

# COYCHURCH CREMATORIUM

## 2019/20

### New Dispersal Cloister

#### *Architects Summary Design Statement, May 2019*

Wales has only a very small number of post-war listed buildings, and Coychurch Crematorium is among the most important of them. The design of the new dispersal cloister has to achieve a careful balance. It should not be designed to appear as if it is part of the original modernist structure, because it is important that the original building can still be easily distinguished from the parts that are added to it.

When we deal with much older heritage buildings this is easily achieved by using modern materials and details. But for a modern building like Coychurch Crematorium we can only do it by using a contemporary form of structure which takes important cues from the existing building, but which is also distinct from it.

The existing dispersal cloister is a simple flat, concrete roof supported on a row of slender concrete columns. It was originally open to the elements along the south elevation. The open side of the cloister was later covered with sheets of translucent plastic to protect family and friends from wind and rain. It is an outdoor space, but also a sheltered space. The new dispersal cloister has been designed to continue to perform in this way, but with a larger sheltered area and with glass weather screens along the south side which provide an opportunity to continue the tradition of high quality glass artwork for which the crematorium is famed.

Because it is primarily a shelter, the most prominent feature of the new dispersal cloister will be its roof. It is the design of the roof that provides the opportunity to create the distinct architectural language that will differentiate the new structure from the original building. The roof uses a very traditional 'vault' shape that is familiar from historic religious buildings of different faiths. The dome-like forms are known as 'handkerchief vaults', because they resemble a sheet held down at its four corners while the crown rises up in the centre. In simple terms it is the shape that is produced when a dome is placed over a square space.

The patterns of domes that we have proposed is based on the spacing of the columns that support the existing dispersal cloister roof. In effect we have made a grid pattern from the structural grid of the existing building. This links the design of the new structure closely to the original. The roof of the new cloister has to be a little higher than the roof of the existing cloister, so that the new roof can overlap the existing roof and give good weather protection.

The domes are built from hardwood frames. The curve of the individual timber arches helps to emphasise the dome shapes. The spaces in the frame are covered with sheets of cream-white glass. These glass sheets will be hand made by a Swansea-based company connected to the architectural glass department of UWTSD. This will maintain the connection with Swansea Art College, which produced most of the stained glass in the original building. The dome forms have ancient precedents but are built using distinctive contemporary techniques. The curves of the roof also provide a counterpoint to the flat roof surfaces of the original building. The structure will embody the spiritual and modern characteristics of the original building. It will complement the existing building while still being distinct from it.

Some of the elements of the new design are deliberately designed to echo features of the original building. For example the new columns that support the new roof are designed to match the columns under the existing dispersal cloister roof, and the stonework on the low walls and in the floor of the cloister will use the same types of stone that were used in the original building, laid in a similar pattern.

There are only a few changes proposed to the original building. The first of these is the removal of the low stone wall that runs along the south side of the existing cloister. This is the wall that the plastic sheets are fixed to. This wall has been substantially remodelled already. We do not anticipate that there will be any difficulty in obtaining agreement of the conservation authorities to remove it.

The second proposed intervention may require a more detailed case to be made. This is the idea of adding a second exit door through the east wall of Capel Crallo, to make it easier for friends and family to leave the chapel at the end of the service. The proposal is to lower the cill level of one of the existing windows down to floor level, so that it can be used as a doorway. There are six windows in the east wall of the chapel. The window at the end of the row, nearest to the back of the chapel, would be made into the new doorway. The window opening cannot be made any wider, and it is not quite wide enough for a door to be set into the opening. For this reason we have proposed that it is left as a simple rectangular opening, and that the exit door is set into a glass lobby built onto the outside of the chapel wall. The glazing of this lobby is designed in the same form as the glass weather screens, and would be incorporated into the same overall glass art work. Because it involves a physical alteration to the principal space of Capel Crallo, we should expect that potentially lengthy dialogue will be required with the conservation authorities in order to obtain their approval for this change. However, if it proves too difficult or too costly to obtain approval for a new door opening in the chapel wall the proposed enlargement will still greatly improve the comfort and the efficiency of the dispersal cloister, and add a beautiful new space that will provide a suitable, uplifting conclusion to chapel services.