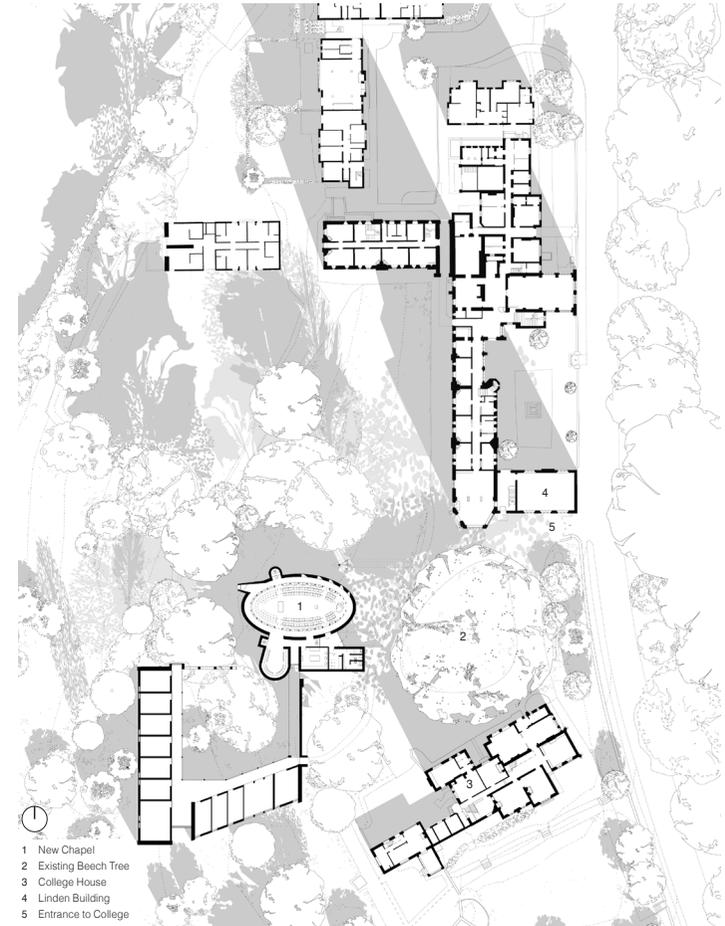




View of Main Entrance from Beech Tree



Site Plan



Christ asleep on the Sea of Galilee

Lightnings: VIII

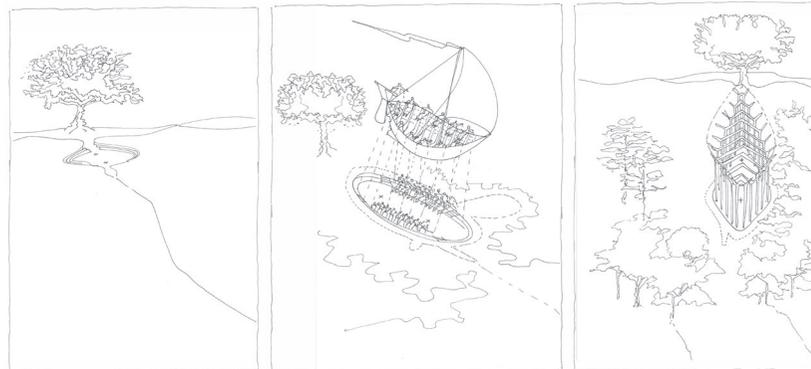
*The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
Were all at prayers inside the oratory
A ship appeared above them in the air.*

*The anchor dragged along behind so deep
It hooked itself into the altar rails
And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,*

*A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
'This man can't bear our life here and will drown.'*

*The abbot said, 'Unless we help him.' So
They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.*

