
[St Michael and All Angels, Berwick](#)

Statement of Need for The Replacement of The Existing Pews with Stackable Pews

24 November 2020

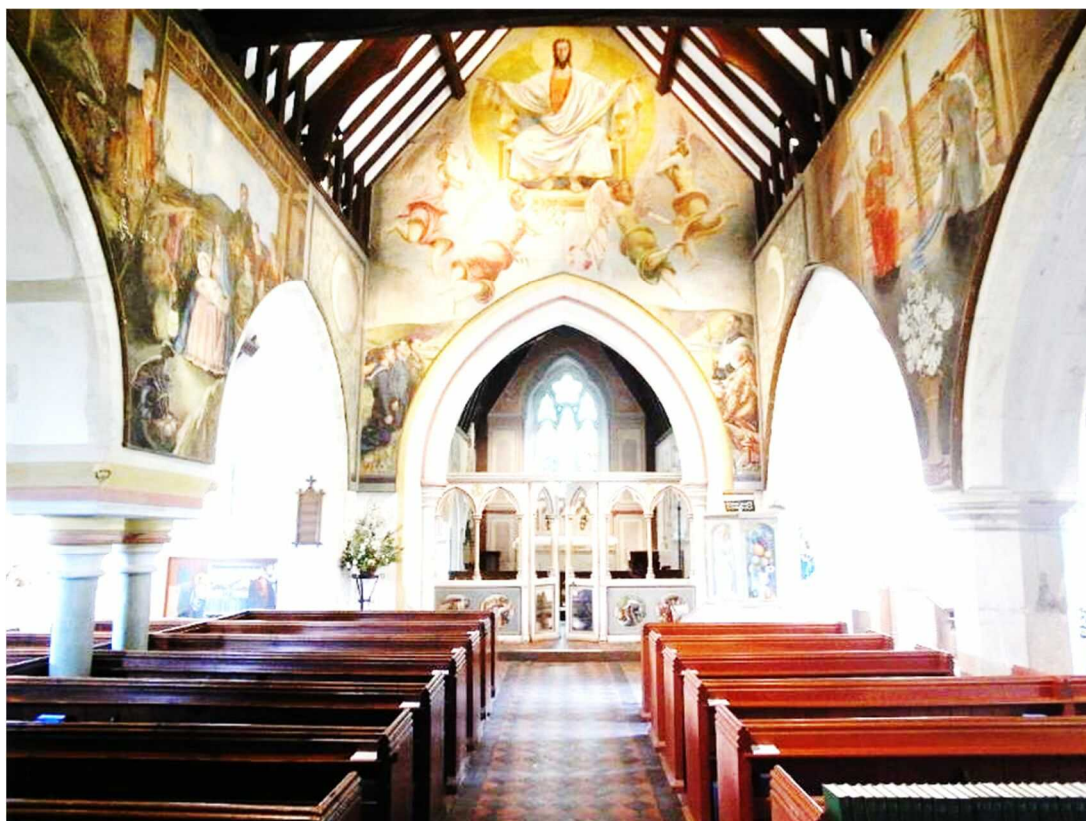
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1. The Faculty Proposal

1.1 Existing Arrangements

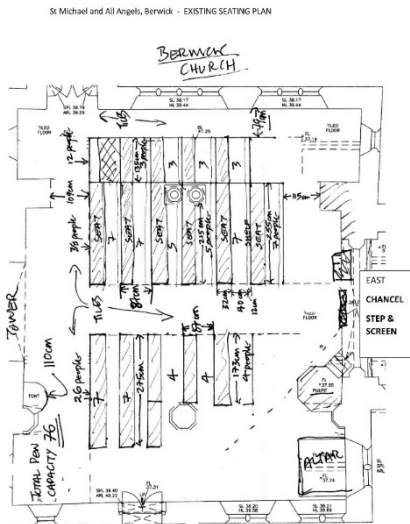
The image below shows the current arrangement with the Victorian pews on the north of the nave aisle extending into the north aisle and 20th Century pews on the south. The 20th C pews are a lighter more orange colour than the darkly stained Victorian pews. The 20th C pews have small brass memorial plaques at the aisle end. There are a few loose chairs in the south aisle remaining from when the Victorian pews on the south of the aisle were replaced with chairs prior to the installation of the existing 20th Century pews.



EXISTING 20th CENTURY PEWS IN SOUTH SIDE OF NAVE AND SOUTH AISLE



EXISTING VICTORIAN PEWS



The figure on the left shows the layout of the existing pews, with darkly stained Victorian pews above the central aisle and orange varnished pine pews below the central aisle.



One of the loose chairs from the south aisle

1.2 The PCC Proposes

The PCC wish to create a flexible space within the interior of the church to accommodate different configurations for activities, events and worship to further the mission of the church. In the current layout there is very little free space. The current arrangement fills the interior of this small country church restricting movement and limiting the variety of ways in which the space can be used. People generally describe the existing pews as uncomfortable to sit in for any length of time. Now that people have had the opportunity to experience the space and the new floor, following the fabric works, they also feel that both contribute in a positive way to the experience of worship within the church, one which would be lost if the pews are retained because they would conceal most of the floor, the lower part of the pillars and reduce the light that comes into the church.

It has been suggested that some of the existing pews and chairs are retained. The PCC is against the retention of any of the pews. The church is small and the space is such that there isn't sufficient room to retain pews without losing the flexibility that is desired. We have not been able to identify a suitable location for pew retention which would not significantly adversely impact the benefits of the re-ordering.



Two images to illustrate the small amount of space in the church.

Left: Two rugs spread on the north of the nave aisle for children's work in the round (e.g. Sunday school, visiting schools or charitable groups bringing parents with children) Each rug might accommodate around 8 children.

Below: Two tables each seating up to 8 people fills the south of the nave leaving space for movement in the central and south aisle.



In terms of the visual appearance the PCC already feels that the mismatched seating does not do the building or paintings justice and detracts from the interior. To retain examples of existing pews and introduce new stackable pews would create an even more mismatched and distracting interior. However, if the determination of the faculty were to depend on retaining an element of the existing seating then a combination of stackable pews and chairs would be preferred to retaining the existing pews. As has been stated in the pre-application advice from Historic England *Woodyer's input to the design of the church is fairly well represented by the thorough restoration of the North aisle, chancel screen and pulpit* which suggests that the Victorian pews are not an essential part of his contribution to the church.

As the images show, the stackable pews are lower than the existing pews and a natural and uniform colour. They allow more of the floor to be seen as well as the medieval stone pillar and Woodyers distinctive double pillar in the north aisle. They also allow more light to enter the body of the church. As well as harmonising with the building and paintings, we would argue that they also create a greater sense of order. It is suggested in Historic England's pre-application advice they would prefer *a more contextual, solid design for the new benches so that they order and fill the volumes of the space*. The PCC have considered a wide range of seating options and not made their decision before trialling the proposed stackable pews. The appearance of the pews relates to function. They need to be light weight in order to lift and stack. The considered design achieves this functionality as well as being attractive and suited to an ecclesiastical setting. This is testified to by their introduction into a number of Grade 1 listed churches (see Appendix A). (It should be noted that these churches were listed Grade 1 on grounds of architectural merit whereas Berwick is listed solely on the grounds of the paintings.) The PCC differs in opinion concerning the way in which seating occupies space. Whereas Historic England would like to *fill the volumes of the space*, the PCC would rather retain openness of space and light and to be able to see the floor and historic stonework.

Our request to remove the pews is based on our commitment to realise the maximum public benefit possible of the project to restore and conserve the paintings in Berwick church, both now and in the future. The project has been made possible through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (£560,000) and funds raised by the Berwick (Sussex) Conservation Trust and the PCC (£410, 343). In simple terms retaining the pews will, by restricting the flexibility of the space, limit the possible ways in which that space can be used and, in turn, the different ways in which the significant investment made in the project can benefit the public.

The underfloor heating, which is powered by a sustainable ground source heat supply, means the church is now a warmer and more comfortable place for worship and events. The installation of a kitchenette and the new audio-visual system all add potential to the different ways in which the church building can now be used for outreach and engagement. The investment in these will only be realised if the interior can be used in a variety of ways.

We set out below the ways in which the removal of the pews will benefit the current life and ministry of the church and the public benefit offered. We also believe that the more the church interior is able to respond to a changing world without harming the building, the more likely it is that what we do now will benefit the church and enable it to engage with a changing culture in the future. Especially, perhaps, given the unknown impact that the Covid pandemic is going to have on the church communities in the longer term.

1.3 Stackable Benches

We propose to remove the existing pews and replace them with stackable benches of a design and type made of oak and commonly used in churches (we currently have Treske and Luke Hughes on loan to trial). The attached layouts show arrangements of 9 x bench for 5 people, 2 x bench for 4 people and 6 x bench for 3 people. These layouts only show the nave and are for indicative

purposes. The pews could also be placed in the chancel for visiting choirs. One of the layouts shows how the benches could be stacked to create a clear space.



Above and below left - interior of Berwick Church with Luke Hughes benches borrowed from a local church (3 x bench for 5 people and 2 x bench for 3 people). Below right 'St Mary' Treske bench.

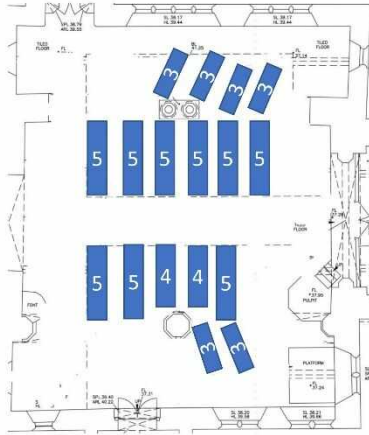




1.4 Indicative Arrangements

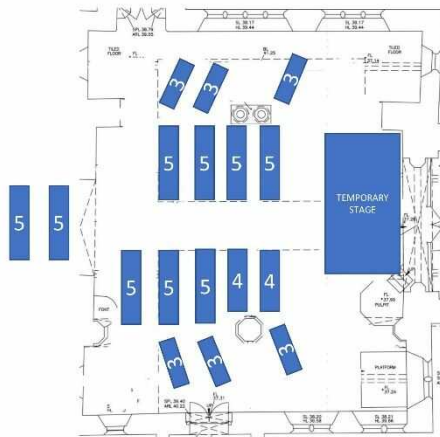
Below are 5 indicative layouts for the nave in Berwick Church. Each arrangement allows worship to be offered in a different way and convey different theologies.

Stackable Benches



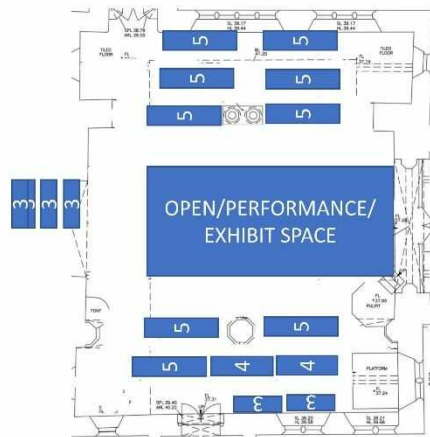
This arrangement mirrors the existing arrangement of pews.

Staged Performance



This arrangement allows a temporary platform to be placed at the front of the church for a performance or for a service that uses a nave altar or involves an element of performance.

