

Church: St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury, Wymondham

Interviewee: E1 – Fr. Christopher Davies

Date: Tuesday, 23 June 2015

1. NW: Can I just start by asking about how long you have been here and have been connected with the building?
2. E1: Yep. I was appointed as vicar in August 2006, so that's 9 years.
3. NW: And in terms of the building project that is happening here, at what stage was it - [was it] already underway?
4. E1: No, no, far from it. We made an initial, or my predecessor and the then parochial Church Council had made a previous approach to HLF, I think in 2002, and that didn't find favour, so the whole project had been shelved effectively and was moribund. And in 2007 the Abbey celebrated it's 900th anniversary and there was a huge amount of enthusiasm and a sense of purpose, and at that point it was decided to reinvestigate the possibility of some sort of development. So effectively we went back to square one.
5. NW: Just for some framework, a reference really, how many people in Wymondham, roughly?
6. E1: Population? Then, about 12,000, but it has grown rapidly, and we're due to hit something like 18,000 by 2018.
7. NW: And further plans for growth?
8. E1: Yes it has been identified as one of the so-called satellite areas of Norwich.
9. NW: OK. And this presumably this is the biggest church in Wymondham?
10. E1: Yes.
11. NW: And *the* parish church?
12. E1: Yep, yep.
13. NW: Yes, OK. You mentioned a lot of children. How many children?
14. E1: There are currently 3,500 children and young people at school in Wymondham. There are plans to build another school to cope with the increased development and I am pretty sure that figure will hit 4,000 within a couple of years. Quite a few children are bussed in. There are no secondary schools in Hingham, for example. So the academy attracts students from a pretty wide area.
15. NW: OK. So [it is] a major building in ... and would you call it a market town, Wymondham?
16. E1: Yes, yes it is.
17. NW: What role do you think the building plays within the town? How is it seen within the town? What happens, as far as the town is concerned, here?
18. E1: For the vast majority of the people in the town it just happens to be their parish church and in fact many, many of them, if not all of them, wouldn't see it as *their* church but simply as 'the Abbey' in the sense that it's always been there and it's part of Wymondham. It's interesting talking to couples who come to get married,

many of them have grown up in Wymondham, and they don't see the church as anything spectacular because they've always known it.

19. NW: Yes, what you're familiar with you don't always appreciate as outsiders might, yes.

20. E1: Yes.

21. NW: So, the context of the project, you were beginning to tell me outside, started off with an effort, was it simply to get some toilets and basic facilities into the building...

22. E1: Absolutely. We have no... We have running water but we don't have hot running water. We have no loo and very, very primitive vestries and the initial impetus was to think well how can we raise money and effectively put in toilets and vestries without detracting from the interior of the building. A huge number of Norfolk churches, medieval churches, have simply stuck a loo in the corner behind a wooden screen and we knew from Day 1 we could never get permission to do that, even if we thought it was appropriate, and I think most people wouldn't think it appropriate. So that then got us thinking, well if we're actually going to build on something it has to be something which makes a statement and doesn't look like a little pimple on the side of a work of art, as it were. And the more we thought about it the more the idea developed, well it's all or nothing, let's go for something that's going to actually be a worthy addition to a great building. But of course that means huge sums of money rather than a few thousand.

23. NW: So is that a case of it in a sense being easier or more feasible to ask for more, to attempt more than to attempt less?

24. E1: I think it's chicken and egg. Once you get beyond the concept of sticking a loo or a kitchen in a corner, then you are into huge sums of money because you're actually into capital outlay rather than just internal alterations. And we knew that if we didn't get Heritage Lottery funding we probably would never be able to do it. Significantly, once we knew that HLF were supportive that opened the door to a lot of other cash funding, because most donors, particularly corporate donors, will come on board if they see something is a viable project and has integrity, and of course an HLF award denotes integrity.