Seamus Heaney, *Lightnings:VIII*



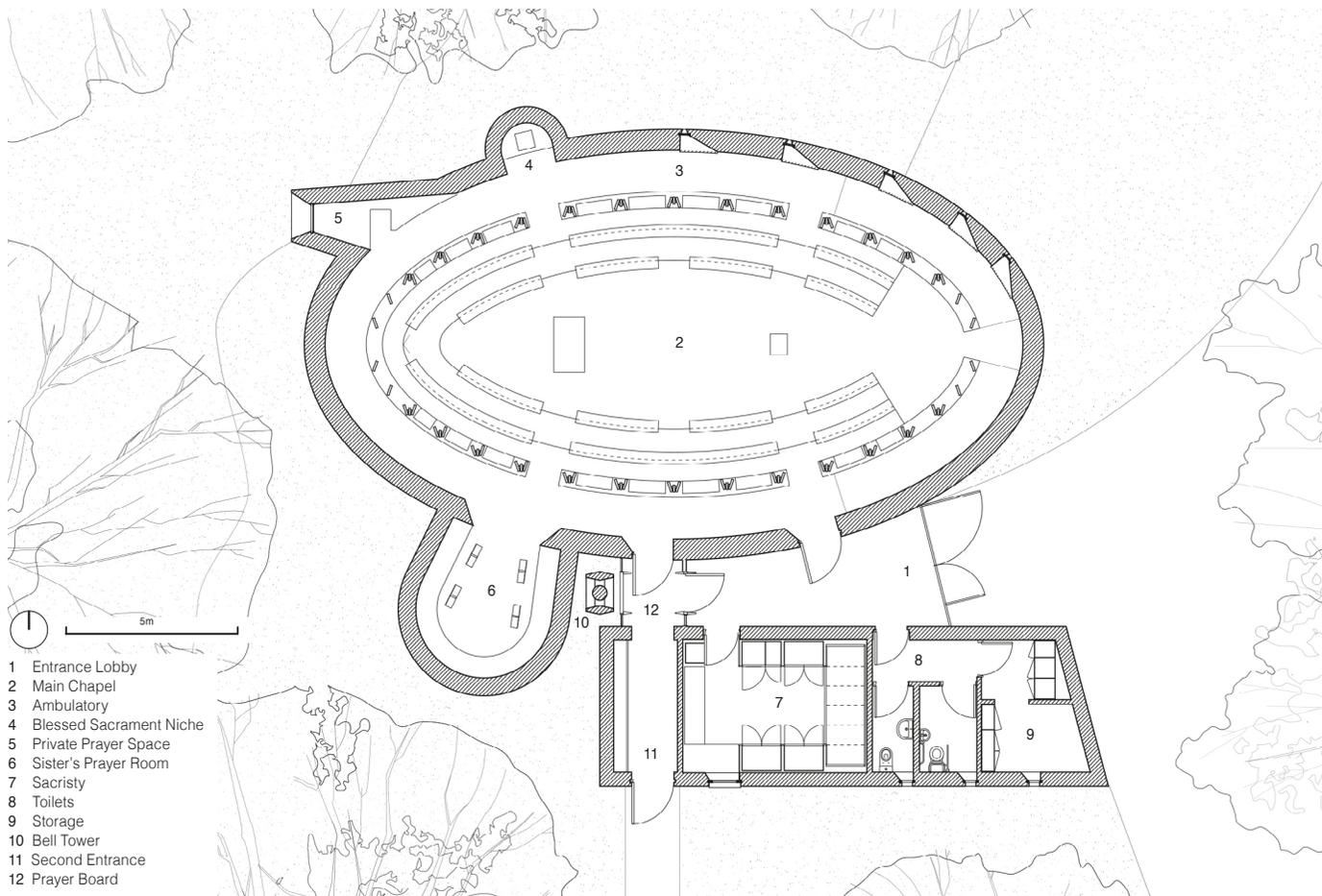
Concept sketches: the nave, the gathering, the clearing

