

NEWSLETTER

Bakers of Danbury

Heritage Builders Since 1878

July 2026

Words from the MD...Peter Smyth

Welcome to our Summer 2026 newsletter!

I'm pleased to introduce our latest edition, featuring a selection of project highlights that demonstrate the craftsmanship and care that goes into our work.

This issue covers some of our more unusual projects, including a cast iron staircase, a Grade II listed footbridge, and a historic merchant house that felt like stepping back in time. Work like this relies on traditional skills, quality craftsmanship and exceptional project management, which is why I'm particularly pleased to welcome a number of new starters into our teams.

The best learning happens directly on our live sites, supported by our experienced trades team, site managers and project managers. It's been encouraging to see our new team members settling in well and gaining hands-on experience across our heritage and specialist projects. Their arrival supports our ongoing commitment to growing talent within the business, ensuring we have the skills and capacity to take on increasingly varied and complex projects. This continued sharing of knowledge across our departments plays an important role in maintaining the high standards we're known for.

A further highlight has been our nomination for a National Federation of Builders Award for our work on St Mary's Church, Hitchin, involving the repair of the magnificent Gothic windows. We're incredibly proud to be shortlisted, testament to the skill and dedication of everyone involved.

We hope you enjoy this edition and thank you for your continued support.



HERITAGE | LISTED BUILDINGS | CHURCHES | RESIDENTIAL | NEW BUILDS

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Managing Director Peter Smyth

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PROJECTS IN FOCUS

Church Department...

Restoration of a Victorian Wrought-Iron Fire Escape

Alongside our church restoration and reordering projects, the Church Department has been working on something a little different; restoring a large Grade II listed cast and wrought-iron fire escape staircase. The building dates to 1848, but the staircase itself is Victorian, its ornate metalwork reflecting the Industrial Revolution's influence on design at that time. With scaffolding in place, the staircase has been carefully dismantled and recorded using 3D survey modelling to capture the condition, location and dimensions of each component before tagging and numbering.

Off site, the approach is specialised, involving laboratory analysis and non-destructive testing. The existing lead-based paint has been safely removed using laser cleaning equipment, a chemical-free, eco-friendly alternative to shotblasting. Patterns of the original cast-iron components will be used to produce individual moulds, allowing each type to be replicated for reinstallation. Square hollow steel sections and connections will also be designed and installed within the core of the original cast-iron support columns, providing additional support and meeting current Building Regulations. We are looking forward to the fire escape being restored and serving the purpose it was made for.

Reordering a Grade I Listed Church in Cambridgeshire

Restricted space, restricted access, and a church that never stopped operating was the challenge at All Saints Church, Cottenham, a Grade I listed 15th-century church in Cambridgeshire. This reordering project focused on the west end of the Nave and North Aisle, providing a new kitchen area and an accessible WC, along with a first-floor viewing gallery within the tower. The project included new services, structural alterations, glazing, joinery, flooring and drainage works.

Restricted access made installation of the steelwork particularly challenging, with underlying conditions only visible once the flooring was excavated and the tower's walls opened up. Our team adapted the design and sequencing of works on-site to respond to these findings, keeping the project on track while working carefully around the building's original construction.

Special Works Department...

Repair Programme Underway on Bridge over Chelmsford Waters

It's not all churches and historic buildings as we begin the repair and restoration work to an elegant footbridge crossing the River Can in the heart of Chelmsford's Central Park. Over time, the bridge has deteriorated due to water ingress and the corrosion, cracking and spalling of the concrete. Our works programme includes concrete and stone repairs, repointing and the application of a protective coating.

Ordnance Survey maps show a bridge at this location dating back to 1895. Originally constructed from timber, the bridge fell into disrepair and was replaced in 1954 with a new bridge inspired by Chelmsford's historic Stone Bridge, echoing its curves and decorative balusters. This design earned it Grade II listed status, and with post-war listed buildings being exceptionally rare, accounting for just 0.2% of all listed buildings in England, this makes it a particularly special project to be involved with.

Underpinning and Structural Repairs Save Grade II Listed Farmhouse

A Grade II listed farmhouse, set in 8 acres of land, required a closer look after signs of movement were identified in the original house which is over 100 years old. Geological mapping, tree assessment, drainage survey and desk study were all carried out to provide a detailed understanding of the ground conditions and various factors affecting the building.

Once the issues were understood, the structural repair programme involved underpinning the existing foundations to depths beyond the influence of seasonal moisture variation and root systems of nearby trees, alongside masonry repairs, structural strengthening and crack stitching. This was followed by a full restoration programme including a new roof, replacement timber windows, an air-source heat pump heating system and a full electrical upgrade. A beautiful property to restore.





Major Works Department...

Restoring a Grade II Listed Victorian Almshouse in St Pancras

The Bakers team are working on the restoration of a Grade II listed Victorian almshouse located in the heart of St Pancras. The building has provided housing for local people since 1850, built at a time when almshouses provided shelter for the elderly and those who had fallen on hard times. With 38 self-contained flats and a communal garden, the almshouse provides an important and supportive living environment for residents.

Our work is focused on restoration and improving the energy and thermal efficiency of the properties. This includes the installation of solar panels, an air-source heat pump system, underfloor heating, new insulation and a breathable render system. As with all our projects, protecting and respecting the historic fabric is a key part of this project. With scaffolding in place and roof strengthening underway, the project is already progressing well.

