



An 800-year-old church, devastated by fire, is reimagined with modern timber structure and sensitivity, blending heritage preservation with contemporary renewal

Location: Ropley, Hampshire

Architect: Alexander Design Architects

Contractor: Reside Construction



Place of Workshop / Glulam timber / Heritage / Rebuild

Context and Vision

After a catastrophic fire in 2014 destroyed the roof and timber bell tower, this 800-year-old parish church faced an uncertain future. The project's vision was not just to rebuild, but to create a more open, adaptable space with a modern extension supporting worship, gatherings, and local events. The challenge lay in balancing restoration with renewal—protecting the church's medieval identity while introducing a contemporary design language and modern performance.

Engineering Approach

As structural and civil engineers, AWA were first on site after the fire, assessing and securing the remaining fabric. Retained for the full design and construction stages, we developed a reinforced concrete raft foundation to support new long-spanning glulam rafters, ensuring no additional loads were transferred to fragile historic walls. A new steel bell tower was carefully inserted within surviving timber, preserving original material while providing strength for future bell reinstatement. Discoveries of graves and irregular wall geometry demanded responsive design thinking and collaboration with archaeologists, architects, and contractors.

Delivery and Legacy

The reconstructed church reopened as a renewed landmark — uniting medieval craftsmanship with modern engineering. It now serves as a welcoming, flexible community hub, celebrating resilience, heritage, and innovative design working in harmony.