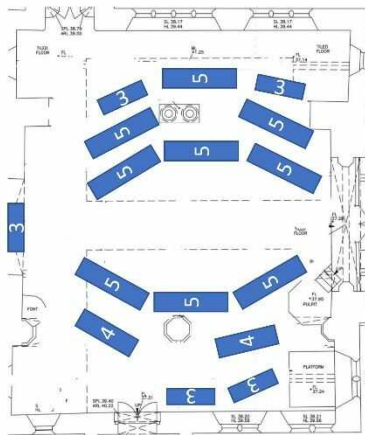
Collegiate layout / choir



This arrangement allows the congregation or the audience to face into a cleared central space. This would allow worship to be led or a performative element given from within the congregation. Or for a performance to be delivered in this way.

At the same time this allows the nave paintings to be viewed more directly from a seated position when a talk is given or worship led with one of the paintings as a principal focus. The openness of the space makes it easy for a group to move from one side to the other – from viewing the Annunciation to the Nativity.

Quaker layout



This shows an arrangement of congregation in the round suitable for Quaker worship or contemplative group worship. (We have had expressions of interest from a local Meeting House to hold a retreat morning in the church)



This arrangement allows the space to be cleared for ambulatory worship, for displays or exhibits to be arranged in any part of the church or for tables to be set up for activities or community event.

2. National Lottery Heritage Fund

The project to conserve the paintings and to make changes to fabric of the building (installation of underfloor heating and insulation of the roof) to stabilise the environment received a grant from the NLHF. This was awarded not solely for the work on the heritage of the building but also for outreach and engagement. Indeed, our application would not have been successful if we had not shown commitment to reaching out to people and demonstrated how we were going to do this through our Activity Plan. The NLHF were clear that we have an obligation not only to the heritage but also to the way in which this heritage serves the needs of a diversity of people. The activities which have been planned as part of the conserving project to restore the paintings illustrate our commitment to increasing the public benefit of Berwick Church. They provide an important springboard for the future ministry of the church and we believe that this key period in the development of the church's ministry will be greatly aided by free and flexible interior space.

3. Use of the church and Proposed Activities

3.1 Socialising and Hospitality

After services or events, we would like people to be able to stay and socialise. The current arrangement considerably restricts the movement of people and their ability to meet others and makes it difficult to offer hospitality in a friendly and welcoming way.

3.2 Disability Access & Inclusion

Before the Conservation Project began Simon Wilson, Independent Disability Consultant who is unable to walk or talk and communicates through a voice synthesizer was invited to visit the church and make comments about disability access. He stated:

“ Pews - It would be nicer if people in wheelchairs could be just part of an open space in the church so that they could feel more integrated amongst the congregation rather than having one place specifically for disabled people. The areas offered are sometimes constricted and can make it difficult to move. With an open space a number of wheel-chair users could be together if they wanted to be. Sometimes they also have carers with them and so adaptable seating is best.”

Simon Wilson Independent Disability Trainer/Consultant SimonsAble – offering disability services for individual requirements www.SimonsAble.com

3.3 Worship

We would like to create flexibility for worship to take place in the round and in a collegiate arrangement, to create more open space when it is needed and to create space in the centre of the church when wanted. We want to adjust the seating to reflect and support the type of worship that is being held. Seating configuration is an expression of a theology of the relationship between members of the worshipping community and their relationship with God. It is important to be able to create a space in which the gathering for worship can happen in different ways to reflect this. We also want to offer the church as a space in which different traditions and denominations can worship in ways that reflect their own theology. We would like to encourage congregations to come for day or half-day retreats, to be able to use and adapt the space as they wish. The art, beauty of the environment and history of the church makes it particularly well suited as a place where the relationship between creativity, the environment and faith can be explored. The peacefulness and

beauty of the church lends itself as somewhere for people to come for retreat, reflection, prayer and discussion. The configuration of the seating effects the ways in which different groups from different spiritual traditions can use the space. We are inviting local churches and particularly have in mind those in urban and deprived areas. Quakers from the local Meeting House in Lewes have already expressed an interest. Churches in Seaford and in Newhaven have also expressed an interest in holding a quiet morning in the church with a view to developing reflective and creative spirituality.

We also look forward to holding discussion and prayer groups for the five churches within our own Benefice. The new audio-visual system allows us to use film, sound and music in prayer, discussion and teaching and it is important that we can gather in smaller groups for this. We have previously held a well-attended Lent course based on the film 'Chocolat'. 'Film literacy' within a Christian framework of understanding is a growing area of interest especially amongst younger people. People have said that they would like to be able to hold these courses in the church and that sharing a meal and discussion around a table is an important part of these evenings for them. At present we are not able to accommodate this. As the photographs on p.5 illustrate, we would be able to accommodate around 32 people seated at tables if we had flexible seating.

During the first Covid lockdown we have experimented with video and produced services published on Youtube which have reached a wider audience than the existing congregations. Seating layouts, social distancing and being able to stream services from different angles and sight lines are all current concerns and effected by the flexibility of the interior space of a church. Covid has opened up one model for sustaining ministry in the future, which involves reaching out to people beyond the parish boundary through a retreat morning or special service. This would give people a connection to the church. Thereafter it would be possible to offer online streamed services and other types of ministry to sustain that connection for people for whom it is difficult to get to the church regularly.

It is important for people on retreats and those doing group work in the church to be comfortable and to be able to gather in small groups and in the round. To attract these groups, we need to offer a space suitable for them.

We have previously held a quiet morning for volunteer hospital chaplains. We facilitated discussion and reflection on their ministry to encourage and support them in this valuable voluntary caring work. We conducted a short act of worship and offered refreshments, a talk about the church and time to relax. We would like to offer similar opportunities to volunteers at the local hospices in support of their spirituality and wellbeing. The way in which we can hold these events with a flexible space will greatly enhance the experience and the benefit it brings to these groups.

We have held discussions with the hospice chaplain at St Wilfrids and he has suggested holding one of the annual services of light in the church for the bereaved. The layout and comfort of the seating, social interaction and hospitality offered at this sort of service will all be improved with flexible seating.

We have had to postpone all our planned activities and events for 2020 associated with the NLHF conservation project. We hope that these will be a springboard for the future ministry and direction of the church. In developing these activities and events we consulted with each organisation and held pilot visits to ensure that what was being proposed actually met their needs. These activities and events are described below to illustrate our commitment to meeting public need and broadening the ministry of this unique church in a way that is in keeping with its Christian ministry to communicate the love of God and to heal the sick.

3.4 Working with Other Charitable Groups

Our vision for the future ministry of the church is to make it available and accessible as a place of sanctuary and retreat for a range of charitable organisations working with the vulnerable and to allow them to use the space in ways that they would like to. We would offer hospitality, guided reflection, talks, creative activities as part of their morning if wanted. We have made contact with various local charities. Blind Veterans U.K. brought a group for a photography morning, the photographs were framed and then exhibited in the church. The visually impaired group greatly enjoyed their visit to the church, though movement around the church, the enjoyment of the paintings and the photography was made more difficult by the fixed pews. Some of the veterans use walking aids. There was nowhere for them to sit comfortably. We have another visit planned and hope that Berwick church will become a regular place for these veterans to visit on their annual outings. The depiction of the three servicemen in Duncan Grant's painting resonates with the group and is a natural point of connection. We have also developed a project with The Royal British Legion home in Bexhill. We have visited the home and invited residents to grow seeds for planting out into the churchyard as part of our churchyard conservation project and other plants for the decoration of the church. These also link with the flower meadows depicted in Duncan Grant's 'Christ In Majesty' and on which the three servicemen kneel in prayer along with Bishop Bell.

We have hosted two pilot visits from organisers of a local charity, 'You Raise Me Up' (supporting those who have experienced the loss of a child aged 16-25). On the first visit organisers of the charity expressed excitement about holding a morning in and around the church for people supported by the charity. On a second visit parents came and responded enthusiastically. The main visits are being postponed until 2021.

We are working with two qualified Inclusive Arts Practitioners, one of whom has run a pilot visit with adults with mental health issues from the charitable organisation, South Downs. She had to gather the group outside in order to have them seated in a circle for part of her work with them. This was weather dependent and we need to be able to accommodate that part of the visit inside the church when they visit again. The other Practitioner brought a group from the Oasis Project in Brighton. This charity supports single parents (who have suffered from addiction) and their children. The visit was a great success and children and parents who had never been into a church before had a wonderful time. They had to do their creative activities outside because of lack of room within the church. We need to allow them to hold their activities inside the church and fixed pews are preventing this.

We have made contact with the Lewes branch the charity SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement By Suicide). They will be coming next year to have a morning at the church. The growth in suicide rates suggest an increasing need for the work of this charity. We welcome the opportunity to support their work.

We have some members of the congregation who have spouses with dementia in care homes and those with relatives who cannot be supported at home any longer. We have contacted a number of these local care homes and invited them to bring residents to the church. The intention of some of these care home visits is that spouses can join their loved ones at the church for a social event, an activity or performance, thereby giving both the chance to enjoy time together.

3.5 Schools Creative Project

Working with 'Artemis Arts' we have developed an ambitious schools' arts programme aiming to reach 12 local schools, particularly targeting those in local areas of disadvantage. Local artists have already agreed to participate and lead work with each school. As well as visits to the church we hope to hold exhibitions of children's work in the church to draw parents and friends to visit. For the children's visits, the displaying of their work and the hosting of the exhibitions, it will be of great benefit to have flexible space in the church to allow both the work and the exhibitions to be carried out in ways which will not be possible with fixed pews.

3.6 Schools Photography Project

Photography Departments at some of local schools have been invited to make the church part of their students' GCSE Photography coursework and portfolios. The Bloomsbury artists used photographs in the development of the design of their works. Dr Sheona Beaumont (Bishop Otter Scholar in the Diocese) has been commissioned by the church to write about these preparatory photographs, drawing on her scholarly area of research. At the same time, she will broaden the subject to include other examples of photographers who have based their work on biblical text and matters of faith. In that way her material will encourage the students to reflect on the expression of faith through photographic images. Being able to use the open space in the church for different approaches to photography and exhibiting work as expressions of faith will open different opportunities for this project. We have had positive response from Seaford Head, St Catherine's College, Cavendish School and Causeway School. We look forward to pursuing these once Covid restrictions are lifted.

3.7 Schools SEN Project

In 2015, in conjunction with Artemis Arts, we hosted a visit from Ringmer Community College 'Circle Project' - a special needs group. In our current NLHF project we plan to work with special needs children from five local schools. Christine Hall of Artemis Arts is an experienced SEN teacher and understands the need to create a safe and responsive environment with which to work with these children. She has written, along with Wenda Bradley, in support of the replacement of the pews based on educational projects which she has run in the church. The projects with the schools will culminate in a celebration either at school or in the church. There has been support for this work by Southover School, Northease Manor Special School, Hertford School and Priory School. We look forward to welcoming these children to the church and offering a friendly and safe environment.

3.8 'The Big Sing' - Glyndebourne Opera and The Dome, Brighton

We have planned with the Education Department at Glyndebourne Opera and with The Dome, Brighton and to make Berwick Church the focus of an annual schools' project called 'The Big Sing', to be held in 2021. This is an extensive regional project to raise awareness of creativity through education, develop emerging talent and broaden access to music as well as reaching older people in Sussex. It allows children to experience the benefits to their wellbeing of music and creativity. We look forward to working with the composer and schools. The project will reach around 300 children. Through this project we hope to broaden an awareness amongst schools of our commitment to developing the ways in which Berwick Church can inspire the relationship between creativity and faith and promote the importance of music in a sacred context. The new audio-visual system in the church will allow us to bring music and performance arising from this project into the confines of the church and to host audiences who will be inspired by it.