25. NW: And importance.

26. E1: And importance, yep.

27. NW: Something one wishes to be associated with.

28. E1: Yep, yep. I mean it was a really difficult period persuading people to make the transition from 'well actually we only want a toilet and a kitchen' to 'let's spend £3million'. That's a pretty big gap, as you can imagine.

29. NW: So how did that happen in practice? What were the ingredients?

30. E1: A huge amount of work on behalf of the project steering group. The project steering group was formed in 2007 and we ourselves at that time didn't have any clear vision of where we were going or what we finally wanted, but a lot of brainstorming and vision building took place over 18 months, 2 years, before we then went to our own congregation and said this is what we hope to do, will you

support us? But there was a lot of soul searching before we even got to the position of saying this is our plan.

31. NW: And am I right that the scheme now includes sort of education elements; it's much more than just a few toilets and...
32. E1: Absolutely, absolutely.
33. NW: So what are the key bits now?
34. E1: Well, this last month we appointed a full time learning and events officer. And her brief is to promote the abbey in all sorts of ways - music, art, exhibitions, visits the whole gamut. And the actual, what I call, capital part of the project - while I have talked about new vestries new choir facilities and toilets, those facilities are available, and have to be available, during the week for other uses. We can't have a sign on the door that says 'Keep Out', because HLF expect us to use those facilities other than for our own use as a worshipping congregation. So the choir vestry doubles up as an education space, clergy vestry doubles up as a reading room for the archives, and most of the new build on that side is actually going to be an exhibition area...
35. NW: That's the south side...
36. E1: Yes, although we will be using it for other purposes on a Sunday.
37. NW: So how will you use it on a Sunday?
38. E1: For what we'd call breakout space for children's groups or other groups, meeting rooms during the week, rather than having to use the whole building. We want them to be as flexible as possible.
39. NW: So would it be appropriate to say, therefore, that part of what the project will achieve is a bringing together of the two forms of community, the church community and the wider community?
40. E1: Oh very much so, yes. I mean we do a lot of that already. We have a huge number of concerts; I think there's going to be one this evening judging by the fact that the piano's been stuck there. And we want to do a lot more of that, and different things as well. We had a learning and heritage event last week where 5-600 children came during the day to learn about medieval and monastic life and we had actors and people going round pretending they were this and doing that - a sort of living history event.
41. NW: As a matter of interest is that something that the church itself organised or...
42. E1: Yes, we organised it.
43. NW: Fascinating. For you, thinking of the building as it stood before the alterations, what is special about it, what's important about it?
44. E1: I think the overriding difference is that we can offer more to the local community and to the visitors, the tourists. Up until now, you can just see a few descriptive panels, so people either buy a guide book or they make their way around, and there isn't really any what I'd call in depth explanation as to why it is as it is and why is that over there, and who put that there, and all that sort of thing. So a key element of the development is to improve the visitor experience and obviously

we've taken professional advice, so there will be things for people who want to spend just a few minutes in the building, things for people who want perhaps to spend half an hour or an hour, and there will be things for people who want to come and spend all day because they have a particular interest in a style of architecture, or a work of art or whatever.

