

Hadlow Tower – Exceptional Craftsmanship

Hadlow Tower, Kent, is the tallest and most flamboyant neo-Gothic prospect tower in Britain. This unique Grade I listed building languished on the Buildings at Risk Register from 1998. A campaign to save the tower was started by the local village community, known as the Save Hadlow Tower Action Group. With the help of a Compulsory Purchase Order, The Vivat Trust and major funding donations, including from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the tower's full restoration finally came to fruition in April 2013. The project won two English Heritage Angel Awards in 2013.



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The tower is built of brick with the lower levels being rendered in hydraulic lime mortar and the upper levels in Roman Cement, with decorative elements pre-cast in Roman Cement. Roman Cement, a product used to mimic stone, is no longer available in this country and has not been used here since the 1930s. However, to authentically restore the tower, The Vivat Trust reintroduced the product to the UK. Extensive trials and testing had to be carried out prior to works commencing in order to secure the correct characteristics and colours of the cement and ensure it could be successfully fixed to the existing building. The chosen material was Vicat Prompt which had to be imported from

Grenoble, France, where it has been produced since 1817. It was mixed with brown dust from Oxfordshire Horton Brown limestone to give the correct colour effect.

Vicat Prompt is a very fast setting and exceptionally hard material, but one which is porous to the elements so allows the building to breath, and is perfect for creating a multitude of pre-cast shapes such as the spiralets that adorn the lantern. Due to it no longer being in use in the UK, personnel from Vicat initially came over to Hadlow, not just to bring materials and work on the folly, but to effectively retrain the craftsmen of contractors Mansells and specialist sub-contractor PAYE Stonework in their own skill base to adapt to 19th century techniques and materials. In keeping with the original construction, intricate pre-cast units were manufactured to replace missing and damaged items. Approximately 2000 individual pieces were produced making up finials, rosettes, pinnacles and splashes. The completed works perfectly demonstrate the level of skill and expertise required of the traditional craftsmen in carrying out authentic (and unique) restoration projects. Training sessions in the use of the material were also run on the site for interested parties, including professionals, local amateurs and school children. The quality of the work carried out and the cement material used means the tower should now be secure for at least another 100-150 years with minimal maintenance required.