Press Release
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Zinc – the sustainable answer to lead theft

Authoritative sources maintain that stolen lead is bypassing the UK scrap recycling industry and being shipped directly out of the UK. Annual lead sheet consumption in the UK equals that of the rest of Europe so it is not surprising that thieves are targeting buildings as a ready source of cheap material. With 14,500 places of worship formally listed as grade I, II or II* and many more historic buildings at risk, zinc can provide a durable and aesthetically acceptable alternative to lead using a metal which has an excellent record in terms of sustainability and recycling.

Since English Heritage published its Guidance Note on acceptable alternatives to lead on church buildings, VM Zinc has seen an increasing number of enquiries for zinc standing seam and batten roll systems. Pre-weathered Quartz-Zinc® develops a natural, self-protecting patina in much the same way as lead, so much so that it was not uncommon in Victorian times to see zinc used on church roofs. Conservation Officers keen to uphold the historic integrity of buildings can therefore do so in the knowledge that systems are suited to traditional roofing methods while also being far lighter in weight.

Among recent zinc projects is St Mary's Plas Power, in Bersham near Wrexham. Built in the 1870s to a design by John Gibson, a Warwickshire architect with offices in London, it remains in the ownership of the Fitzhugh family and is the last remaining privately maintained chapel in Wales to hold regular services. The Grade II* listed building was built with a zinc sheet roof, the original surviving for over 140 years until, ultimately, it was accepted that thermal movement and repairs carried out in the 70s were the cause of leaks. Architect Tim Ratcliffe commented: "We used traditional solid roll joint details but made the sheets narrower and longer than the original ones in order to avoid future problems with damage from thermal movement.

Initially, it was hoped that, as well as repeating the details of the original roof, it would be possible to set out the rolls and lapped joints in the original manner, to achieve a completely 'like-for-like' replacement. Current thinking and advice, however, is that zinc sheets should be narrower than those originally used so the seams are closer and lapped joints have been avoided. I decided that, although copying original details would have been desirable, in this case it was more important to ensure the roof covering should be as reliable and robust as possible. I am pleased to say that the visual difference between the original and replacement coverings is minor, and also that the quality of work carried out by the specialist contractor, one of the country's leading architectural restoration and roofing specialists, was of a consistently high standard."

James Carter, Commercial Director of restoration specialists CEL Metal Roofing Contractors, said: "The pre-weathered VM Zinc material was a great product for this application. It was in keeping with the listed status of the building and now looks fantastic. Our client can have the peace of mind that the new roof will protect this historic building for decades".

For further details of VMZINC façade systems please contact the company by email vmzinc.uk@umicore.com or telephone 01992 822288 or visit the website www.vmzinc.co.uk