45. NW: But thinking of the historic part of the building, what is particularly special about it for you, what is its meaning and importance?
46. E1: For me personally, the very fact that for 909 years people have used it as a place of worship; that's the single most important thing for me and I think for most of the congregation there is a sense of continuity. I always say to couples who come to get married here, when I take them through the preparation and the lead up to the wedding and I say at the rehearsal 'You're standing on the spot where for 900 years couples have exchanged their vows', you can almost see the frisson. And as I say that's the world of difference between coming to a place like this and going to the registry office in Norwich. You are part of history.
47. NW: Mmm, lovely. So if we could move on to talk a bit about the process of the project, can you outline how you have got from beginning to end, very briefly.
48. E1: (Laughs) It feels like a lifetime's journey really. I think a critical element was being able to offer the vision and the drive to the rest of the congregation and thereby to the wider community and to the potential funders. Part of that was the decision quite early on to take professional advice from an organisation which had mentored other churches and groups in vision building and applying for funding.
49. NW: Who was that?
50. E1: That was a company called Different View, they're based in Norwich, or just north of Norwich. And we had an initial interview with them, a sort of appraisal, do we like them, do they like us, and then we decided to invest quite a considerable sum of money and they took us through right back to square one: why do you want this, what do you hope to achieve, and what will be the benefits. And that helped us really cement our own thinking, and our own vision, so that in turn we could convince HLF that this was a viable project, and as I said also our own people. There were a lot of people, very understandably, in the congregation who thought 'Hang on a minute, where on earth are we going to find £3 million? This is never going to get off the ground.' And it's a difficult situation because you have to have worked up your ideas to a fairly accurate estimate of costing before you can go to HLF; you can't just say 'Here's a bit of paper and this is what we would like, and if that doesn't work [then] that might, and what have you.' But to get to that level you've committed a huge sum of money already. We'd already paid £80,000 in archaeologist's fees and probably as much again in other bits of professional advice before we were in a position to apply formally. If you're successful you then get a first round approval whereby they will give you 10% of what you've asked for to work up the project to the next stage, in other words with detailed architectural plans. We appointed quantity surveyors and the like. So there's a great leap of faith between the original vision and not knowing whether you will get a successful

response at the end, and obviously HLF has only got a certain amount of money to give away. We were again advised correctly, but it was a huge leap of faith, when we applied, the criterion were that if you were applying for less than £1million you would be considered regionally; a regional panel of East Anglia would consider your application. If you went above £1million you would be put into the national category. We were advised to up our bid and go nationally, although I think we nearly all felt that we stood more chance locally. And we discovered we were up against places like Durham Cathedral and real landmark buildings, but we were successful. As I've said, it is not at all about the significance of the building, it's about how the building can be further developed to promote community involvement and activity.

51. NW: And in that process, were there any particular roadblocks, or things that threw you off course?
52. E1: I think that the biggest single potential roadblock was a loss of nerve and thinking how much more do we have to spend not knowing... There were people who, very understandably, said when we started to spend £80, £90, £100,000, 'We could have built the loos for this'. So it was really a matter of refining the vision, refining the vision, holding your nerve, and trying to keep people on board. Which in a voluntary organisation is not a mean feat. You know we don't have a board of directors who say, 'Look, this is where we're going; jump to!'. Everybody is a volunteer and it's by cajoling and convincing rather than clicking your fingers.
53. NW: With a building such as this, one needs to do a lot of consultation; there are lots of people who have a say in what happens, for example the national amenity societies and so on, the DAC, Historic England etc. Overall, those bodies, have you found them helpful, or has there been conflict there...?
54. E1: Yes, I mean there was some conflict with the Historic Churches Preservation Trust, I think it was them, or the Victorian Society, one of the other, but there was one group, I think it was the Historic Churches Preservation Trust who were implacably opposed to any new development. I think their mantra is 'Nothing must change'. In view of the sensitivity of the building and the potential changes to it, the chancellor, who of course has the final say, called an open meeting rather than decide on her own, which she is legally entitled to do. But she called an open meeting and consulted very widely and then issued a very comprehensive report detailing why she found in favour because obviously she realised the sensitivity of it. The DAC have been extremely helpful; they've had several site visits. The key to that was keeping them appraised at every step of the way. Their last site visit was only 6 weeks ago when they were concerned about one or two aspects of the exhibitions. But once they were here and we explained in situ what was going to happen they were perfectly fine.
55. NW: So that was a good relationship with the DAC.
56. E1: Yes, very good. Our former architect is a member of the DAC, so he has intimate knowledge of the abbey and was able to answer some of the queries in committee.