3.9 The Towner Art Gallery and Berwick Church

The Towner Gallery in Eastbourne has preparatory paintings for the Decorative Scheme in their archives which were donated by Revd G Mitchell, the Rector at the time. The Gallery has won awards for its work with those with mental health needs. They will be integrating Berwick Church into their work with this group and we look forward to welcoming them to the church after lockdown. Being able to put up tables for members to work will be a great help.

3.10 Charleston

Charleston is the home of the artists. We have an important relationship with Charleston. The Revd Peter Blee has given a talk at Charleston about the conservation project to volunteers at the house and those from Monks House, the National Trust home of Virginia Woolf. However, somewhat to our surprise, Charleston is the only organisation with which we have not been able to agree an activity. We very much hope that we will be able to arrange activities with them - perhaps organised walks to the church - and that we will be able to host events at the church to support them. We have done this in the past. On one occasion Charleston organised a performance by professional actors of T.S. Eliot's poetry in the church. The event raised funds for Charleston and some for the church.

3.11 University of Sussex

Berwick Church hosted a seminar as part of a 'Sussex Modernism' conference organised by Dr Hope Wolf, lecturer in Modernist Literature at Sussex University. Peter Blee delivered one of the talks. It is much easier at seminars if seating is arranged in a more circular pattern to facilitate discussion. With more comfortable seating and with the new audio-visual system we will be able to meet the needs of holding seminars in the church. The interest and desire to do so is evidenced by this visit. As a result of that conference in 2019 we hosted three visits from first year students studying English Literature, a total of around 60 students in all. Some of the students had never visited a church before and expressed their anxieties beforehand. The students were free to write prose or poetry in response to their visit. The students all responded positively and said that the visit to the church was one of the best 'field trips' that they made. This pilot visit led to a project conducted this year with a smaller group of 3rd Year students who produced an essay and portfolio of work as part of their final dissertation. The students' essays are going to be published and made available in the church and on the website. Being able to seat the students more comfortably and in the round, to allow them to experience the space with a greater feeling of freedom and to provide places where they can sit and write, would meet the needs of visiting groups of students better. We hope that this work with Sussex University is going to be integrated into the final year curriculum. A collegiate arrangement of pews for group visits, where the pews face each of the nave paintings, will make it easier and more comfortable for small groups to sit, reflect and learn about each painting.

3.12 Local Community

We would like the church to be able to host gatherings for the local community. The flexibility and openness of the space without fixed pews would enable this to happen far more effectively. A similar rural church at St Mary Magdalene, Whatlington has recently replaced pews with stackable benches and the illustrations below show how they have used the space to hold a community meal and for community choir practice. The newly installed underfloor heating and the kitchenette at Berwick now make the church a more welcoming and attractive space for the community to use.

St Mary Magdalene, Whatlington



3.13 Events and Performances

The chancel screen makes it difficult for the chancel to be used as a space for performance and the chancel step is very narrow. This makes the giving of talks or performances difficult. We would like to be able to create space in front of the chancel arch or in the centre of the church for events or performances and where a temporary stage could be erected if necessary. There are a number of regular choral concerts in the church and we have hosted performances by school music students as part of South East Music 'musical pilgrimage'. The number of children able to perform in the church was limited by the amount of space that the pews take up.

3.14 University of Brighton

We have hosted a visit by students from Brighton University Department of Media Studies. They spent a morning filming in the church and its surrounds. They were accompanied by three members of staff. The students' work was compiled into a short film about their visit by one of the lecturers. The film features interviews with the students and incorporates their own photography. It demonstrates the positive experience that they had. Inspired by the visit Dr T. Koulouris, who accompanied the students, agreed to write an essay about the church incorporating his spiritual experience on the visit, together with his scholarly research on Virginia Woolf. This is now available as an inspiration to both students and scholars and shows how fruitful a relationship with university lecturers and students can be.

3.15 Arts and Faith

We have held art exhibitions in the church. For example, the decision to commission Julian Bell to make paintings for the decoration of the reredos was the result of an exhibition of his work based on Old Testament stories. We have also commissioned artists to produce work specifically for temporary display in the church and a few permanent commissions. We want to develop the way in

which Berwick Church can promote the relationship between creativity and faith. A more open, flexible and lighter space will make it easier for us to develop this in the future in different ways.

3.16 Conferences and Festivals

We had planned a three-day conference with Arts and Christianity this September. Working with Laura Moffat and the Trustees we have rescheduled this event to 2021. For this event we would like to be able to use the space in the church flexibly to set up different configurations for attendees. Artists are going to contribute to the conference and we would like to be able to offer them freedom in the arrangement of the space for their work.

A 'Green Energy Day' was planned, to showcase the ground source energy system and underfloor heating and promote an awareness of sustainable energy solutions. The promotion of the green energy aspects of the project are part of our witness as a church to a more sustainable future that conserves the diversity and beauty of creation. Contractors who worked on the project have all expressed an interest in contributing to this in 2021.

We were also planning to participate in the Wellbeing Week in May 2020 organising a day seminar on wellbeing to which we had invited various speakers including those in the 'heritage' sector. The Professor of Spirituality and Wellbeing, Charles Watters, from Sussex University was amongst the speakers. He is writing an essay on his response to Berwick Church and wellbeing. This is now planned for 2021, together with some creative activity days and guided walks.

There is scope for the church to host small conferences and festivals in a way that would have been difficult before and the possibilities for the ways in which we can host these will be greatly enhanced with a fully flexible interior space. We see the current cultural concern for wellbeing as an important bridge with the ministry of the church and the potential of Berwick Church to respond to this need more widely.

3.17 Local Schools Projects

We have worked with local schools on creative projects and sometimes this has involved an exhibition or performance of their work in the church. For example, two puppet theatre artists worked with a local primary school in Alfriston to make puppets and props and write a script bringing to life a biblical parable. The play was performed in the church. The performance was marked by difficulties working within the cramped space in front of the chancel screen and the difficulty that children in the audience had seeing the performance from pews. The experience of trying to host this performance pointed to a clear need to alter the interior space to enable small performances to be staged and for audiences to be able to see and appreciate these properly.

We have also run a ceramics project with Eastbourne College which culminated in an exhibition of their work designed for the church and a celebration with a musical performance by students attended by parents and local community. This would have been much better organised if the space was flexible.

We organised a day pilgrimage for Alfriston primary school. The whole school walked to the church for a day of activities. They brought with them pilgrim tokens which had been made in school and fired by a local potter. There were around 75 pupils in total and we were unable to accommodate all of them inside at once. If the children were able to sit on the floor, as they would in an assembly, we would be able to have the whole school gathered inside the church. The underfloor heating now provides the warmth to enable this to happen at any time of the year. Some group activities had to be undertaken outside because of the lack of space within the church and holding activities outside is weather dependent. It is probably hardly necessary to say that children find the pews uncomfortable to sit in and it is difficult for the younger children to see. Our work with children often

involves drawing or making in response to the paintings. We are not able to provide a surface for them to work on because there is no room to put up tables. Children have to twist uncomfortably on the pews and work as best they can within them. We need to be able to put up tables, arrange seating for groups of children, lay out rugs for them to sit on if we are really serious about undertaking work effectively with them and in a way which makes the trip to the church as valuable and rewarding as possible.

We have been helped in planning and delivering some of our educational projects by 'Artemis Arts'. They have written in support and make the following valuable observations about the church;

Our experience of working with schools in the area for over 25 years is that most of the pupils in this area are deprived of the access to art in its widest sense. In Lewes there are now no galleries that are large enough to welcome school groups and with cuts to funding trips further afield are impossible. This makes the offer of a guided involvement with the art and architecture within Berwick Church especially valuable.

They also point out that some schools may not be able to participate unless we can make the space Covid friendly.

If the present viral epidemic persists into 2021 the new space offers opportunities to distance pupils from one another safely and may mean that it will be possible to allow the project to take place. Choirs and musicians will also have room to perform and those with special needs can more easily be included.

3.18 Guided Talks

In 2018 we hosted 28 groups who came to hear a talk about the paintings. The groups pay and provide a valuable income for the church. They tend to be older people who find the pews uncomfortable. The feedback of people who have experienced the lighter and more open interior is that it is easier to see and appreciate the Decorative Scheme, both when seated and also when walking around.

With the new audio-visual system, we will now be able to illustrate different talks and with the new kitchenette we are able to offer refreshments more easily. However, the fixed pews and lack of freedom of movement makes this part of a visit much more difficult to deliver. To attract groups for guided talks we need to provide as warm a welcome and as comfortable an experience as we can to make the most of the investment in the kitchenette and audio-visual system.

4. An Appraisal of the Significance of the Current Pews in Berwick Church with Reference to their Replacement

It has been explained to us that the removal of any fixed item in the church is by definition within the faculty process an act of harm. We believe that the removal of the mismatched pews and loose chairs will be of relatively little harm to the church. In fact, the letters of support written by the people who have been able to visit the church since the completion of the main works all say that doing this 'harm' will in fact enhance the building. We believe that any harm will also be outweighed by the benefit to the worship and mission of the church already outlined. The following appraisal seeks to address some of the comments made about the level of harm that removing the pews will do to the church by exploring the character, significance and history of the church.

In 1941 the introduction of contemporary art by artists of repute into Berwick parish church was a bold proposal which met with controversy and resistance. The dispute was resolved by a Consistory Court hearing in September 1941 in Berwick village. The main point of contention being whether it was appropriate for a modern intervention on this scale to be made into this rural historic church. Amongst the arguments in favour of the introduction included a report on the architectural value of the church by Frederick Etchells. He wrote; '*..the church is to a large extent a rather amateurish reconstruction of 1856...*' The permission to introduce the paintings was based, in part, on the understanding that the structure of the building was not of any particular merit, let alone the seating. The importance of the decorative scheme was, in part, that it would set a precedent for modern interventions of this nature to be made in other parish churches and that it would help to win the trust of contemporary artists. It would convince them the Church believed in the importance of the contribution which they had to make. We believe that one of the unique opportunities for Berwick is that it keeps that same message alive today by nurturing this relationship in each generation and does not consign Bishop Bell's vision to history.

Bishop Bell's purpose in commissioning the project was broader than Berwick Church itself. His aim was to undertake commissions within his Diocese which would restore trust and understanding between the contemporary artist and the Church. He believed that the artist and the Church both needed each other and the separation which existed between them was to the detriment of both. It was the living relationship that mattered. The Decorative Scheme was commissioned to communicate this vision and to nurture this relationship, not just at one moment in its history but in its continuing ministry. Through the conservation of the paintings and by making adjustments to the building, Berwick Church continues to promote Bishop Bell's vision and provides a place where the interaction between contemporary creativity and faith can continue to take place. The installation of the new audio-visual system will itself facilitate new ways in which this can be done in a contemporary medium which was not available in Bishop Bell's time.

