

Case study: William Anelay Limited

Modern planning enables a new future for historic Middleport Pottery



About William Anelay Limited

Founded in 1747, William Anelay Limited is one of the UK's longest-established construction companies. The company specialises in the conservation and restoration of listed and historic buildings and the construction of bespoke new build residential and non-residential properties.

Originally a South Yorkshire firm, today it delivers expert services to owners and developers of historic buildings across the UK. Its team includes many directly employed specialist trades and experts including stonemasons, brick workers, slaters, joiners, pointers and more.

This dedicated team works on buildings ranging from castles to chapels, cathedrals to civic buildings and stately homes to historic industrial landmarks, all around the country.

The historic Middleport Pottery near Stoke-on-Trent has been the home of world-famous Burleigh-ware since 1889. After it was sold to The Prince's Regeneration Trust, however, the ideas about what this site could become expanded considerably.

William Anelay Ltd., one of the UK's longest established construction companies, took on the job of evolving this hugely complicated Grade II* listed site, comprising some 50 buildings. It placed Site Manager Gary Wilson in



charge of delivery – and was delighted when he walked away with a Silver Medal at the Construction Manager of the Year Awards as a result.

The diversity of such a complicated, and delicate, remodelling and re-fit project, presented plenty of challenges. The vision was for the site not only to support the original pottery tenant but expand to provide facilities for many more craft-based and start-up businesses, providing employment for local people and creating a tourism attraction.

“ I was in the software constantly – because, on this project, things changed on a daily basis. ”

As a heritage site it would involve a delicate balance of modernisation and preservation. With no two buildings or spaces the same, a significant requirement for the installation of

modern services and utilities, over 100 windows to refurbish or replace like-for-like, the project required excellent planning. The team turned to Asta Powerproject, its standard software for planning and project management.

The best laid plans...

The first planning challenge was fundamental, because it quickly became apparent that the master plan would need revisiting: “The master programme was done as usual at the tender stage – and once you get onto the site you always know that will be tweaked” Gary said. “But we realised after just a few weeks that we would need to do much more than the programme said.”

The most significant constraint was that the pottery, and its 50 staff, would continue in production throughout the build. It would need to vacate half the buildings during the process, to allow for them to be turned into spaces for other concerns. Although the architects had prepared a phased plan to allow

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this, Gary rapidly saw that this plan would need to be entirely re-sequenced.

“It required entirely new phasing of work. I use Asta Powerproject a lot but here we had to use it constantly. I often do 8-week short-term programmes, and usually don’t need to revisit them. Here I would do 4-week programmes, review them with both the client and the tenant, as well as email it out to the architect, designer and structural engineer who were all based off-site. Sometimes that 4 weeks would be fine with no glitches – but sometimes just a week in we would need to start again and re-sequence completely – and keep everyone constantly in the loop.”

Rigorous communications, careful negotiations and a constant refocusing on priorities were a major feature of the project. Nowhere was this more important than in liaison with the pottery tenant, as he explained: “On the phasing plan it assumed each particular space would become vacant at a particular date – and often they would do so, so we could move in and do the work. But the tenant would sometimes say ‘I just can’t move that process’. For example, their slip-works was on the first floor and had pipework that could never have moved. We had to not only take the roof off and replace it while they were making slip below us, but ensure that zero dust descended – or it would destroy production.”

“Asta Powerproject played a massive role in helping incorporate all these trades.”

The programme in Asta Powerproject became a central feature of meetings. “We used the software each Thursday on site with The Prince’s Regeneration Trust, the site manager, the tenant’s project manager and myself, to look at the following week. When someone, such as the production guy, pointed out an issue, I could easily tweak the short-term programme. It could happen for many reasons – for example, if they had a bad batch of firing and needed to re-make and fire again, it could create a delay of several days in their ability to move out of a space.”

The software made it easier to

communicate progress: “I kept the programme itself fairly simple, because the client and tenant didn’t want all the detail just the top line. It wasn’t a massive complex document, so everyone could look at it and see what we were doing and how.”

Gary told us that they were never short of work: “When something changed we could always find something else to do. I was in the software constantly – because, on this project, things changed on a daily basis.”

