

• project

ST DOMINIC'S ORATORY

sway, near lymington, hampshire

By Columba Cook



Exterior view

IN APRIL 1999 a small community of Dominican Sisters of St Joseph moved from St Joseph's House of Prayer in Ashurst to Sway, near Lymington, on the edge of the New Forest.

The heavily extended Edwardian house

into which the Sisters moved, was quickly adapted to suit their life and work. The community is primarily a preaching Order and hosts regular retreats, spiritual formation programmes and the like, for individuals, religious, school and parish groups on

a residential and non-residential basis. From the outset the Sisters realised that the house contained no suitable spaces that could be readily adapted for use as a chapel. Initially one of the ground-floor reception

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Interior view

• From page 20

rooms was used for this purpose and additional temporary chapel facilities were provided in a large garden shed in the grounds. At the end of 1999, I was commissioned as architect for the new chapel. My Christchurch-based practice specialises in church architecture, liturgical design and building conservation. Initial designs were

produced showing an extension to the house in a Victorian style, however, the Sisters settled on a free-standing building away from the main house in a traditional style and with traditional materials more akin to its forest environment. In exploring different possibilities, the Sisters were particularly impressed by the lovely oak-framed Anglican Benedictine chapel at Elmore, near Newbury, featured in the May/June 1996

issue of *Church Building*. Planning permission for the chapel was obtained in August 2000.

The final plan of the building was cruciform in shape with the entrance lobby, sacristy and ancillary rooms housed in the two centrally positioned transepts. A small belfry was located at first floor level in the south transept and is used to call the community to prayer. Whitechapel Bell Foundry cast the bell, which was installed by Matthew Higby and Co Ltd of Chilcompton, Somerset and dedicated to Sr Dominic OP, one of the Sisters of the community, who sadly died before seeing the chapel completed. The choir seating is arranged antiphonally with additional processional seating provided for guests and visitors at the liturgical west end. The quality of light in the chapel is particularly fine, high level windows on three sides of the east end, delicately raise lighting levels over the sanctuary emphasising the importance of the space. The acoustics of the chapel also work surprisingly well.

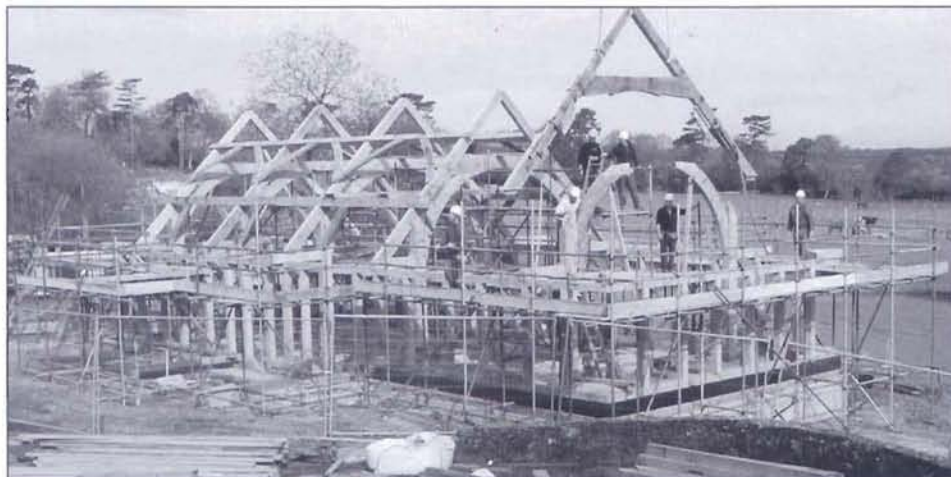
The chapel is used at least five times a day for the Divine Office, as well as for Mass and other services. The first service to be held in the chapel was the 2002 Christmas midnight Mass.

The chapel was formally dedicated on 9 July 2003 by the Rt Revd Crispian Hollis, Bishop of Portsmouth, when Mass was concelebrated by 30 priests from as far afield as America.

The oak frame of the building was constructed by Carpenter, Oak and Woodland Ltd of Chippenham to their usual high standard using traditional timber framing techniques and pegged joints throughout. To overcome problems of oak shrinkage, movement and insulation, the external frame was constructed with a cavity. The oak frame has been left exposed to weather naturally, the panels were finished inside and out with a self-coloured hydraulic lime render. The roof was clad with plain clay tiles and copper rainwater goods completed the ensemble.

Hardwood doors and window frames were supplied by Stock Deutsche Fenster GmbH and the floor was finished throughout with two types of stone from Haysom's Quarry on the Isle of Purbeck. Downsvein was used for the main areas of floor while the steps, ramp and ambo projection were emphasised in the darker Grub stone. Underfloor heating is used throughout.