Bishop Edward King Chapel

Niall McLaughlin Architects

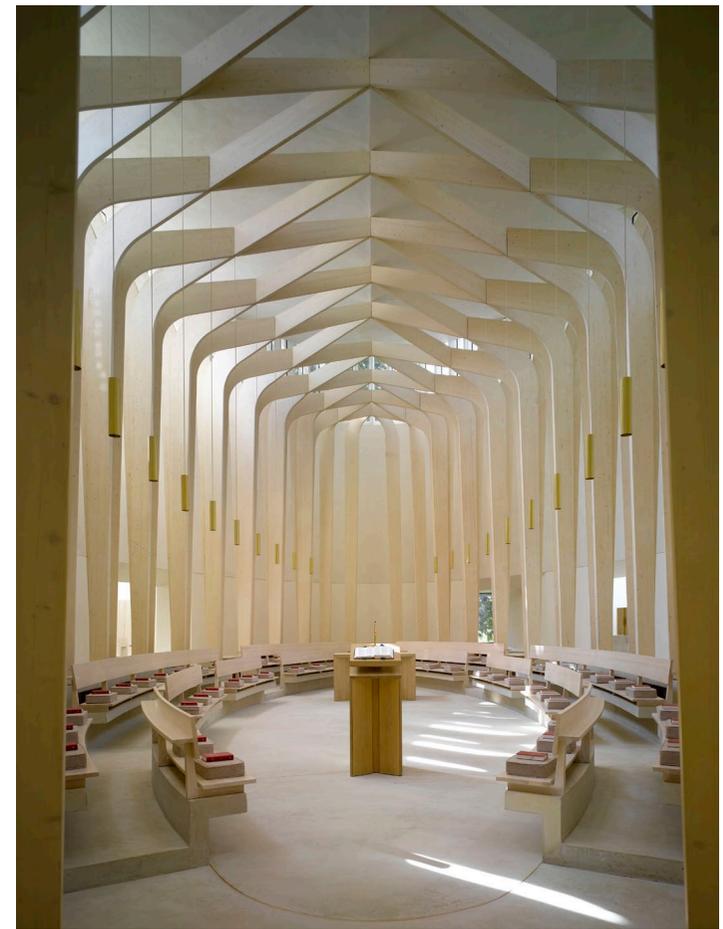
The practice was commissioned to design a new chapel for Ripon Theological College in Cuddesdon, after winning an RIBA competition in 2009. The clients for the project were the college itself and a small community of nuns resident on the site, the Sisters of Begbroke. The chapel replaces the existing one, designed by George Edmund Street in the late nineteenth century, which had since proved to be too small for the current needs of the college.

The brief asked for a chapel that would accommodate the range of worshipping needs of the two communities in an antiphonal seating arrangement, and would be suitable for both communal gatherings and personal prayer. In addition the brief envisioned a separate space for the Sisters to recite their offices, a spacious sacristy, and the necessary ancillary accommodation. Over and above these outline requirements, the brief set out the clients' aspirations for the chapel, foremost as 'a place of personal encounter with the numinous' that would enable the occupants to think creatively about the relationship between space and liturgy. The client summarised their aspirations for the project with Philip Larkin's words from his poem *Church Going*, 'A serious house on serious earth it is... which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in...'



- 1 Entrance Lobby
- 2 Main Chapel
- 3 Ambulatory
- 4 Blessed Sacrament Niche
- 5 Private Prayer Space
- 6 Sister's Prayer Room
- 7 Sacristy
- 8 Toilets
- 9 Storage
- 10 Bell Tower
- 11 Second Entrance
- 12 Prayer Board

Ground Floor Plan



The interior of the main chapel space

On the site is an enormous beech tree on the brow of the hill. Facing away from the beech and the buildings behind, there is a ring of mature trees on high ground overlooking the valley that stretches away towards Garsington. This clearing has its own particular character, full of wind, light and the rustling of leaves. Our design sought to capture these qualities within the building.