57. NW: That's helpful. Is that Neil Birdsall?
58. E1: Neil Birdsall, yes.
59. NW: I know Neil, yes.
60. E1: A few local objections, understandably. The meadows there [to the south of the abbey] are highly protected – SSSI or whatever it's called, Site of Special Scientific Interest – and people living on the other side of the meadows, one or two, raised formal objections. They felt the development, which would actually face their houses, would somehow disfigure the abbey. But again the chancellor very sensitively and rationally explained in her judgment that she thought that was not going to be the case. I think we have been extremely lucky, well I know we have been extremely lucky, in appointing Freeland Rees Roberts who are very, very competent, and have a tremendous eye for detail. I have been impressed – I have been into the new bits on several occasions now – and the way they blend in and the way they make the most of the historical artefacts that are there already I think is absolutely second to none.
61. NW: It's Henry Freeland, isn't it? Is Henry the church architect, also?
62. E1: No, it's two different things. When we started the project Neil was the church architect – Birdsall, Swash and Blackman I think is what the company is called – and he retired half way through. I think, knowing that he was going to retire, he didn't want to do the new development. He said 'I will carry on as the abbey architect but I don't want to tender for the new development'. So that's how we came across Henry Freeland, and in the course of the development Neil retired fully and now his successor Ruth Blackman is the actual abbey architect, but she has no direct input in the new development.
63. NW: Going back to the folk the other side of the meadows; obviously you will have needed to have got planning permission for the extension elements – was that straightforward or problematic?
64. E1: I did a lot of homework before we applied, and we had several open evenings here for people to come and look at the plans in detail; we had our architect here and one or two other people who were knowledgeable about developing church buildings. So we went as far as we thought we could in pre-empting any objections. And there were very few, I think no more than 3 or 4.
65. NW: What do you feel your role has been in this overall thing? Have you been guardian of the overall vision?
66. E1: I've chaired the steering group, which actually I am, no two of us are now the only, two out of 10, who were originally on the group in 2007. I mean that's the nature of church office; it revolves. So I have seen it through with my vice-chair, and I have done an awful lot of what I call informal canvassing behind the scenes, both in terms of persuading people that it's a good idea, and fundraising. My particular brief for the last 3 years has been fundraising, because we have had to match fund, obviously.
67. NW: And in doing that, do you think, obviously there are particular skills that you bring to that, but in terms of your role as incumbent, has that been...

68. E1: I think it's been essential. A project like this could not succeed unless the incumbent was absolutely foursquare behind it.
69. NW: And seen to be. Articulating it.
70. E1: And seen to be. Absolutely; it's one thing being a figurehead, but it's got to be far more than that, because if people are slightly jittery and then they see the vicar being a little bit diffident, then the whole thing will collapse.
71. NW: So, responding to what you were saying, there is an awful lot about confidence in a project like this working isn't there?
72. E1: Yes, a huge amount, a huge amount. The number of times I heard myself saying 'There is no Plan B'. (Laughs)
73. NW: Looking back over the input from the external stakeholders, coming back to them, what do you think at root their interest is, what are they interested in in a situation like this?
74. E1: When you say external stakeholders you mean funders?
75. NW: No, sorry, such as the national amenity societies, Historic England, the conservation officer, for example...
76. E1: Well, clearly they all have their own brief, and their own mantra. It was interesting when we had the open evening for what I call the professional or charitable people, that they were all very concerned from their own particular point of view. But none of them actually seemed to have an overview of the project as a whole. So there were those who were absolutely hellbent there should be no change whatsoever. There were those who said, 'Well, change must be in this style', and you could see where they were coming from depending on what hat they were wearing. But apart from us, the steering group, nobody could see the overall vision of what we actually hoped to achieve; or perhaps they could see it, but they weren't particularly interested in it.
77. NW: So, in once sense, for example, the Victorian Society worrying about the Victorian bits, for example. The lack of an integrative view of the whole, do you think that stops their comments being too...
78. E1: Given too much weight? Yes, I think it does, and rightly so. I have always come at this from the point of view that this place is not a museum. It is a building, a facility which has to, within the constraints of its fabric, and there are clearly constraints, has to within those constraints serve the community in which it finds itself now. Because otherwise, what is it? Is it a museum, or is it a space for the community? There's no doubt in my mind which it needs to be, but I'm also aware that there are some beautiful things that are rightly cherished and must be preserved. We haven't destroyed anything; the end result will be that we have enhanced the building.
79. NW: Given it more life...
80. E1: Absolutely. Yes.
81. NW: I think often in terms of the distinction between a building as a monument, and a living building.