F & S Noble Ltd from New Milton acted as main contractors for the project. Peter Rathbone and Partners of Christchurch undertook the quantity surveying and the structural engineering was carried out by



Set of principle rafters being lowered into place



St Julie OP managing operations

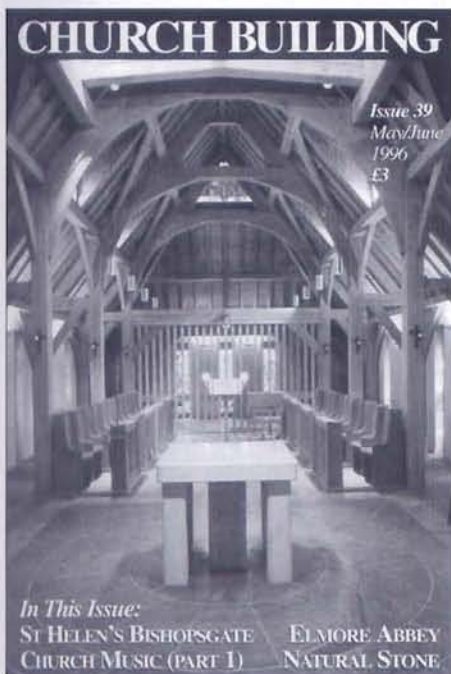
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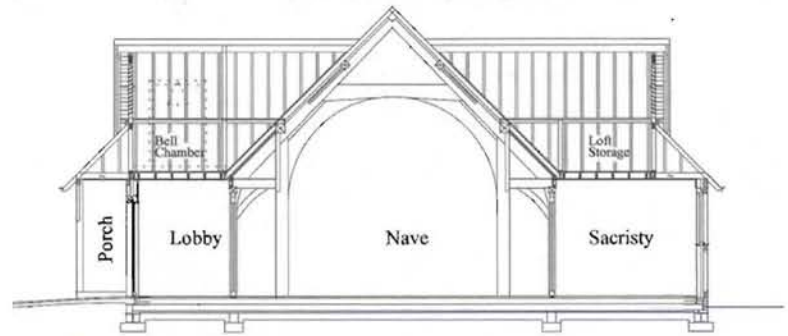
Work progresses in the New Forest

I W Payne and Partners of Romsey. The prioress, St Margarita OP, energised and inspired the whole project and Sr Julie OP acted as liaison for the Sisters. The community was very involved in every aspect of the building from fundraising to the selection of all the materials, fixtures and furnishings.

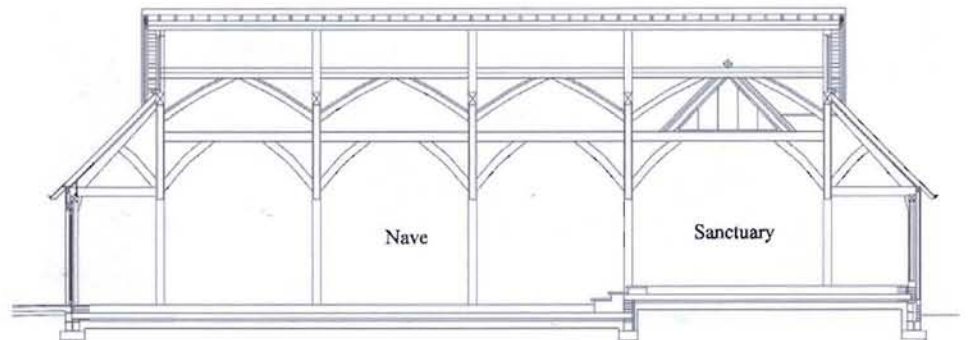
New churches or chapels are sadly comparatively rare, as are oak framed buildings; both are a joy for any architect to work on. But the greatest pleasure for me is to have had this special community as a client. Their joy and hospitality, a clear product of their deep faith, is legendary in the New Forest and beyond; and their total trust in the providence of God and the generosity of His people, is an inspiring lesson to any parish or community considering building or renovating a sacred space. •



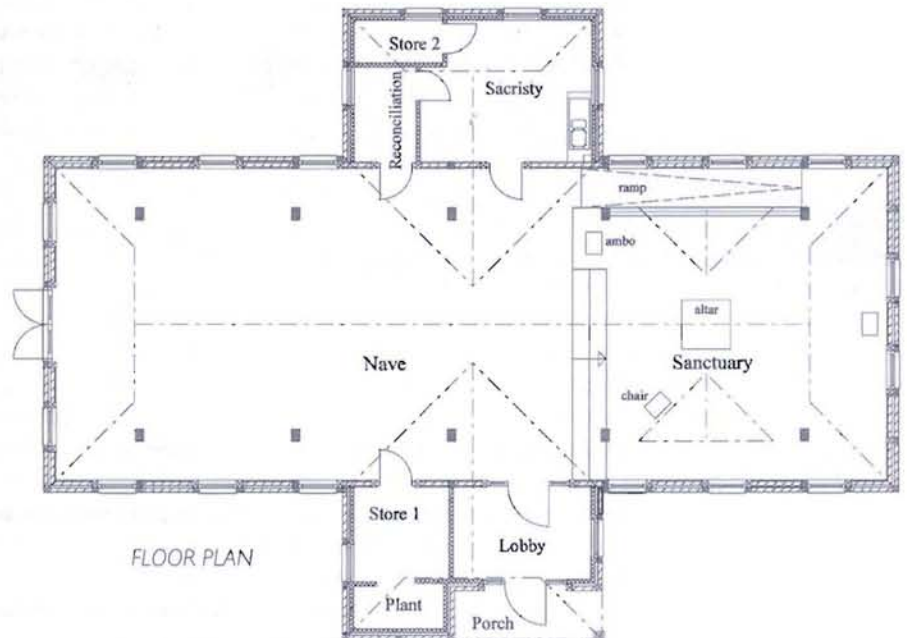
The cover of Church Building (Issue 39, May 1996) featured the Anglican Benedictine chapel at Elmore, near Newbury which impressed the Dominican Sisters of St. Joseph



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