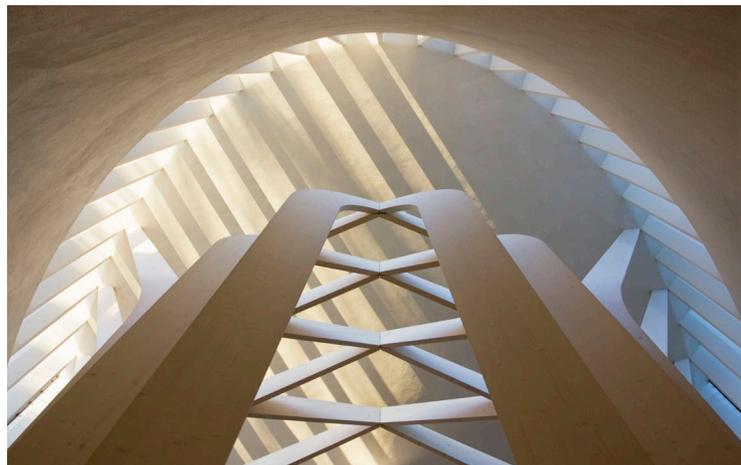
The starting point for this project was the hidden word 'nave' at the centre of Seamus Heaney's poem *Lightenings viii*. The word describes the central space of a church, but shares the same origin as 'navis', a ship, and can also mean the still centre of a turning wheel. From these words, two architectural images emerged. The first is the hollow in the ground as the meeting place of the community, the still centre. The second is the delicate ship-like timber structure that floats above in the tree canopy, the gathering place for light and sound.

We used the geometry of the ellipse to reflect the idea of the exchange between perfect and imperfect at the centre of Christian thought. To construct an ellipse the stable circle is played against the line, which is about movement back and forth. The movement inherent in the geometry is expressed in the chapel through the perimeter ambulatory. It is possible to walk around the chapel, looking into the brighter space in the centre. The sense of looking into an illuminated clearing goes back to the earliest churches. We made a clearing to gather in the light.

The chapel, seen from the outside, is a single stone enclosure. We have used Clipsham stone which is sympathetic, both in terms of texture and colour, to existing limestone buildings nearby. The external walls are of insulated cavity construction, comprising of a curved reinforced blockwork internal leaf and dressed stone outer leaf.



