

Article

Masonry key to Church of the Redeemer's bell ringing again

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After years of being silent, the bell at the historic Church of the Redeemer in downtown Toronto will soon be ringing again.



Approximately 15 years ago church officials ordered the bell couldn't be rung because they feared the vibrations would aggravate the fragile state of the tower that houses it.

Now the tower and a good part of the masonry walls are being given new life by [Clifford Restoration Limited](#) and heritage consultant [E.R.A. Architects](#).

Underway since May and scheduled to be completed in late September/early October, the project includes replacing or repairing several wall stones, a complete rebuild of the arches and the installation of new cross assemblies on the bell tower, plus a considerable amount of non-masonry interior work.

That, however, has not been an easy task. Located on Bloor Street, one of the busiest streets in Toronto, the building is overlooked and surrounded on two sides by a condominium. In the early 1980s, the developers of the condominium purchased the air rights, resulting in the church's footprint being right on the property line. This means there is no lay down area for materials and supplies, says Clifford project manager Alessandria Trigila.

"All deliveries have to be from the street and that can only be done from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m."

An early challenge was obtaining a comprehensive understanding of what work was needed.

"We didn't know what to expect," says Trigila of an initial investigation conducted by Clifford and the architects.

Although there had been a number of interim parging of the stones over the years, there had never been a complete restoration, she explains.

The study revealed that 31 stones on the walls of the 1879 structure would have to be replaced, while others would have to be repointed or repaired. Most of that work had been completed by early August.

Another aspect of the wall restoration was the removal of the glazing on the stain glass windows.

"The glazing was supposed to protect the windows. But it trapped condensation and moisture inside."

Clifford is now in the process of developing a protective screening. As for the windows, they're in good shape, although their wood frames did require some repairs and repainting, she says.

In early September, the contractor began the most complicated component of the exterior masonry restoration — the dismantling and eventual reconstruction of the bell tower.

Consisting of north- and south-facing arches and two large cross assemblies, the tower had to be taken down to the top of the arches "which were so deteriorated they just popped out."

Using an 80-ton tower crane over a week-long period, Clifford workers removed the cross assemblies and 22 arch pieces of various sizes, the largest weighing three-quarters of a ton. This was a carefully sequenced procedure which had to be conducted on weekdays to avoid weekend festivals, as well as coordinating with the church to ensure the operation would not clash with weddings and other events, she says.

"Our compliments to the Toronto Police Service paid duty officers who did a great job ensuring pedestrian safety. Their contribution to all construction projects tends to be overlooked."

New arch stones and cross assemblies, which were fabricated by Traditional Cut Stone, were slated to be installed either the last week of September or first week of October. There were 22 separate arch pieces, with an average weight of approximately 550 pounds, she says.

As the bell tower was being dismantled and reconstructed, a series of fine tuning adjustments to the bell were made by campanologist John Scott, principal of ScotiaBell Inc., a Waterdown, Ont. firm that installs and services church and other bells.

This included cleaning the journal bearings the yolk sits in, properly aligning and securing the clapper, and installing a new rope.

"The bell is actually in great shape. Bells are like fine pieces of crystal. Either they ring or they don't," says Scott.

If everything proceeds according to plan, the bell will be rung sometime in October, says church project manager Peter Tovell, a retired architect.

Designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, the Church of the Redeemer is not facing the fate of many other churches in downtown Toronto, which have either been demolished or converted into other uses because of dwindling membership, he says.

"We have a growing congregation."

The project currently underway is the second the church has undertaken to meet its needs and a third is also planned, adds Tovell.

Photo



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