

## NEWS RELEASE

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Before and after: St Mary-le Tower, Ipswich. Images by Freeland Rees Roberts Architects

### ST MARY-LE TOWER CHURCH, IPSWICH CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF WORKS

Cambridge based Freeland Rees Roberts Architects have announced the completion of works to the principal parish church of Ipswich, St Mary-le Tower. Scaffolding has recently been dismantled from the church's west front to reveal the splendour of the knapped flintwork and stone dressing elevations of the imposing church which boasts the tallest spire in Suffolk.

The work undertaken by Freeland Rees Roberts Architects involved stone repairs and conservation measures at high level to the west front of the nave and north and south aisles. Much of the ornate stonework had eroded and lost its fine gothic detail. Buttresses rise up each side of the nave with ornate traceried panels, gablets and are finished in crocketed pinnacles and finials. Both pinnacles had to be taken down and much of the stone replaced with new carved stonework.

Specialist conservation stone cleaning has taken place to the nave window and aisle windows. Window guards have also been renewed to the windows. The parapets to the aisles were also badly eroded and had to be dismantled. Several stone quatrefoil panels were replaced as well as much of the coping.

The buttresses to the nave and aisles were also repaired and several offset stones were replaced. Re-pointing of the knapped flintwork took place at high level.

Leading UK conservation specialist, Henry Freeland, Architect of St Mary-le Tower Church and Director of Freeland Rees Roberts Architects, commented: “The two bottom stones to these pinnacles, with an ornate gablet and finials on each side, weighed over a tonne and had to be lifted by crane some fifty feet onto the building. This meant the road had to be closed, and due to bad weather conditions, the lift had to be delayed several times. A substantial amount of carving work took place on the scaffold for several weeks.”

Mr Freeland continued: “The outstanding feature of the church is the south porch tower with a recessed spire which is 176 feet high with openwork parapets. Some original perpendicular work remains - the arcades of five bays and a short sixth bay and two niches to left and right of the chancel east window - but most of the church is the result of Architect Richard Phipson’s 1860-70 restoration. “

Churchwarden, Mr Richard Hanley, commented: “We are delighted with the work undertaken by Freeland Rees Roberts and Bakers of Danbury, the contractors. The conservation measures and stone work have been essential to restore, preserve and maintain this church for the local community. They also ensure that this church remains available for future generations to enjoy.”

He continued: “St Mary-le Tower is both a parish church with a thriving congregation of people of all ages, and the civic church for the town of Ipswich. Its fascinating history and its location in the heart of the town draws large numbers of visitors. Our congregation is drawn from all around the Ipswich area.”

Simon Wood of contractors, Bakers of Danbury, said: “This was a once in a life time opportunity for a stonemason to carve such large pieces of stone on a church.”

Freeland Rees Roberts Architects are architects to over 100 churches across East Anglia and the South East. The practice has four AABC registered conservation architects and works on all aspects of repair as well as reordering and extensions. Henry Freeland is Temple Bar’s Historic Buildings Architect, Architect to the fabric of King’s College Chapel and Architect and Surveyor to the Fabric of Norwich Cathedral and Guildford Cathedral. Mr Freeland is currently working for University College Oxford (a new build buttery kitchen) and Cambridge Colleges. He is also architect of the new Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge Visitor’s centre and an

ecological kiosk in Epping Forest, St Lawrence Jewry Memorial Fountain and carries out large barn conversions to offices.

Other historic building projects Freeland Rees Roberts Architects have been involved with include: a major improvement project to St John's College Masters Lodge originally by Sir George Gilbert Scott; the conservation and relocation of Temple Bar to Paternoster Square, City of London (which has been awarded seven architectural awards in the past two years); the conversion of a former derelict gallery into new library facilities at Peterhouse, Cambridge (which was awarded a national RIBA Conservation Commendation in 2006) and numerous conservation and repair projects at Ickworth house, Suffolk.

Ends

**Notes to the Editor:**

1. For further media information, interview or images, please contact Carri Crook, Carisma Communications on 01842 815910 or mobile 07704 920350; email [carri@carismacommunications.co.uk](mailto:carri@carismacommunications.co.uk).
2. Freeland Rees Roberts Architects' key areas of expertise include: Education: Universities, Colleges & Schools; Local Authority; Sports; Extensions; Ecclesiastical; Residential; Libraries; Commercial; Conservation and Domestic. [www.frrarchitects.co.uk](http://www.frrarchitects.co.uk).
3. St Mary-le Tower Church is based in Oak Lane, Ipswich, Suffolk. For further information on St Mary-le Tower Church, visit [www.stmaryletower.org.uk](http://www.stmaryletower.org.uk).
4. To join the Friends of St Mary-le Tower Church (Registered Charity number 1073848), application forms can be found at the back of Church. The Friends help to maintain this beautiful church and its traditions. It costs only £20 a year to be a friend of St Mary-le Tower (less than 40p a week).
5. The Friends' aims are:
  - To restore, preserve, maintain and improve, beautify and reconstruct the buildings and their contents
  - To establish scholarships for choristers and organists at St Mary-le-Tower
  - To encourage the study and performance of music in the Church.
6. History of St Mary-le Tower: There has been a church on this site at least since the Domesday Book. It was presumably built near a tower on the town walls, and it quickly came to be seen as the principal church of the Borough. From 1177 it was staffed by Augustinian Canons. In 1200, it was the scene of the reading of King John's new charter for the Borough. The Merchants' Guild Chaplain also functioned as schoolmaster of the ancestor of today's Ipswich School. After the Reformation, Ipswich was a stronghold of Puritanism, and Tower clergy were imprisoned for attacks on Church and Regime. After Charles II was restored in 1660, however, the Tower became a center of the High Church party and ever more closely associated with the Corporation of the town. While Ipswich was a garrison town, it was also the Garrison Church. The rebuilding of the church commenced in 1850, under the direction of the architect Richard Phipson. A dozen years later, this continued at the expense of churchwarden George Bacon, Mayor of Ipswich at the time. At this time, the church was widened and heightened. A new 176 foot tall spire was put in place above the South entrance and almost all the fittings were replaced. The 18th Century pulpit only just survived, its tester only being returned years later after being used as a hall table. Memorial tablets were tidied away into the corners. The font of early 15th Century provenance was moved as well, and many new fittings and stained glass added. In this way much classical work in the church was swept away in a way that we might consider vandalism. On the other hand, a large and noble church was the result, committed to the architectural and liturgical ideals of the Oxford Movement.