Bishop Bell believed that contemporary engagement was essential and that each generation should make its own contribution. Around the time that the introduction of the Decorative Scheme into the church was being challenged he wrote an article for an exhibition in Brighton in which he stated;

Why should not modern artists paint in our Churches to-day, offering their gifts of colour and design, in the spirit of the artists of old? I believe we have been taking too narrow a view in what we have thought of as fitting for Church decoration. We have tended to have recourse only to the same kind of work, and the same kind of memorial or ornaments as those to which our parents were accustomed. And there is so much that is beautiful and new astir in the world!' (Paintings for Churches catalogue, 1941)

The commission at Berwick Church is a demonstration of the openness of Bishop Bell's vision. It is the vision of Bishop Bell, represented by the paintings, which defines the unique character of

Berwick Church and it is to this end that the changes to the church and the conservation of the paintings has been undertaken. The aim of the project is to realise and release the potential of the Decorative Scheme in breathing life into Bishop Bell's vision. Only to frame this in terms of heritage and conservation is to take too narrow a view and to fail to understand the purpose of the Decorative Scheme in its wider context.

4.1 Art Historical Perspective

The initial proposals put forward by Duncan Grant for Berwick Church consisted of a series of four paintings; The Annunciation, The Nativity, Christ in Majesty and The Wise and Foolish Virgins. He stated in his submission that he took into account the colours of the stained glass in the East Window. He makes no mention of any feature in the church which he took into consideration. As the scheme developed, he wanted to add more colour to the church. He put forward proposals for the decoration of the dark Victorian wooden chancel screen which were accepted. The whole screen was painted white with gesso and decorations added. He put forward proposals for the decoration of the dark Victorian wooden pulpit by Vanessa Bell which covered all the woodwork. Then he decided more colour was needed to tie the paintings together and to the building. To this end he asked to paint the stonework, including the Medieval arches. He retracted the latter proposal but was given permission to decorate the Victorian stonework. The colours he chose were warm and light and make no reference to the dark woodwork of the pews; Sienna, Terre Verte and Venetian Red (see illustrations below).



Duncan Grant sketch for decoration of south aisle medieval arches.



Duncan Grant sketch for decoration of Victorian Chancel

Duncan Grant was pleased with the effect that the three bands of colour had on creating a greater unity and binding the paintings to each other and to the stonework of the building. In a letter of 3rd August 1943 Revd G. Mitchell wrote to the DAC conveying Grant's request to decorate the roof timbers: *Mr Grant asks permission to lighten with colour the large transverse beam in the Nave, and, if the treatment is as satisfactory as he anticipates, to treat all the roof timbers in the same manner.*

It has been asserted by some that the paintings in some way respond to the dark Victorian pews and the chairs in the nave that were present at the time and that this is one argument for retaining them. However, this argument would seem hard to uphold when one considers the approach adopted by Duncan Grant to extend the scheme to bring light and colour into the church and to

paint every piece of dark Victorian woodwork that he possibly could. From an art historical perspective, there is more evidence here to suggest that the removal of the dark Victorian pews serves the intentions of this Decorative Scheme than there is to suggest that they should be retained, on the grounds that the artists saw them as integral to the scheme. On the basis of what is known about Duncan Grant's development of the scheme and his unrealised aspiration to paint dark timbers of the roof, then the removal of the pews might rather be better understood as a step that helps to realise more fully the intentions of the artist. As the conservators, who have worked on murals around the world and these paintings for 4 months, have stated in their letter of support;

We are strongly of the opinion that all the recent interventions within the church – including the removal of the pews – provide an appropriate context for the paintings, rendering them more accessible, understandable and appreciable by both parishioners and visitors. We would therefore strongly urge that the old pews are not reinstated.

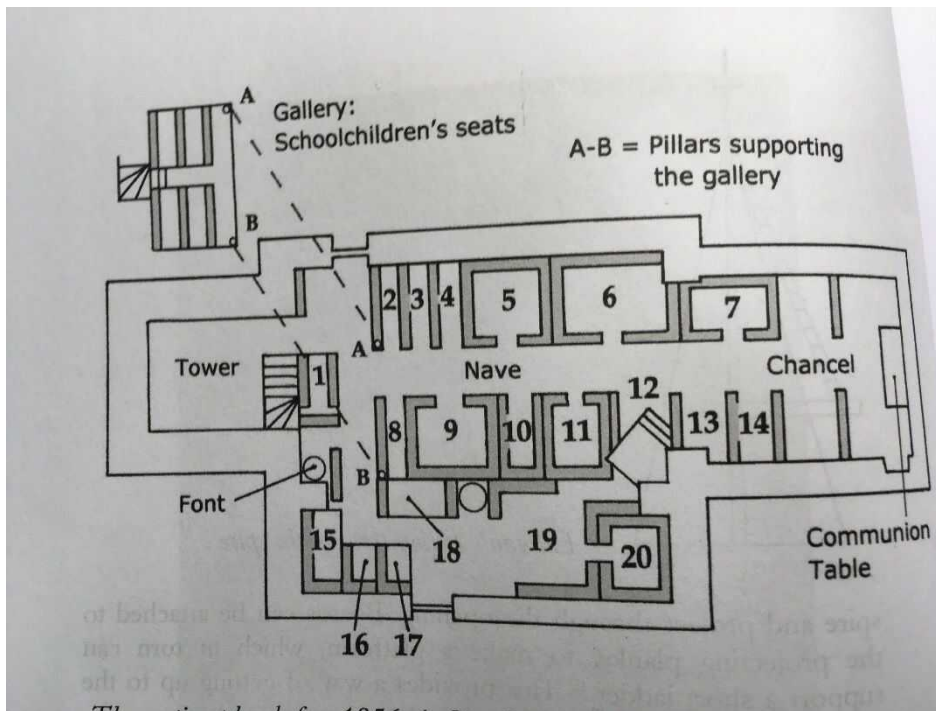
Rickerby and Shekede 18th November 2020.

4.2 Building Listing

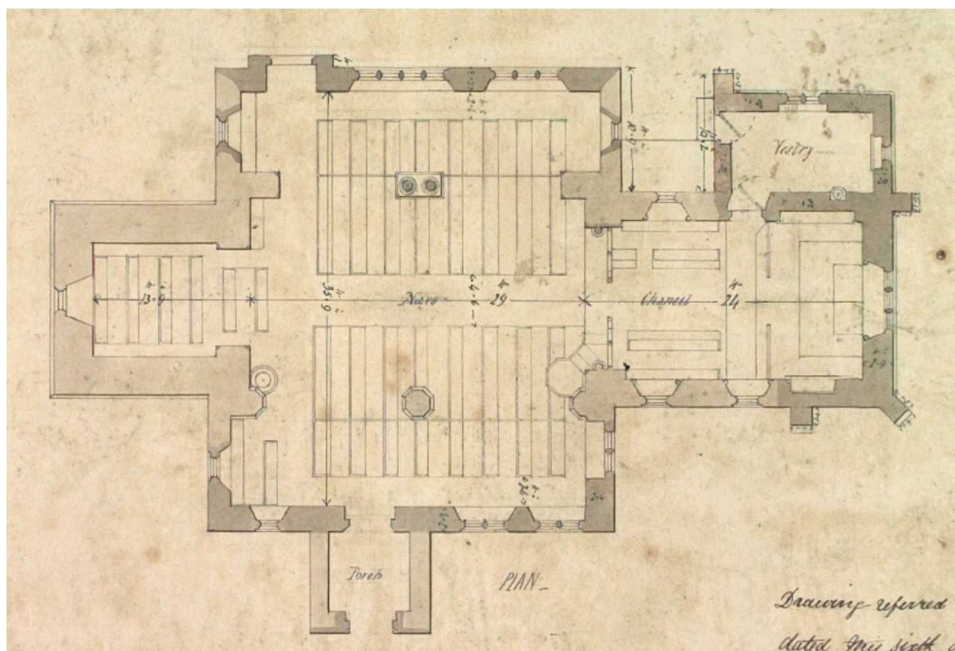
The only reason for the Grade 1 listing of the building is the paintings. Removal of the pews does no harm to this aspect of the church. In the opinion of some their removal enhances the Decorative Scheme. The removal of the pews allows the medieval structure and stonework to be better seen. The colour of the tiles helps to integrate the paintings with the historic stonework and works in harmony with the bands of colour that Duncan Grant added to the Victorian stonework to create a greater unity and sense of harmony.

4.3 Seating Developments

The interior furnishings of the church have changed throughout the long history of the building. Revd E. B. Ellman made a record of the box pews and the gallery at the west end that existed prior to the Victorian restoration. The arrangement shows that some sat in the round within their boxes. There was no chancel screen. The box pews were replaced to suit the Victorian approach to worship. Over time, the pews in the tower were removed, the Victorian pews on the south of nave and in south aisle were replaced with chairs. Later the choir stalls were removed and the chancel space left open and empty. The proposal to replace fixed pews with moveable stackable pews is part of the evolution of the church in its understanding of worship, mission and ministry. It has been stated by Historic England that the mismatched seating *tells the story how the village community, based on its means, furnished and patterned the church over the decades*. Just as the Victorians felt a need to change the interior to suit the needs of their generation so the current generation wishes to do so today. The letters of support illustrate how members of the church today, including long-standing members who have worshipped in the church for many years, wish to pattern and shape their church today. We wish to assert their right to do so to ensure that the ministry of the church continues to develop. We believe that this big conservation project at Berwick has demonstrated the enormous trouble that has been taken to identify, respect and care for the valuable contributions made by previous generations in the best possible way. And we believe that we have done so in a way which will also promote the ministry and mission of the church.



Copy by Rodney Castleden of Revd E.B. Ellman diagram showing the layout of box pews and the west gallery in Berwick church which were all stripped out in the Victorian restoration.



Plan by H. Woodyer showing the layout of pews and choir stalls. The seating in the tower, the south nave, south aisle and chancel have all been removed previously.



Chairs with rush seats occupied the south side of the nave in the 1940's when the paintings were installed and a few remain in the south aisle today.



Existing 1970's pews which replaced the chairs.



The remaining dark Victorian pews occupying the north of the nave and the north aisle.

4.4 Beauty, Order and Worship

For the community at Berwick the church is primarily a place of worship. The way in which it is ordered should facilitate and enhance this worship.

The current arrangement of seating consists of three types of different form and colour; the dark Victorian pews, the orange pine 1970's copies and the half dozen or so wooden chairs with rush seating. It has been previously argued by Debo Gage that the *'mis-matched pews and chairs...are intrinsic to the value of the totality of the ambience of this simple, much loved rustic church'*. This is the only comment to this effect that the PCC is aware of.

The DAC have referred to this and come to the following conclusion. *'The DAC feels that the chairs at Berwick have both historic and artistic interest and that any proposal to remove them should be included in a faculty application.'* We have asked for clarification and a description of those features which are of historic and artistic merit but have only received an informal response saying that this comment is 'subjective'. It has been pointed out to the DAC that those who sit on the chairs for Morning Prayer have found that after a short time the front bar of the seat tends to cut off blood circulation to the legs and that they are not at all comfortable to sit on, even for a short time.

In the nineteenth century Berwick Church was set in the Anglo-Catholic tradition by the Rector, Revd E.B. Ellman who studied at Oxford and heard some of the founding figures of this movement. This tradition emphasises the critical role that beauty and order play in worship. Indeed, the importance

attributed to these is likely to have been a major reason why the parish was receptive to the introduction of the paintings. The artists' works are themselves filled with colour, beauty and order and through these they contribute to the offering of praise and worship. The notion that a mismatched hotchpotch of seating is in keeping with the church and the worshipping community is entirely at odds with the belief of the worshipping community, as is evidenced by the letters of support. The stackable pews will add to the order and beauty of the interior of the church to the benefit of worship and the enhancement of the contribution that the newly restored Decorative Scheme can make to it. They will also permit worship to be ordered in different ways to enhance different forms of worship.