82. E1: Yes.
83. NW: And buildings such as this seem to me to succeed or fail to the extent to which they are able to live and breathe...
84. E1: Yes, absolutely.
85. NW: ...and that means change...
86. E1: Yes it does.
87. NW: ...the ability to change.
88. E1: It does, it does, without any shadow of a doubt. This building is not the same as when it... I mean in my time, which is a blinking of an eye, I can think of 3 or 4 significant additions to the building and that's in less than 10 years. If you go back 3–400 years... I mean that gold screen wasn't here 100 years ago – well it was, but it wasn't finished – and most people come in and they think, gosh, this is the crown of the building, it must have been designed as the building was built. Certainly not: it's one of the newest additions. So in a sense the building has never been static, never. The monks had barely finished it when they were arguing with the town about putting up another tower or whatever. So it's been an ongoing thing.
89. NW: Could I just ask you to reflect on what you think you might have learned through this process.
90. E1: Patience. (Laughs) I think I had a fair share of that already. The necessity, without doubt, the necessity of keeping informed at all sorts of levels of what is going on. My experience is that if people are unsure, they are more likely to be concerned and rattled by something, than if they are kept up to date. And even very basic things like, now we've got builders on site, some people are a bit frustrated they can't see anything, because it's all boarded up and what have you, so we're very shortly going to be having some visits, tours round, as soon as it's safe to do so. And when scaffolding goes up, or when hoardings go up it's about telling people. I mean that box thing there [in the north east corner of the north aisle] which looks fairly innocuous, appeared just literally with a week's notice. We knew that something was going to happen because they've got to knock a doorway through; I had no idea it was going to be something like that. So that was a case of explaining to the regular worshippers 'This is why it's there, this is how long it's likely to be there, and it's not going to become a permanent feature. [Laughs] But when a building is cherished and loved people rightly think that if somehow something is disfigured then it's almost a personal thing. And if they come one day and there's a big gash in the wall, or whatever, it's far better that they know beforehand and they know why, and all of that. Interestingly we have a visitors book, and some visitors who have been perhaps 10 or 15 years ago and hadn't realised and some have said 'Gosh not before time', and others have said 'What on earth are you're doing?'. [Laughs] But that's human nature.
91. NW: Aside from the visitors, the folk that you have more pastoral responsibility for, has it thrown up pastoral issues for you?