Supporting the Restoration of a Historic Merchant's House in Spitalfields

Bakers of Danbury are pleased to be supporting the early stages of a heritage restoration project in East London's Spitalfields. Working on behalf of the Spitalfields Trust, and alongside Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we have undertaken initial structural repairs to make the building safe and accessible in preparation for further investigations to take place.

Built in 1719 as a merchant's house, in the mid-18th century it became home to Huguenot families, French Protestant refugees, who settled in Spitalfields and were heavily involved in the silk weaving industry. Houses like this were often adapted for their trade, including the addition of a "weavers' garret," a top-floor workspace designed to maximise natural light for operating looms. Entering this building was like stepping back in time with even the original spinning wheels still in place.

Our works focused on timber repairs, addressing areas affected by historic water ingress. This involved exposing defective elements, agreeing appropriate solutions with the project team, and completing repairs with minimal impact on the historic fabric. Wherever possible, original materials were retained, with decayed floor and stair supports repaired or replaced in situ.



Insurance Department...

Keeping Factory Operational Throughout Complex Reinstatement and a Big Welcome!

Our Insurance Department has been busy managing a wide range of claims across Essex and Kent, from fire and flood damage to impact incidents and structural issues, working closely with insurers, loss adjusters and property owners across commercial and residential projects.

A recent project stood out for the scale of co-ordination required when reinstatement works were needed within a live manufacturing facility following an impact damage claim. Time was of the essence which we achieved through detailed sequence planning and efficient co-ordination between our Contracts Manager, site teams, the policyholder and insurers from the outset of the project. The works involved rebuilding sections of damaged external brickwork and internal blockwork with internal and external scaffold systems installed and netted, to create safe working areas for our teams while allowing the factory to continue its day-to-day operations. The project demonstrates the Insurance Department's ability to quickly adapt to changing site conditions and the importance we place on maintaining clear communication with all our stakeholders.

In other news, we're pleased to welcome Sebastian Slaughter back to the team, as he returns to take on the role of Contracts Manager. Based primarily in Kent, Seb will be out on-site managing insurance claim and restoration projects across the region. It's great to have him back on board.

Get in touch...

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OTHER NEWS

What's been in the news at Bakers?



Sandcastle Competition Winners in Frinton

We were delighted to take part in the recent Daniel Connal Sandcastle competition on Frinton beach, with sandcastles and 'digging in' the order of the day. This year's theme was based on a key event from the last 80 years, and the Bakers team opted for Paul the Octopus, who gained fame during the 2010 World Cup for accurately predicting match results. We recreated the prediction with a tentacle placed on the England flag (good luck England!). We're also thrilled to say our team were crowned winners on the day.



Supporting the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

We were delighted to host SPAB Scholars & Fellows, participants on the SPAB Repair of Old Buildings course, at a historic merchant house in Spitalfields, giving them a behind-the-scenes look at our recent repair work. This formed part of SPAB's training programme, running since the 1950s, which introduces participants to the SPAB conservation approach through technical lectures and site visits. It's a society we're glad to have supported for many years, with participants engaged in careers across the conservation sector.



Sponsors of Heritage Construction Event CARE 2026

We were proud to sponsor the CARE Conference 2026 in York, a three-day event focused on conservation engineering and historic building preservation. Highlights included a tour of Temple Works, a Grade I listed former flax mill in Leeds, where sheep once grazed on the grass-covered roof to regulate humidity in the mill. Our Pre-Construction Director, Mark Holland, hosted our exhibition stand, speaking with delegates about our heritage restoration work. We were delighted to support an event celebrating heritage construction expertise.

Hear from our valued partner company Pickford Builders...Insurance Building Repair Specialists

The team at Pickford Builders continue to be busy with insurance-related building repairs with a notable influx of escape of water projects. These have varied from small leak repairs to major pipe bursts requiring extensive strip out and reinstatement.

One such larger project has been an escape of water restoration project to a detached home in rural Suffolk. The project has involved the complete replacement of wall and ceiling plaster, plumbing and electrical services, floor and wall finishes due to a significant escape of water over two floors of the property.

Having now completed and handed over the project, the client has provided their assessment of the repairs giving top marks for all aspects of the repair service, for being kept informed, and the quality and speed of repairs. Pickford Builders were particularly happy to receive this feedback of the site team... 'very impressive building team, hard working, polite and no complaints at all!'

New Starters...

We extend a warm welcome to our new colleagues each bringing their expertise, valuable skills and enthusiasm to their roles across the business.

We welcome Martin Burley (Contracts Manager, Major Works), Seb Slaughter (Contracts Manager, Insurance), and Zak Crafer (Contracts Manager, Church), bringing a wealth of experience essential to the successful delivery of our specialist works. We also welcome Accountant Lilie Smith and Ellie Ashford (Junior Accounts Assistant) to our important finance team.

We're also pleased to support the development of new talent across our onsite teams. Olivia Bull, a qualified Level 2 Bricklayer, is continuing to develop her heritage building skills through involvement in live projects, while Connor Peacock has joined the Church department, bringing his experience and developing his knowledge of building conservation.

What our clients say...

We're proud of the relationships we build. Clients have told us how much they value working with our teams, from the professionalism and care shown by our project and site managers to the flexibility and hard work of our trades team. Our recent project at St Mary's Church, Stebbing, highlights this, with the client praising the team for being safe, considerate, and collaborative, and helping the church's day-to-day life continue with minimum disruption throughout the works.

We're always grateful for feedback, and if you've worked with us recently, we'd love to hear from you. Get in touch to share your experience.