People writing to the Diocesan Registrar in support of the removal of the pews who have seen the new floor and the openness of the space have cited the beauty of the interior as one reason why they are against the reinstatement of the pews. Many of these have been attending church regularly for many years. One example is quoted below.

Seeing the nave now so filled with light is a spiritual experience in itself. It opens the heart. Not only is the newly revealed space beautiful, it is a great asset (more about which below) and – pertinently for the paintings – the increased light shows off the now restored work to much greater advantage than before. In addition, as someone who has attended many (many) services there over the last forty years I can testify that the pews in question are terribly uncomfortable. Not a spiritual support in the slightest – rather the opposite. Mrs M. Wilmot. 18th November 2020

4.5 Heritage Statement by Brian O'Callaghan and Diana Coulter

The heritage statement which has been commissioned by a group opposing the replacement of the existing pews is welcomed by the PCC. It clearly states that the building is listed on the grounds of the significance of the paintings. It states that the paintings are not just of significance in their own artistic right but that their significance is due in part to fact that they are '*a vibrant testimony of the vision of Bishop Bell of Chichester for enhancing Sussex churches and of his willingness to embrace contemporary artistic styles rather than derivative imitations*'.

As outlined above, the view of the PCC is that the proposal to remove the pews is in accord with this vision. Over the centuries the church interior seating has changed dramatically. The rationale for deciding that the appearance should be fixed in the Victorian era is unclear.

Concerning the Victorian restoration, the report states that; '*Woodyer's restoration is competent and excels mostly in not altering the building beyond recognition*', suggesting that the Victorian restoration did little to enhance the building and did not contribute anything of worth in itself. If the architectural and structural work of the restoration adds little to the merit of the building from a heritage perspective, then one might reasonably conclude that in turn the Victorian furnishings are unlikely to either. The report does not assign a heritage value to the Victorian pews and it is unclear whether this is simply an omission.

What has surprised the PCC is that the five pews installed in 1972 which might well be described as 'derivative imitations' of their Victorian predecessors (except in colour) have been attributed a 'moderate-high significance'. According to the authors this means that they consider them to be 'important at regional or national levels'. It puts them at the same level of significance as the 17th Century memorial to Revd and Mrs Nutt (see image below). This is a striking assertion and somewhat surprising. The cost, the materials, the skill of craftsmanship and the historic significance of this memorial make it difficult to understand how 1970's pews can be of equivalent significance. Revd Nutt was a notable figure in the history of the church and in the local area. He was Rector of Berwick and displaced by a 'parliamentary intruder' in 1645. He started a book 'The Remembrances for the Parsons of Berwick' which is held in East Sussex Archives. The church is still in possession of a

silver-gilt chalice and patten which Revd and Mrs Nutt donated to the church in celebration of the birth of their twins. One cannot help but wonder how they would feel to have their memorial and contribution to the life and history of the church classified as being of equivalent heritage significance to 1970's pews.



The 17th Century Memorial to Revd Nutt and his wife on the north wall of the tower. (The memorial is a substantial 8.5 ft in height).

4.6 Changes Since the Installation of The Decorative Scheme

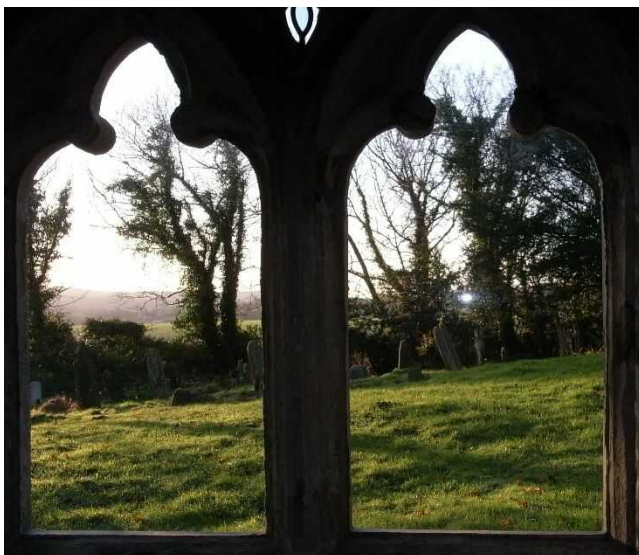
It is being argued by Debo Gage and her colleagues, who were all involved in the conservation project at Charleston, that the interior of the church should be fixed at the moment in history when the paintings were introduced into the church. They are applying to Berwick Church the same principles of conservation that were applied to the conservation of Charleston. As Debo Gage writes in her introduction to *Charleston Saved* by Anthea Arnold 2009: '*...the integrity of Charleston is that it was a complete 'time capsule' from the Bronco toilet paper to the Bakelite electrical fittings.*' It would seem that this approach does not try to attach different heritage values to individual items but views all aspects of the building and its contents as being of equal value if they are original, by which they mean that they date from moment in time that the conservators choose as the 'origin'. The whole focus at Charleston has been on freezing the building and contents in a moment in time, a shrine to the artists and to that moment in history. We do not think it appropriate to apply this approach to a living church. Indeed, if it had been, then it seems very unlikely that permission would ever have been given to introduce the paintings in the first place. Even if one were to attempt to apply this approach, which moment in time would one choose? The building has a history stretching back to Saxon times. There are historic records which would enable one to reinstate certain features and argue for the removal of others. One might conclude that Debo Gage and her colleagues see the church primarily in terms of it being an adjunct to Charleston. Because the church has paintings

by the Bloomsbury artists they believe the same principles should be applied to the church as were applied to Charleston. In effect that Berwick should become an extension of the Charleston conservation project. In this way those who visit Charleston will also be able to visit Berwick Church in the same light, preserved at the point of 'origin' which they select, around 1941. As the letters of support for the removal of the pews indicate, members of the church are opposed to the imposition of these views onto a church which they love.

The church is primarily a place of worship, mission and ministry. And so the interior has changed over the centuries responding to changes in attitudes and understanding. The reality is that many changes have in fact also occurred since the paintings were installed which render the church a different interior now to what it was then. The most significant change are the windows along the north and south aisle. After the paintings were installed a V bomb landed near the church in 1944 and damaged the clear leaded glass. The windows were replaced with clear plate glass and these have become one of the most distinctive features of the church which set it apart from nearly all other rural parish churches. The clear windows afford views directly out onto the churchyard and landscape beyond, including glimpses of the Downs. From a heritage perspective these are totally out of keeping with an historic rural parish church and yet no one has ever suggested reinstating the leaded windows which were in situ when the artists were working in the church.

The Victorian pews on the south side of the nave aisle had been removed before the 1940's and replaced with chairs. These were in situ when the artists were working in the church. Later in the 1970's these were replaced with pine pews. It was never argued then that the chairs should not be replaced because they were in situ when the paintings were installed. In the 1980's a large organ was installed in the tower completely filling the space and obstructing the window in the west wall of the tower. No argument was put forward then that this would alter the interior from the way in which it was when the paintings were introduced. The church has evolved and changed since 1943 and it is not the same interior now as it was when the Decorative Scheme was done. It is difficult to see that the removal of the remaining Victorian pews would constitute harm to a building which has changed so much over the years since the artists installed their paintings. Particularly as the pews do not appear to be of merit in the first instance.

The recent works associated with the conservation of the Decorative Scheme have changed the interior further. These have included the installation of underfloor heating and the new floor of local, handmade tiles. The timbers in the south and north aisles have been painted to lighten their colour, in similar manner to that suggested by Duncan Grant, in order to reduce their visual impact on the paintings and ancient stonework. These works have further changed the interior significantly.



Two of the eleven clear windows along the south and north aisles put in after the Decorative Scheme.

In conclusion, the replacement of the pews will contribute in new and beneficial ways to the needs of the mission of the church. It will generate more possibilities for the present and future generations to contribute to the continuing and living story of the church. It will allow the building to be of greater benefit to the wider public.

Seeing the interior of the church on the completion of the works to restore and conserve the Decorative Scheme and having carefully considered the history of the church, together with the unique significance of Bishop Bell's vision in commissioning the Decorative Scheme, the PCC believes there is a strong case for arguing that the removal of the pews will cause minimal harm. It will help the church to nurture the relationship between creativity and faith, between contemporary artists and the church, and keep Bishop Bell's vision alive today in new and imaginative ways.

Appendix A

Treske Church Projects

Treske Church Projects – Grade 1 listed buildings.

A representative from Treske has written the following

We have supplied our oak and stacking St Mary's benches to numerous projects located all over the UK. Many of these are to historic listed and important churches where the reorder involved the removal of older pews and benches that were fixed and inflexible. Quite often DAC's ask for an example of the original seating to be retained within the church as an historical reference point – this is important where the existing pews have great merit.

I have enclosed a list of some of the projects to give you a range of different situations to look at. Where there is a case study on our website I have also put the web address. Where I can I have put the numbers of benches as well as the numbers of matching St Marys chairs. They are as follows:

St Giles Cripplegate (grade 1) – 28 benches and 18 chairs to be delivered in February 2021

St John the Evangelist, Taunton (grade 1) – 24

benches <https://www.treskechurchfurniture.com/churches/case-study/st-john-the-evangelist-taunton>

Holy Trinity Church, Bradford-on-Avon (grade 1) - 37 benches and 22

chairs <https://www.treskechurchfurniture.com/churches/case-study/holy-trinity-bradford-on-avon>

St Nicholas Church, Great Kimble (grade 1) – 12 benches and 12 chairs

<https://www.treskechurchfurniture.com/churches/case-study/st-nicholas-church-great-kimble>

All Saints, Little Kimble (grade 1) partial reorder of benches – 8 benches

Best regards

Justin Bartlett
Managing Director

Treske

Station Works

Thirsk, North Yorkshire, YO7 4LX

Tel: 01845 522770

www.treskechurchfurniture.com

Appendix B

Letters of Support from Professionals

CARDEN & GODFREY

Architects

33 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1R 0AU. Telephone 020 7490 0300 Facsimile 020 7490 0004
e-mail: mail@cardenandgodfrey.co.uk website: www.cardenandgodfrey.co.uk

Rev'd Peter Blee
The Parsonage
Berwick
East Sussex
BN26 6SR

24 November 2020

Dear Peter

St Michael & All Angels Church, Berwick: removal of pews

I write as your inspecting architect, and as the architect for the recent NLHF project, in full support of the proposal to remove the old pews from the church and replace them with stackable benches.

The original scheme included a new floor with underfloor heating, with the old pews reinstalled. The focus of that scheme was the conservation of the wall paintings, and its principal parts were environmental measures to preserve the paintings followed by the conservation itself, and I can rightly be accused of not having considered at that time other aspects and consequences of the scheme.

The old pews were removed to allow the new floor to be constructed, and it was apparent the moment they were removed what an improvement resulted to the spatial quality of the church, as well as enhancement of the wall paintings. This became more apparent when the new floor tiling was installed, with its soft colouring which further enhanced the paintings.

The end of the original scheme was to have seen the old pews reinstalled, but to have put them back would have been visually and aesthetically detrimental. I have since shared with you an exploration of what alternatives may be possible which would enable the church with its wall paintings and colouring to be seen at its best, and I agree with you that the stackable and movable benches work very well in providing flexibility, and through their almost transparent nature to allow the architecture and adornment of the church to be better seen.