92. E1: Yes, without any doubt. There are those who with great integrity say 'This cannot be right, spending £3million on ourselves' – I question "on ourselves", but they come at a point of view that we support charities in Africa, where we're actually saving lives; here we are embellishing a building. That's always been an apparent contradiction at the heart of the gospel. That's writ clear in the New Testament, when Jesus said, 'The poor you will have with you always, you won't always have me.' So that's been a challenge, not in a vitriolic way. I think one of the hallmarks of a good Christian community is that you can have these debates and you can argue without it actually becoming divisive. The important thing is that people know they are being listened to and taken seriously, and not dismissed as wacky, or that their opinions don't matter.
93. NW: Going back to the consistory court, that was called; were there official objections from the amenity societies?
94. E1: No there weren't actually; they stopped short. They objected, but they said they would not be party to an official objection to the chancellor. But I think in view of the fact that they objected, and in view of the fact that there were a few – one or two – official objections from residents and, as I said, the sensitivity of the building, the chancellor decided that she would call a consistory court. I think [it was] absolutely the right decision, to get it out in the open, and let people know that it had been thoroughly considered. I mean, her judgment was 80 pages; it was quite a formidable document. But she was in absolutely no doubt that it was for the long term good of the building and didn't in any way detract from its heritage.
95. NW: Have you changed your ideas in any respect, do you think, in the process of seeing this project through?
96. E1: Well, hindsight's a wonderful thing. I often think now, well why didn't we actually... The original plan, which was shelved, was to infill the monastic tower. You're familiar with the disused tower at that [east] end? It's the equivalent height of a 10 storey building, and the idea was, the original scheme, was to infill it to three storeys, and to put a lift in, so we would actually get three more rooms as it were. But as you can imagine that's hideously expensive. And I'm not sure it would have provided us with that much more in terms of facilities, but looking back on the fact that we got the award from HLF does make me now think 'Should we have been even more bold and come up with something even more radical and dramatic?' But hindsight's a wonderful thing, and I'm extremely grateful that we've achieved what we've achieved.
97. NW: What do you think the impact of the project has been and will be when it's finished, in terms of the place that the church has within the community, and also for the church community itself...?
98. E1: Well, for the church community I mean it has created a dynamic of its own really, because whilst we haven't had to directly fundraise in a really concerted effort amongst the congregation, we have approached the congregation and everybody has been given the opportunity to give, and many, many have. But we haven't had to say to them, 'Look, you've *got* to give this, or the whole thing won't work'. We

were fortunate to have got most of the funding externally. But alongside that there's been quite an excitement, as people come week by week to see... I mean it's only this last three weeks that the scaffolding has come down on this [north] side, and people can see a bit more. And I have no doubt that when it comes down on the other side, and even more so once the doors are open and people can go in they'll be absolutely delighted. So that has had a spin off among the congregation, that there is a good feeling. The town, I think, it's difficult; it depends who you talk to. The older residents of Wymondham, who've known the abbey all their lives, I think are actually quite proud that Wymondham as a town has got this money, albeit it's going to enhance the building itself, the abbey. There is a feeling, certainly amongst the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Council, that inevitably this will be good for the town, because more tourists will come. Incidentally we took the decision very early on, and it was exactly the right thing to do, we would not build a refectory because we want people, when they've been here, to go and enjoy the town, and spend a bit of money in the cafés and what have you. We have a shop, we do, but the stuff we sell in the shop wouldn't be available in the town anyway, because it's mostly church-based stuff. So there is a feeling amongst the businesses that this is inevitably going to be good for Wymondham. And the local steam railway that brings people, more people, and we're looking at putting some sort of tie up with them so that when a trainload of people come, nearly all holiday makers, they will come here...

99. NW: Yes, you're the first stop on their tour as it were...

100. E1: Yes. So there's a lot of that, a lot of interconnectedness. In terms of what I call the dormitory residents, the newer estates are almost exclusively occupied by people who don't live or relate to Wymondham. As part of the pre-application process we had to do a lot of canvassing and surveying, and interestingly talking to people on the new estates, some didn't even know the abbey was here, and didn't know what it was. A lot of them thought, 'Oh, it's an ancient monument, and it doesn't do anything, it's just a lump of stone.' Those people tend to relate to Norwich or Cambridge; they don't shop in Wymondham, they see no reason to come to Wymondham, they might come to Waitrose, or down the road to Sainsbury's, but wouldn't actually come into the town itself. So for them, it's not on their radar. That I think in itself is quite a sobering thought for us, because it made us think 'Well what does that say about our mission, leaving aside the building?' And how, if we can, how can we relate to these people, who simply come home to sleep, and work and leisure is elsewhere? But that is a challenge for any market town.

101. NW: If you were to do this a second time around, would you do anything differently?

102. E1: [Laughs] No, I don't think I would really. The key was getting these consultants on board early; that was an absolute vital...

