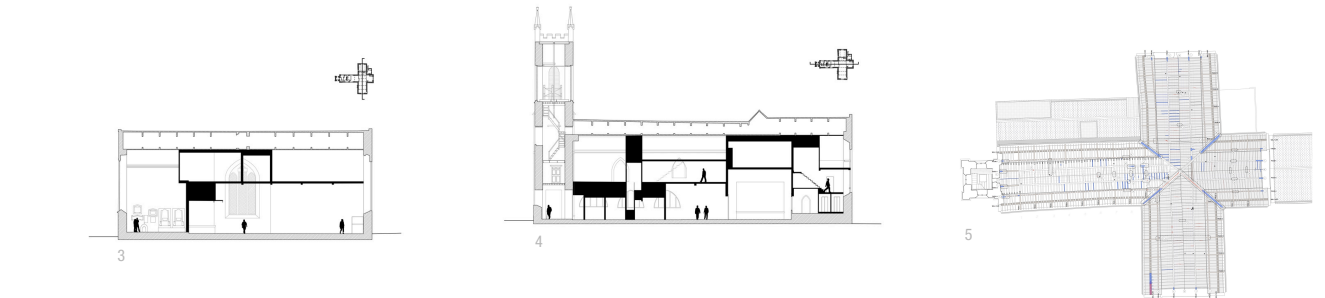
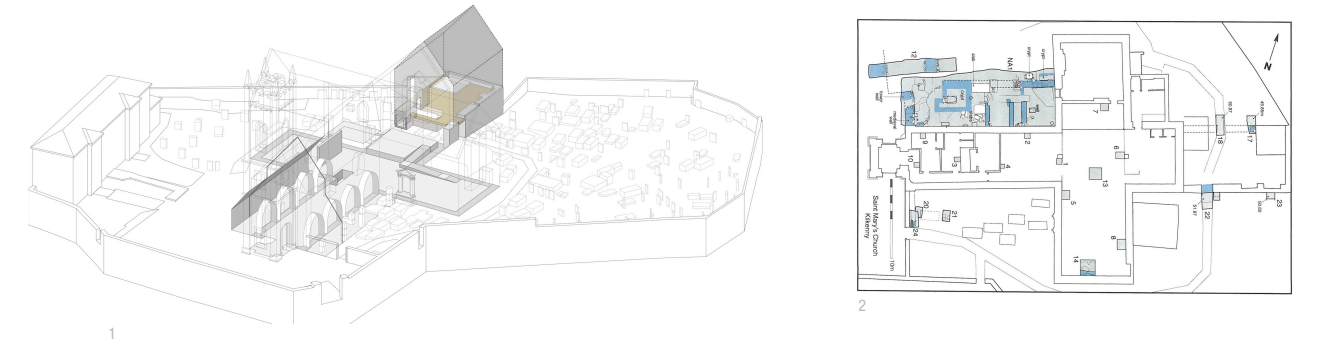


St Mary's Church Museum in Kilkenny was quite different- not an idea but an immediate truth, a stony church, very real, very material. It required a combination of abstract consideration with careful survey and patient looking, seeking possible truths in architecture and construction unavailable to the academic eye. The resulting architecture follows the idiosyncrasies of the fabric and builds on them, but grows out of its character- like moss or lichen on a stone; new ideas come out of close adherence without seeking banal modern requirements to 'resolve' or 'reveal' the enigma of age. The church was clearly very old, a layered monument; there were pieces from many ages, odd angles, remnants of medieval windows; the interior was filled with rooms, an Alice-like fantasy of suspended chambers. The North transept had been walled off to create a Monument Room. It had clearly once been bigger and had been reduced by selective demolition; there was a ruined chancel and blocked-up nave aisles. Analysis included dimensioned drawings, archaeology, history and simple observation. Church and castle had been founded by one man in the early 13th century. Walking around, it became clear there was a strong visual link between them; perhaps William Marshall looked from his castle windows at the church as his 'memento mori'. This sense of the church as a monument with specific meaning grew when it was surveyed; re-adding the dimension of the original chancel, the cruciform shape was nearly symmetric - a perfect object- a completely intentional medieval idea. The church was taken 'as found'- there was little attempt (apart from the removal of the 1960's floors) to recreate a perfect original- the place had evolved; changes were simply more evolution within that tradition. A 'hole' in the ceiling at the crossing where the plaster ceiling was missing was left in situ, revealing the most dramatic part of the roof timberwork. The sides of the wall separating the Monument Room were cut down to allow passage; the side towards the crossing was re-used to hang further monuments, creating an intriguing spatial compmexity. The floor was renewd in Kilkenny Limestone l pattern like the patterns of old tombs found on church floors; filled with services and glass sections to display archaeology it became a singular intervention in its own right, set away from the old walls and turning up to form a ramp in the South transept. New steelwork stairs gave access to the tower; a balcony at the top was answered by another in the side of the chancel. The rest of the interior was a careful calculation of colours and materials, plaster, timber and stonework. New work built on the survey knowledge and historical consciousness of the place, trying to create interventions which were 'of' the church, which were contemporary in nature. In its original form, St Mary's had acquired depth and complexity in monuments and nave aisles, elements which were later shorn off, the aisles removed, the chancel demolished- a shape expanding and contracting, already through a violent cycle of change. To add to the church, the low walls of the areas which had been removed were re-harnessed as foundations for new extensions, reconstructing the the North aisle and chancel to the original plan but a different materiality of timber and lead. The lead was used for its quality of material weight, density and colour- it had affinities with the stone, varied when wet and in sunlight, but had a malleable quality - and an intensity of detail- which was quite unlike the original masonry. The new elements - heavy holograms- restore something of the spatial complexity of the original building and release a dynamic series of fixed and moving views through windows, screens and old arches. The new chancel room overlooks the town, re-establishing its dominant form in the urban landscape; the space beneath it becomes a tomb-filled undercroft observed through a glazed floor; the new room is visible through the original East window from the nave; rooflights in the aisles are directed down through the floor to levels of archaeology below. Being about observation, looking at and looking through, being a still and moving eye, using archaeology as agenerator of Ideas - the project is part of the office's ongiong exploration into the relationship between the past and contemporary architecture.

- 1-Axonometric
- 2-Archeological Survey
- 3-Short section before intervention
- 4-Long section before intervention
- 5-Roof timber survey



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St Mary's Church Museum

Kilkenny, Ireland

Category A

1 - Before intervention