I am aware that there are those who consider the old pews to be important historically and providing context for the Bloomsbury paintings. Neither of those arguments can I take seriously: while the pews may date from Woodyer's 19th C restoration of the church, they are a stock pattern of no special quality; while the paintings were executed with the pews in place there is no record or other indication that Grant and Bell paid any attention to them, and indeed their subsequent painting over of the 19th C chancel screen and pulpit may well reflect their lack of regard for material of that period.

I look forward to being able to support this application further as it proceeds through the faculty process.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD ANDREWS

Directors

Richard Andrews MA Dip Arch FSA RIBA Ian Angus Dip Arch RIBA AABC Andrew Burrell BSc BArch RIBA
Associate Olga V Weal BA(Hons) PG Dip RIBA

artemis|arts

opens up creative experiences to new audiences

22 November 2020

Berwick Church Heritage Lottery Fund Project

Artemis Arts has worked with Peter Blee at Berwick Church since 2007. We developed a project to replace the doors on the South side of the building. The old door had fallen into disrepair and was boarded up and visitors entered the church from the car park on the North side of the building.

In connection with this project we invited local schools to come to the church for a day of combined celebration. We encouraged them to walk with their teachers along ancient paths across the open fields to the church. It was a reminder that this was the way that parishioners arrived at the building before the advent of motor transport. The children sang together but there was not room for them all in the church so we provided a large tent in a field nearby in case of bad weather.

We have managed several education projects at Berwick Church involving local primary and secondary schools. Many had not visited a church in their entire lives.

Disability

Currently the integration of students with special needs into mainstream schools is seen as benefiting both the special needs students and the general school population. The recognition and necessary arrangements for people with special needs in wider society is improving as a result.

We consulted Simon Wilson; a talented severely disabled young man with cerebral palsy to give advice on the opportunities to involve disabled young people with communication problems in creative work. www.simonsable

Deprivation

East Sussex has the highest levels of deprivation of all the counties in the South East. In many rural areas affluence exists alongside, and therefore often disguises, the deprivation that exists. Schools draw from a wide catchment and will include children both from affluent households and 'deprived' households.

Our experience of working with schools in the area for over 25 years is that most of the pupils in this area are deprived of the access to art in its widest sense. In Lewes there are now no galleries that are large enough to welcome school groups and with cuts to funding trips further afield are impossible. This makes the offer of a guided involvement with the art and architecture within Berwick Church especially valuable.

The initial sessions for the HLF Education Project arranged for May/June/July 2020 had to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 restrictions.

If the present viral epidemic persists into 2021 the new space offers opportunities to distance pupils from one another safely and may mean that it will be possible to allow the project to take place. Choirs and musicians will also have room to perform and those with special needs can more easily be included.

We support the removal of fixed pews from the church, as it will make the building even more welcoming. Its central religious purpose will flourish but it will also offer a unique venue for local people of all ages and abilities to come together creatively.

Christine Hall & Wenda Bradley

Directors Artemis Arts Ltd

Artemis Arts | 1 School Cottages | Iford | Lewes | East Sussex | BN73PL
Tel 01273 486595/07748363250 artsartemis@gmail.com | www.artemis-arts.co.uk
Registered in England and Wales |Registered No. 5819202 |Charity No. 1123794|
Registered Office: 1 School Cottages, Iford, Lewes, East Sussex, BN73PL |
Director: Wenda Bradley | Secretary: Christine Hall

Heathside,
Hollywater Road,
Hollywater,
Hampshire
GU35 0AH

25th November 2020

Dear Sir,

RE: Flexible Seating Application St Michael and All Angels, Berwick.

I am writing in support of the application to remove the existing fixed pews and to replace them with flexible seating at St Michael and All Angels, Berwick.

I have been involved with the Church since 2018, actively supporting the development of the outreach and engagement work and have been the Project Manager since 2019, working closely with a range of groups (care homes, charities, community groups, schools etc.) to understand their needs.

Before that I was the Project Manager for the National Lottery Heritage Fund initiative at Guildford Cathedral for nearly three years where outreach activity played an important role in enabling us to work with new groups. I have a deep understanding of the importance activities play in realising a sustainable future ministry for the church.

Having run a series of pilot activities within the church, it is evident that the fixed pews restrict movement and limit the use of the space. It has been difficult to run break out activities and individuals with mobility issues have to sit in the aisles, feeling apart from the group.

Currently, activity has to be delivered in a very specific manner and does not always meet the needs of the vulnerable groups we are seeking to support (the elderly, individuals with mental health conditions, children with additional needs etc).

Flexible seating creates more intimate and safe spaces for vulnerable groups, enables events to take place without disrupting worshippers or visitors and widens the scope of what we can offer as a church and extending our ministry into the community.

Having seen how the new flexible seating works, I believe this approach will ensure activity is delivered more effectively, encouraging visits in future years and creating an increased connectivity to those we wish to support.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Ellis

Project Manager

RICKERBY & SHEKEDE

wall painting conservation

12 New Street, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7DA
 +44 (0)1989 565551 | +44 (0)7798 837714 | +44 (0)7787 573852
 srickerby@rickerby-shekede.com
 lshekede@rickerby-shekede.com
 www.rickerby-shekede.com



18 November, 2020

Church of St Michael and All Saints, Berwick, East Sussex: Victorian pews

We are both graduates of the Courtauld Institute of Art three-year post-graduate course in wall painting conservation, and have thirty years' experience in the field. We have our own private conservation practice but also work regularly as conservation consultants for organisations such as the Courtauld Institute of Art, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the World Monuments Fund. Our profession has taken us to sites across the UK, Europe, Africa, America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and we have worked on wall paintings ranging in date from as early as 1500 BC to the middle of the twentieth century.

As wall painting conservators we consider the paintings under our care not in isolation, but as integral to the buildings that house them, providing a function particular to the spaces and communities for which they were designed. The conservation of a wall painting is therefore not limited to preserving it as an isolated physical entity, but to facilitate the functional, aesthetic and historical roles appropriate to its specific context.

Our association with the paintings at Berwick church is long and intimate: our first visit in July 2016 was to a rather chilly church with shabby and neglected paintings. A detailed assessment of the nature and condition of the paintings followed in 2019, culminating in a four-month treatment intervention this summer. As we slowly removed layers of yellowed and blanching varnish and dirt from the surface of the paintings, re-laid areas of flaking and reintegrated losses, the darkened paintings began to emerge with a new vibrancy reflecting the artists' original vision. At the same time, transformative work was going on elsewhere in the church too, and from the noisy chaos we witnessed the parish's holistic vision for the church slowly emerge.

The geothermal heating now provides a gentle heat through the new buff-coloured terracotta floor tiles. These, and the newly painted walls and ceilings are gently illuminated by light from the clear fenestration; the formerly dark, cluttered space beneath the west tower is now an elegant meeting area overlooked by newly restored monuments. The removal of the unremarkable Victorian deal pews (and the more recent garish modern ones) has been an essential part of the church's transformation, further opening up and brightening the interior and enhancing its calm and harmonious atmosphere. Their removal facilitates appreciation not only of the church's elegant proportions and ancient architecture but, importantly, of the unique paintings which adorn its surfaces. Aside from the obvious advantages of affording more flexible and safely spaced seating, the open design and light colour of the stackable pews chosen to replace them is entirely in keeping with the unique character and decoration of this lovely church. We are strongly of the opinion that all the recent interventions within the church – including the removal of the pews – provide an appropriate context for the paintings, rendering them more accessible, understandable and appreciable by both parishioners and visitors. We would therefore strongly urge that the old pews are not reinstated.

S. J. Rickerby *Lisa Shekede*

Stephen Rickerby, MA hons, Dip. Cons., ACR
 Lisa Shekede, BA hons, MA, Dip. Cons., FIIC

[Appendix C](#)

Letters of Support

Introduction

The context of these letters arose from the fact that parishioners and people with long standing connections with Berwick Church, wished to state their views and add their support to the application for replacing the pews. The letters bear witness to their participation in the activities of the church and their wish to sustain and nurture its ongoing projects and initiatives, as part of its mission. The letters also illustrate very eloquently what the church means to them, along with a strong awareness of being custodians for its future.

The PCC together with parishioners, and all who have since visited, have been able to see (since completion of the Works), the huge potential and opportunity which the interior space allows for without the encumbrance of fixed pews. The authors of the letters chose to write, in the face of possible or perceived opposition – by a small group which has in fact no liturgical connection with the church. (I.e they don't attend its Services, or indeed participate in any of its activities or outreach.)

Many of the letters' authors were baptized as babies or confirmed in Berwick Church, and/or were married there, and have spouses, parents, relatives and even children buried there. It is integral to the fabric of their lives.

Whilst each letter is both personal and individual, it can be seen that their themes are highly relevant. Because they are so varied, and each written in its own style, they are best illustrated simply through reading them, which I have been privileged to do, and I very much hope the DAC and the Chancellor will do likewise.

They all speak of the innate practicality however, which the movable benches would afford, and the huge opportunity they allow, for the church to function in a more inclusive way. Their versatility affords a bigger welcoming capacity. They each testify in their own way how it would render the church better able/less restricted in carrying out its role in both worship and in its mission.

Every letter also draws attention to the aesthetics, the light, the space that has been created without the heavy and somewhat dark, boxed-in feeling of the pews.

I believe they bear witness to the simple fact that the mission of the church cannot be sacrificed to a notion of the pews being ascribed a significance which our community, frankly, fails to understand.

The letters amply substantiate the resulting public benefit in replacing these with comfortable, well-designed and aesthetically pleasing oak benches. In my view, they go a long way in establishing that this consideration far outweighs any other argument.

They also demonstrate the responsibility felt and indeed shouldered by our community, the varied ways of serving the ministry of Berwick Church, and their wholehearted support of its Rector, Revd. Peter Blee.

They attest a proportionate and holistic vision. They articulate – and several in a professional capacity - that this is really the only viable way forward.

Mrs Ruth Nares
Church Warden.

**Berwick Court
Berwick
BN26 5QS**

01323 870927

The Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

16 November 2020

Dear Mr Oliver

Berwick Church, Replacement of Pews

I am writing to voice my wholehearted support for the replacement of the old pews in our church, with stackable ones.

I have been worshipping regularly at Berwick Church since 2013 when I moved to the area from London, having been widowed young. I became a PCC member two years ago and was fortunate enough to be remarried there shortly before the restoration of the paintings began.

The newly opened church is a joy to behold and I commend Peter Blee on his unstinting work in driving the conservation project forward to such wonderful effect. The paintings are fresh and vibrant. Equally uplifting is the sense of space and light afforded by the beautiful floor and the light streaming in from the tower, open again for the first time in 35 years and as it was when the artists first painted the murals. I confess, my heart sinks at the thought of the effect on this wonderful interior of putting those cumbersome, dark pews back in.

I gather that the decision hinges on whether the public benefit of replacing the old pews outweighs the historical and artistic importance of keeping them. I would argue that this is almost a no-brainer and that the public benefit of having stackable pews is overwhelming. Due to the paintings and our church's beautiful rural setting, the church is particularly attractive to visiting groups/events and it is our heartfelt wish to make the most of opportunities for mission and to welcome communities beyond our weekly congregation. As we are taught (Matthew Ch.25) "*I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in*". I hope our commitment to this duty is self-evident from the list of activities we have planned, and which are set out in the statement of need. Clearly it would be hugely advantageous to have seating arrangements that are as flexible as possible to suit a variety of purposes.

