that it will continue to serve the community for generations to come.

“We now have our specialist ‘Repair Grants for Places of Worship’ scheme which provides grants of up to £100,000 for necessary and urgent repairs to listed places of worship, and we welcome applications from all faith groups and denominations.”

Caroline Maguire the Northern Ireland Environment Agency area conservation architect said: “The craftsmanship required in this complex restoration has been exemplary. The intricacy of the detail required, be it in the carving of the pinnacles, or the replacement of the ashlar stonework by local firms is testament to the capabilities of the local stone trade in Northern Ireland. The congregation and conservation project architects are to be congratulated for the rigour with which this conservation project has been undertaken. It is truly a showcase for our traditional skills in Northern Ireland”.

The rededication service began at 7.30pm and was attended by the Archbishop of Armagh and the Bishop of Down and Dromore.