103. NW: And where did the idea for that come from? How did you identify the need? Because lots of people wouldn't identify that as a need, I imagine.

104. E1: I think the steering group as a whole did. We were going round in circles a bit and not knowing how to sort of break through the morass of red tape, and getting the application in and getting it right.
105. NW: The HLF application?
106. E1: Yes. We knew the thing would never have got off the ground without HLF money. Absolutely, categorically. And we knew if we didn't get HLF money that it was a complete non-starter, and we realised that to apply to HLF actually was a skill that we did not have, even down to the wording of the application. Because you don't get a form and say tick this box, put a cross in this box, and sign at the bottom. You actually have to in manuscript make your case.
107. NW: You need to tell a story.
108. E1: Tell the story, against the criteria that obviously they expect. But not only do you have to tell the story, but you have to tell it in the right language. And once we realised that, we realised we couldn't do that. We knew what we wanted, and we knew how to talk about it, but we didn't know how to put it in a way which would find favour with HLF. And the consultancy was absolutely key to that. And significantly we've had a number of churches who have come to visit us like you have and I think if they've gone away with any message it's that one: you cannot do this on your own.
109. NW: That's very helpful. Lastly, I suppose in reflecting on it, thinking of the process of changing a profoundly historic place like this, if you could change one thing about that process, is there anything you would change?
110. E1: Well ideally the timescale, the time in which it takes to get everybody on board and the permissions. But having said that, the timescale has enabled us to revisit certain aspects of the project which initially we thought were absolutely right but in hindsight and with a second pair of eyes, it wasn't a case of 'No, no, no', it was a case of 'Yes, but have you considered that'. And that was immensely valuable.
111. NW: So the time allows for an enrichment I suppose...
112. E1: It does
113. NW: ...or a refinement...
114. E1: Yes it does.
115. NW: The danger I suppose is particularly where a project depends upon one or two key people. As you've said, people move through churches; I mean you might have been appointed somewhere else, or something, so that makes the whole thing less achievable, a much bigger deal, the timescale.
116. E1: Yes it does, but there's also the risk that the one or two committed people who've been in on it from the beginning become so fixated that they're not prepared to consider any variation. I've seen that happen, not here [but] in another project in London in my last parish, people develop ownership of it, and then if a new group come along because other people have moved on, they say 'Well you don't understand anyway, you weren't in on it five years ago when we started talking about it'. So you can get the wrong sort of drive and ownership which doesn't

allow for any variation as the thing develops. I mean only – it was a lovely variation – but only a month ago we decided... originally there was an enormous window facing the east end of the abbey going out onto the graveyard which was going to cost about £30,000 and because we were really tight for money we scrapped it; we said, 'No, we can't afford a £30,000 window'. And then we got some VAT back which we weren't expecting, so the project treasurer said, 'What about the window?'. So we said to the architect, 'Yep, we'll have the window.' And the builders only a month ago started to knock through an old archway and they found some thirteenth century graffiti...

117. NW: Interesting.

118. E1: ...which will now become part of the tour. So you have to be flexible, and you can't say, 'Here's the plan, and in 5 years time what's on this paper will be built.' Because that's not how it happens, or certainly it's not how it has happened here.

119. NW: It's a bit more like a conversation...

120. E1: It is.

121. NW: ...with a building which has its own ideas.

122. E1: Absolutely, absolutely. And I know they're top of the tree, but I'm amazed at the way the architects have managed to put something so radically modern onto a wall which isn't even straight. I mean clearly the technical expertise in doing something like that is considerable. But I'm very pleased that the decision was taken very early on not to mimic the flint and the stone and make it look almost as though it was here all the time. What's there will make a statement. Whilst it is sympathetic to its surroundings it's not trying to mimic them.

123. NW: Thank you Father Christopher. I think we've probably got to the end of our time.

124. E1: OK. Well I'm glad to be of help.

125. NW: That is really, really helpful.