As a former primary school teacher, I write with visits from groups of children particularly in mind. As any children's worker will testify, the advantage of being able to sit them down in a circle on the floor or be able to separate into small groups is so helpful, aiding engagement and the sense of everyone's contribution to discussion being equally valid.

I have many years' experience of helping with children's ministry in my former church in London (St Barnabas, W14) where flexible seating allowed us to convey God's truth in a variety of ways – enabling theatrical enactments of biblical events and parables, as well as providing space for creative work. Simply in terms of studying the paintings, one can see how advantageous it would be to be able to seat groups of children (or adults) in front of individual paintings. (At Berwick church, we did have a puppet show a few years ago in which children from a local school enacted a parable, but it was rendered very much more difficult by restricted space).

Similarly, at my former church we used the church interior for many events, religious and secular, in an attempt to reach out to those who might not normally see our church as their natural home. We hosted quiz nights with groups of tables, country dancing evenings, womens and men's breakfasts and talks (after which we split into smaller

groups), in addition to the small regular prayer groups etc – all facilitated by flexible seating.

The ability to create greater space in front of the chancel screen would be greatly beneficial for concerts and theatrical performances. A friend of mine, Emma Bell, (an internationally renowned soprano and a Glyndebourne regular) has recently offered to give a concert, singing arias chosen by members of the public in memory of loved ones who have died during the Covid months, for example. This alone is perfect example of a wonderful opportunity, for which seating set back from the front of the church would be very desirable, due to the fullness of her voice.

To add another, my husband was in church recently when he started chatting with a visitor, who turned out to be the chairman of Magic Hour Theatre. He has organised theatrical performances in a church in Brighton, and offered to do the same in our church, with proceeds from ticket sales going to help our fundraising efforts. These opportunities can be captured only with flexible seating. The old pews simply clutter the interior too much.

I feel strongly that, with flexible seating, we have the opportunity to breathe new life into our church, to make it fit for purpose for its mission and to render it more financially secure for the next century. It should not be missed.

Yours sincerely
Catherine Marsh

Mr Darren Oliver, Registrar,
 Chichester Diocesan Registry,
 Minerva House,
 5 Montague Close,
 London SE1 9B.
 20th November 2020

Dear Mr Oliver,

My husband and I, with our family of five daughters, have been worshippers at Berwick for just over thirty years.

It has been a precious place for all of us as we have not only found sanctuary for our souls here but increased in our knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.

Our daughters have gone out from this place richly blessed by the Christian faith they have found here.

I now take my part in helping with flower arranging and serving at the weekly Eucharist. I have also for the last ten years prepared a weekly Service Sheet, composing introductions for the three readings.

I rejoice that our church has been restored to an even greater beauty. But, of course, the prime motivation for this huge effort and expense was always so that we might appeal to a wider public; especially to those who would not normally venture to engage with the Christian faith.

So it was with great excitement that we saw how valuable were the possibilities of this glorious open space, light and bright, offering all sorts of seating arrangements. In this way we could extend hugely, reaching out in a new and living way with so many people of faith or, even more importantly, of no faith.

Surely, that is what the church is there for?

It would seem to me, therefore, a retrograde step to put back fixed pews whose primary function was to enable a Victorian congregation to be able to sit for the main feature of the service i.e. to listen to the sermon.

Victorian, and 1970s, pews may have 'heritage' value but surely they cannot compare in value to the greatest gift of our heritage; that is, the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. With this new space offered, we are now able to present our faith in so many innovative and creative ways.

To be denied that possibility by the enforced replacement of the Victorian pews would block so much of our endeavour to present to others our "love of the Lord Jesus and for all His people" as we are reminded this coming Sunday – The Feast of Christ the King – in the letter from St Paul to the new churches he was founding.

Monica Stoodley

Alfriston, Polegate
East Sussex. BN26 5UZ

The Registrar
Mr Darren Oliver
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

9th November 2020

Dear Sir,

St Michael and All Angels, Berwick – Pews.

I have been a member of the congregation at St Michael and All Angels, Berwick for 70 years; for the last 18 years serving on the P.C.C. Members of my family have been Churchwardens and other church officers over the years, and many family members are resting in the Churchyard. During my lifetime in Berwick Church, Rectors have come and gone, but we have been very blessed to have the Revd. Peter Blee amongst us for the last 20 years. As a member of the P.C.C., several years ago we started to discuss the restoration of the murals. With the enthusiasm, artistic eyesight, patience, attention to detail and hard work of the Rector and visiting experts, the scheme ‘got off the ground’. Progress has been conscientiously and thoughtfully carried out. I would add that the whole time the restoration was planned and carried through, The Rector has always emphasised that it is first and foremost our lovely Parish Church, and nothing will change that.

However, with the prospect of dwindling congregations, something needed to happen for the Church to continue and thrive. The restoration work has been completed and the dark pews temporarily removed so that we now have a bright flexible space to allow the Church to function both liturgically and socially in a more inclusive way, thus attracting many and varied groups. The proposed purchase of stackable, moveable, comfortable pews which have a lighter appearance, means that the church interior can be used for both formal and informal services and events – as shown in the helpful charts illustrating their anticipated use.

My late parents were members of the congregation when the murals were first proposed by Bishop Bell and were well aware of the controversy surrounding the project. However, work on the murals went ahead, and over the years many hundreds of thousands of people have visited Berwick Church because of the murals and found a deeply spiritual atmosphere. I feel the present restoration is a continuation of that work, transforming the interior to provide a very special and spiritual focus for generations to come.

Having had doubts about the whole project in the first instance, I now fully support the successful outcome of this application, and feel that the Revd. Peter Blee should be congratulated and thanked for his extensive, often onerous work to make the interior of Berwick Church the inviting, peaceful, and warm space it now is.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) Jane Fox-Wilson

Pringles Court
Alfriston
E. Sussex BN26 5TT

7 November 2020

Dear Mr. Oliver

I have been a member of the congregation of Berwick church for twenty years and help with Sacristan duties and flowers. Initially I was concerned to hear that the Victorian pews might be replaced but now, having seen a sample pew in place in the church, I think the proposed oak bench pews are the perfect compromise. They will work well both for Services of worship and, because they are moveable, to provide flexibility for groups who will be visiting the church to view the beautiful paintings.

Berwick church will always be a special place of worship and spirituality. The proposed oak bench pews blend perfectly with the present ambience of the church following the conservation work.

Yours sincerely

Anne Michael

6 Staveley Court
Staveley Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex BN20 7JS
6th November 2020

Dear Peter,

Pews in Berwick Church.

I know that my wife Maggie is writing, but she and I have not collaborated over the matter so that our views are quite separate and distinct. I have worshipped in Berwick church since moving to Eastbourne in 2014. I am on the lesson-reading rota, I have a licence to help with serving communion and I am a trainee reserve organist, playing about once a month.

I am a traditionalist. I like pews in church, but there are pews and pews! The old ones were uncomfortable, did not really match, had little history behind them and some were quite dilapidated. The proposed new ones look very smart, the stacking facility offers flexibility in their use and they must be more comfortable. They would offer a sense of light and airiness in the church which would be in keeping with the new tiles and general refurbishment. I would therefore support the removal of the old ones and their replacement with the suggested modern ones.

A lot of time, energy and money has gone into conserving the paintings and making the church environment suitable for their preservation. While this is very worthy in itself, it is not the prime purpose of the Church. The building, the furniture, the art-work, the music, all should be directed towards helping us to worship God and facilitate the growth of a Christian dimension in our lives. The building and material contents of the church should be marshalled to achieve this end most effectively. Show-casing the art is of secondary importance. If replacing the pews will assist our devotional objectives, that should take precedence over any aesthetic considerations. But, in my opinion, the new pews will significantly assist in both.

With kind regards,

Robert (Atkinson)

Crispin Freeman
Sanctuary, Winton Street
Alfriston, BN26 5UL
07506 726638 cpftep@gmail.com

16 November 2020

Darren Oliver Esq
Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

Dear Mr Oliver

**Replacement of fixed pews with stackable pews in St Michael & All Angels Church,
Berwick**

I write further to the faculty application to remove the fixed pews in Berwick church and replace them with moveable stackable pews.

I have lived in a house in view of Berwick church for 39 years and have been a member of the congregation throughout that time. I have been treasurer of Berwick PCC since 2017.

I support the application to replace the fixed pews with moveable stackable pews to enable the church to utilise its internal space better to suit the requirements of modern worship and other activities and socialising within the church.

Yours sincerely



Crispin Freeman

To Mr Daren Oliver
 Registrar
 Chichester Diocesan Registry
 Minerva House
 5 Montague Close
 London SE1 9BB

From Jonathan Chiswell Jones
 2 Hillside, East Dean
 East Sussex
 BN20 0HE

6th November 2020

New Pews in St Michael and all Angels Berwick

I have been a committed member of the congregation at Berwick church for the past 7 years and a member of the PCC for 4 years. I serve at communion once a month and read when required. I also look after the tax reclaim on donations to the church.

My work as a craft potter of 45 years practice involves making visual judgements all the time, so I approach the question of the pews in Berwick from both the practical and the aesthetic angle.

First the practical angle- it is clear that if Berwick church is going to survive as a live place of worship not a museum, it will require wider thinking than traditional church services provide. The church has to attract and provide for a much wider constituency than the regular Sunday worshippers. I believe Peter Blee wants to create a church interior which will be flexible, useful in multiple ways, and better suited to a variety of groups who presently rarely enter churches. Informal prayer groups, meditation sessions, visiting art groups, and perhaps more collegiate layouts even for regular worship. I believe all these possibilities would be better served with seating which can be moved than by the fixed pews of the past.

Second the aesthetic perspective. In my opinion, the movable and stackable pews in oak harmonise so much better with the new brighter interior of the church. I have seen and sat in them on two separate occasions. I understand some people unconnected with worship at Berwick want to retain as much of the past as possible. But the church at Berwick is a living centre of worship, not just a place to wander into, take a couple of photographs, buy a postcard and leave, as part of the Charleston experience. That reduces it simply to a tourist attraction, and even as a tourist attraction, the church should be presenting itself as part of a relevant and contemporary tradition. I often wonder whether bodies of experts would have allowed the building of the Royal Pavilion in Brighton if they had had the power to refuse. Yet over the years, it has become the emblem of the city itself. Experts are not running the church at Berwick and attempts to freeze one particular period of the church's history can risk its effective and continued functioning.

I am frankly amazed that there is not more support for those who are envisioning a future for Berwick Church. Attempts to petrify a particular moment in its history may succeed because of power structures which exist, but might well be at the cost of faith in a future which could meet a variety of 21st century spiritual needs uncatered for by traditional religious services.

Let us have courage, welcome the possibility of new beginnings, and make Berwick church something more than an artistic curiosity. That surely is the role of the church. Without this vision, it will simply cease to exist as a Christian centre of worship and spirituality.

Sincerely yours,

J. Chiswell-Jones.

**6 Smugglers Close
Alfriston
Polegate
East Sussex BN26 5TG**

Tel: 01323 870177 / 07772 585089

Email: jane.corkran@gmail.com

5 November 2020

Mr Darren Oliver - Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB.

Dear Mr Oliver

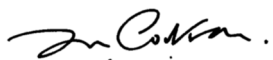
Re: St Michael & All Angels, Berwick – Church Pews

I am writing to you as a regular and committed member of Berwick Church for the past 14 years. I have been a PCC member since 2007 and served as PCC Secretary for nine years. I Serve at Communion once a month and am on the rotas for reading the Lesson and acting as Sidesman when needed. I also enjoy helping with the church flowers. It has become my spiritual home where I find nourishment, peace, joy and great comfort.