Trading Favours

The team was multi-faceted. As well as William Anelay’s own groundworks team, lift engineers and flooring specialists, Gary worked with an array of sub-contractors and trades including M&E, slate roofers, brickwork specialists for refurbishing the bottle kilns and lime pointing, and a joinery firm for the many, many windows that needed replacement or refurbishment.

“Asta Powerproject played a massive role in helping incorporate all these trades. Getting them all to agree to the plan and follow it was one thing – getting people to commit to working evenings and weekends another. We used the software to help cajole people – it helped to explain to the electrician and the pipe-fitter whenever we had to ask them to work Sundays, or work two evenings in a week. It helped them understand the reasons why we were doing things in a certain order, such as to avoid interrupting 30 people on a production line.”

Gary used Asta Powerproject to explain in a standardised way how very different activities would run – the



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re-roofing alone was a major task, with 20 different roofs to replace, varying from five square metres to some that were 100 metres long, but all different shapes.

Driving planners batty

Firms used to working on historic buildings can frequently uncover hidden treasures, or even discover colonies of wildlife, such as giant crested newts. It was no surprise at all to find that some of the roof-spaces of the pottery were chock-full of bats.

"There's an established process for managing bats – but it takes time, and bats don't care about your deadlines. You can only work on those roofs at certain times of year, and have to bring in a specialist to move them. At Middleport an ecologist came to do a bat survey through the night to judge numbers and see where the bats were settling. Once we knew which roofs we had to be careful with, we could plan the work using the software. We often have to work to particular timings; another thing unique to this site was its canal-side location. Masonry repairs on the canal walls were needed – but this could only be done when the canal was closed, so there were no narrowboats cruising past."

Working around tenants

The challenge of working around tenants grew as new people moved in. Initially only 50 people were employed on site in the pottery area but numbers rose as workspaces were completed. It meant that Gary and his team had to work to precise timings for starting and finishing individual spaces, either so that factory processes could be moved out temporarily, or to move them permanently so that spaces could be refurbished and new services installed, ready for new tenants to move in.

"We especially had to get the dates

right around the installation of lifts. There were four – including a dumb-waiter for the new café restaurant area, a passenger lift for visitors and two goods lifts for the factory. Inevitably the factory ones created the biggest challenge because the tenant had to move their goods and processes around."

“ I find it simple and quick to use. ”

No two spaces, workshops or rooms were the same. "As we gained access to a block, such as the ground floor of a building, we could start work dividing it into four and work on them all at the same time." Each presented unique challenges: "One other tenant who was already on site making bespoke kitchen furniture was to move into the old main packing house. When they shut for 10 days over Christmas we not only transformed that space, but moved all their extraction equipment too. They were able to walk into their new space and get straight back to work in January" explained Gary.

Giving back

William Anelay shares one commitment with its client, and that is supporting young people. During the build it absorbed twelve youngsters as temporary apprentices, as they were released from college for work

experience. It added yet another factor to the planning: "We had to find ways to keep them occupied and interested – and it wasn't as easy as simply placing them with a sub-contractor for work experience for a couple of weeks – we had to move them around. Using Asta we re-sequenced a few work areas, to create a broader opportunity for involvement."

A job well done

Gary considers Asta Powerproject to be an essential tool in managing very complex sites and projects, such as Middleport. He commented: "I have been using Asta Powerproject for about five years – and I find it easy to use. At William Anelay it is our standard planning tool. Our contracts manager often gets involved in creating the more complex programmes – but I use it on site, and I find it simple and quick to use. I don't have to spend hours putting down what I want. I like using it, and have become really comfortable with it."

The project was delivered on time and – particularly importantly for the client – on budget. It was opened in July 2014 by the Founder of The Prince's Regeneration Trust, HRH The Prince of Wales. Today over 100 people are employed on the Middleport site. Factory tours and other visitor attractions are hugely popular, and it has received the Visit England stamp of approval too. Since it opened, the Pottery has also won eight awards, including a 2015 RIBA National Award for architectural excellence and a Europa Nostra Award for heritage conservation. Gary concluded: "Working on churches, cathedrals and stately homes is always nice. But this project created jobs in an area that was run down and deprived, so to see it thriving is really rewarding."



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