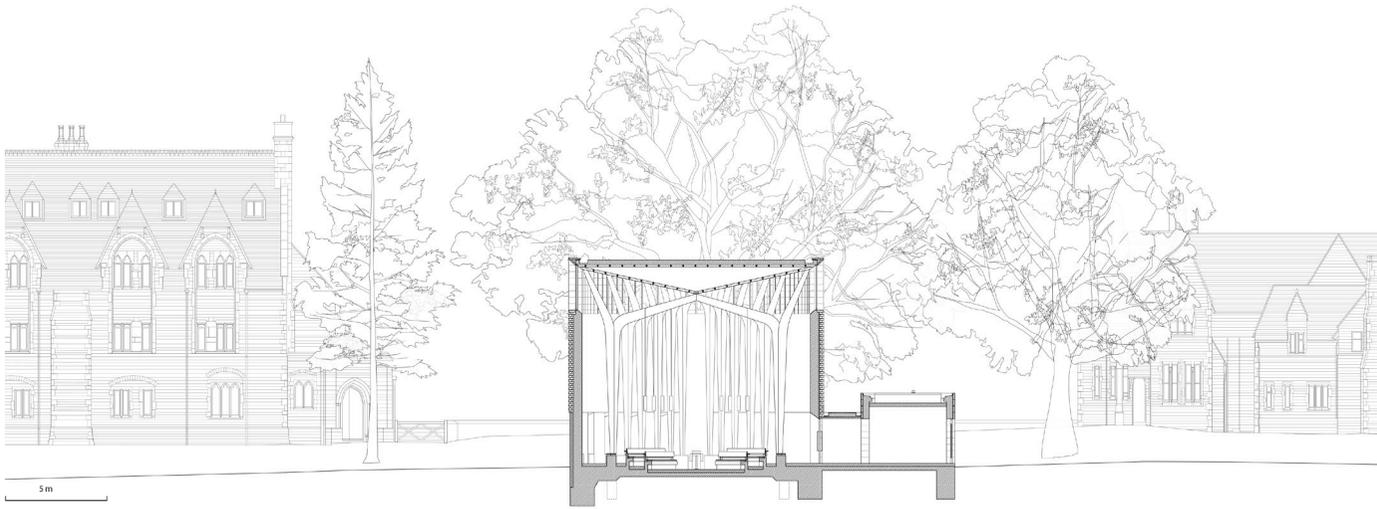
The ceiling of the main chapel space



View of the lime plaster ceiling

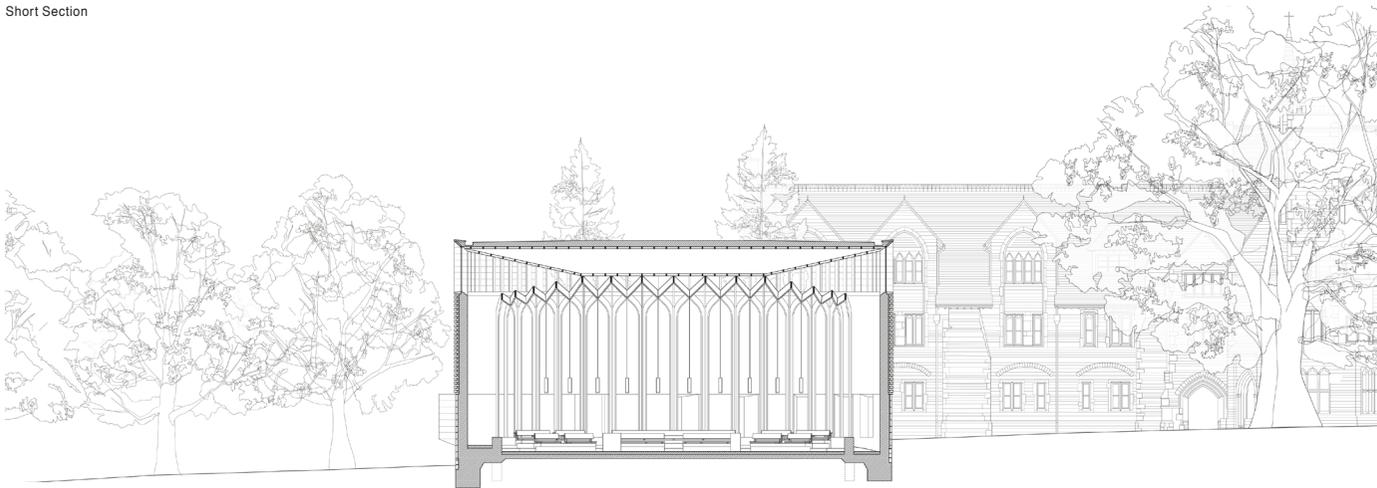


The timber glulam structure above the ambulatory



5 m

Short Section



5 m

Long Section



Clerestory stone fins



Dog-tooth stonework



View into the Private Prayer Space and Blessed Sacrament Niche



The bell tower seen from underneath the beech tree

The base of the chapel and the ancillary structures are clad in ashlar stone laid in regular courses. The upper section of the main chapel is dressed in cropped walling stone, laid in a dog-tooth bond to regular courses. The smooth ashlar stone of the base contrasts with the strongly textured appearance of the middle section which is dressed in cropped walling stone laid in a dog-tooth bond. The chapel wall is surmounted by a halo of natural stone fins. The fins sit in front of high-performance double glazed units, mounted in concealed metal frames.

The internal timber structure is constructed of prefabricated Glulam sections with steel fixings and fully concealed steel base plate connections. The sections are made up of visual grade spruce laminations treated with a two-part stain system, which gives a light white-washed finish. The structure of roof and columns express the geometrical construction of the ellipse itself, a ferrying between centre and edge with straight lines that reveals the two stable foci at either end, reflected in the collegiate layout below in the twin focus points of altar and lectern. As you move around the chapel there is an unfolding rhythm interplay between the thicket of columns and the simple elliptical walls beyond. The chapel can be understood as a ship in a bottle, the hidden 'nave'.

In the centre of the space the community sit facing each other, their seats bowing slightly around the curve of the ellipse. At one end is the lectern and at the other is the altar. The clearing is laid out around the Word and the Eucharist. The furniture is designed to suit the collegiate form and to be used in other arrangements for different forms of worship.