I wish to express my full support for replacing the current pews with stackable pews. Berwick Church has been the spiritual home to the residents of the rural Parish of Berwick since Saxon times. The fabric of the church and indeed the contents have been added to, changed and evolved over many centuries – as rightly occurs in all living buildings. The Victorian pews, and those added in the 1970s, were of **their** time, which was but the blink of an eye in the history of Berwick church.

During the past year the 20th Century Bloomsbury paintings have been restored and conserved which have necessitated further changes to take place. This work came to an end just two days ago. Yesterday, a small Service took place to rededicate the church and to thank the five principal people involved in this process. The little church positively glowed with light and space and the spirituality and prayers and praise that have taken place there over the centuries were almost tangible.

I have seen the new stackable pews, which I found to be comfortable and which offered much better support. As it is planned to open the church to diverse groups as part of the ministry of the church in the future, stackable pews would lend themselves to this. They would also open up the church in a positive way to the community.



Yours sincerely

Mrs Jane M Corkran

**Diamond Cottage
Ripe
Lewes
BN8 6AR**

The Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

13 November 2020

Dear Mr Oliver

I am writing in enthusiastic support of the replacement of the old pews in Berwick Church with more comfortable, movable seating.

My longstanding connection with St Michael's and All Angels, Berwick, began in the late 1950s when I became engaged to be married to someone living in Berwick. Upon marriage, I worshipped there weekly and became a member of the PCC for a period during the 1960s. Both of my children and all five of my grandchildren have been christened there, and both of my children were also married there. I moved away to the Bath area for a while after the breakup of my marriage, but returned here in 2007.

I have seen this gem of a church evolve during my lifetime. I remember the black paint vandalism of the pulpit, for example, and the replacement of the chair seating in the south aisle, (where my mother-in-law used to sit) with pine pews. It has been marvellous to see the wonderful work that has been done to restore the paintings, the opening up of the tower and the beautiful new flooring and kitchen arrangements, which give the church such a feeling of freshness, space and light.

I fully support the idea of replacing the fixed pews with more modern movable ones, such as the very nice-looking one on display at a recent service I attended. The ability to reorganise seating in whatever way is wanted, would surely make more opportunities for other uses within the church, such as concerts and group visits. They also were so very much more comfortable to sit on and would look so much nicer with the new floor than the old pews, some of which were very dark and the others rather orange in colour. I have some experience of pew-replacement from the church of St Michael's in Bath, (known well by Archdeacon Martin) which I visited occasionally during my time living nearby. I understand there was initial opposition to the notion of replacement of pews there, which changed completely once the new flexible seating was in place, to absolute delight with the comfort and flexibility of use it provided.

I am aware that there is considerable support for the idea of new seating , to which I would like to add my voice. It seems a very appropriate next step in the ongoing evolution of a living church which needs to adapt to the needs of the day.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Julia Cockell.

44 Brook Street, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6BH

Tel: 01323 484500; 0788 7644156; email: loveday.murley@googlemail.com

5 November 2020

Mr. Darren Oliver
Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

Dear Mr. Oliver

St. Michael and All Angels, Berwick

I and my family have regularly attended Berwick Church for over thirty years, and since May 2019 I have been Secretary to the Parochial Church Council. We have watched the progress of the building and conservation works with great interest – the restoration of the Bloomsbury murals is outstanding and will ensure the church will continue to provide a welcoming and spiritual haven to both parishioners and visitors for many years to come.

However, maintaining the upkeep of Berwick Church and ensuring the murals do not fall into disrepair again comes at a cost, which can, I believe, be mitigated by making sure the “space” within the Church is as flexible as possible so that it can support a wide variety of activities and events both for the community and beyond. The stackable pews which are being proposed offer a wonderful opportunity to do just this – enabling a traditional environment for worship, and a more flexible environment for events and activities.

Yours sincerely

Miss Loveday Murley
Secretary, Berwick PCC

To: Mr Darren Oliver, Registrar, Chichester Diocesan Registry, Minerva House, 5 Montague Close, London SE1 9BB.

From: Mrs Maggie Atkinson, 6 Staveley Court, Staveley Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN20 7JS

9th November 2020

Dear Mr Oliver

Regarding the opportunity to replace the old pews in Berwick Church with alternative pews that are stackable:

I would be grateful if my comments listed below could be taken into account when deciding whether to allow the replacement of the old pews.

I have attended Berwick Church for 5 years and sometimes read the lesson at services.

- **Comfort:** I would be very thankful indeed if the old wooden pews were to be replaced with the much more comfortable lighter-weight stackable ones at present on display in the church.

I have a bad back – not an uncommon story amongst people of all ages in our modern world! – and I find the old pews very difficult to sit in. It's the angle of the back of the pew to its seat that's the problem. There have been times when I have had to miss going to church on a Sunday because I've known I wouldn't be able to make it through the service. On some other occasions – I remember particularly the funeral of a friend – in order to be there, I have had to sit on a chair, separated from my husband who was in the main body of the church. At a sad time, it would have been so good to be able to sit beside him. These old pews really are very uncomfortable and, since they have had to be removed to do the work to the floor of the church, it would seem that we have the perfect opportunity to replace them.

I have tried the new pews on offer and they are MUCH more comfortable. We want to be able to welcome members of the wider community to the church for social, entertainment, educational and therapeutic purposes – I hope the welcome will include making them feel comfortable, not only spiritually, but physically.

- **Performance:** I am an actor and have performed in many churches in the UK and the US. Berwick church makes a wonderful performance space, both acoustically and atmospherically. Its only drawback is the lack of flexibility it offers for performance. The old wooden pews are immovable. I feel that the most successful performance spaces, for all age groups, are not those that put the performers at the front with the audience lined up in front of them – 'them and us'. We want our performances to be inclusive – sometimes immersive – and *always* with good sight lines. Seating (comfortable seating) that can be rearranged to create a space in which to be creative, and in which to be 'moved', is vital if Berwick church is going to fulfil its potential as a performance space for secular as well as spiritual use. I would like to mention two performances that were wonderful but were hampered by the rigidly arranged seating – one was the telling of T.S Eliot's 'Four Quartets', the other a play by actors who were working with local school children. Within a more flexible space these two pieces would have flown! Some of our audiences are people who don't usually set foot in a church and, although they come bravely to support the entertainment, are sometimes daunted by the 'churchy' set-up. We have a real chance to engage them with the experience of being in Berwick church, and how we present the space is crucial.

- **Light:** The conservation of the paintings in Berwick church, together with the necessary replacement of the old tiling on the floor and the whitening of some of the beams has been a joy to observe. We are nearing now, Duncan Grant's vision for the space. In 1943 Sir Charles Reilly wrote that entering the church was 'like stepping out of a foggy England into Italy'. In 1943 we know there were not nearly as many pews weighting down the picture. If only the heavy, mismatched pews, that do nothing to grace the space, could be

replaced by the lighter ones, then that luminous, uplifting atmosphere could be given back to us.

- **Maintenance:** The old Victorian pews need a great deal of repairing if they are to be reinstated. Some of them play a joke on you – you put your hymn book in the receptacle in front of you and it falls straight through to the floor! As far as health and safety goes, the new pews we are hoping for will make it much easier to clean the church. The present old, closed-in pews, are a trap for dirt and cobwebs, and it's hard to get enough light on the job to be sure you have cleaned effectively.

We have such an opportunity to make things more comfortable, more flexible, more inspiring, and cleaner in Berwick church by replacing the old pews with new, lighter-weight, moveable ones. I hope we will be able to do it.

With kind regards

Maggie Atkinson

Mr Darren Oliver, Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

18/11/2020

Dear Mr Oliver,

There is a proposal to reinstate the pews which occupied the nave before the present restoration. That would be a great pity. They are of different periods, unevenly stained, and detract from the wholeness of the space they occupy. Seeing the nave now so filled with light is a spiritual experience in itself. It opens the heart. Not only is the newly revealed space beautiful, it is a great asset (more about which below) and – pertinently for the paintings – the increased light shows off the now restored work to much greater advantage than before. In addition, as someone who has attended many (many) services there over the last forty years I can testify that the pews in question are terribly uncomfortable. Not a spiritual support in the slightest – rather the opposite.

I have memories of my young children participating in Christmas events, my husband and I reading lessons, later taking a (by then slightly older) son to fill in as organist on occasion. The church has played a great role in our lives in a wider capacity too. I take visitors to see the paintings, and in June combine that with the hollyhocks and point out the iron which distinguishes the grave of a parishioner who loved ironing. I've been to plays in the church – somewhat constrained by the intransigence of fixed pews – and started out on downland walks from there. I followed the development of the Pilgrim Path with interest, walking too with people who have less interest in services inside the church per se but have their own spiritual connection to the area, feel no less a part of the villages in their own minds.

Which brings me back to the increased flexibility of the space in the nave. The proposed benches which would replace the pews are in a light wood, and may also be lower? They feel less obtrusive, as if colour and light may now assume a larger role. The benches also may be stacked away, enabling flexibility beyond traditional services. There are many other activities which bring us together. Lent talks and meals. Prayer groups, held too outside in clement weather – and the lovely south door too (open on warm days) is more visible now. There are art projects. Recently, outreach events have begun taking place – with children as well as university students. The church has always been good at hosting 'Bloomsbury' events, but why limit the possibilities? In a wider capacity, isn't that what church is for? To foster our sense of belonging to a whole, whichever part of that whole we may identify with?

Yours Sincerely,

Margaret Wilmot

Berwick Court
Berwick
BN26 5QS

01323 870927

The Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

11 November 2020

Dear Mr Oliver

Berwick Church, Replacement of Pews

I join many others in our parish in calling for the replacement of the old pews in Berwick church.

I have worshiped at Berwick church all my life. I was born in Berwick, the son of the late Mr John Lewis DL (longstanding PCC member and Church Warden). I was christened in the church, as were my three children. My late wife's funeral was held there, as was my 17-year-old son's and both are buried there, alongside my father and my grandparents. And finally, I recently remarried there. The church is very close to my heart and, quite apart from attending services, I often pop in for quiet moments of reflection. Being a farmer, I am also often involved in any "heavy lifting" or practical arrangements for church events.

Before the restoration work started, I gather that there were some in the congregation who were reticent about change and wished to proceed cautiously regarding suggestions of new seating arrangements. My father was among them. Sadly, he died before he could see the splendid transformation of our beloved church, so I will never know whether he would have come round, as have so many. Indeed, I have the feeling that support for change is now virtually unanimous, and I could not be more delighted.

On aesthetic grounds alone, I can see that new proposed stackable pews would look so much nicer than the collection of mismatched pews/chairs that were there before. Judging from the models that were on display in the church, not only are the proposed pews infinitely more comfortable, they would go much better with the lovely new floor and complement the sense of light and freshness lent by the newly revealed window.

Much more important to me, however, is the conviction that in failing to install more flexible seating, we would be missing an important trick in terms of equipping our church for its mission and for its future. Flexible seating would undoubtedly be advantageous in helping us reach out to a wider range of people and community groups (by hosting concerts, talks, small group prayer/worship and visiting groups who might benefit from different seating arrangements and more space for socialising). Not only is this our heart-felt mission and our obligation (having received National Lottery funding), but it is also sensible in terms of our church's long-term financial viability. The Berwick area is too expensive for many young families to be able to afford to live so, inevitably, many in our congregation are in their retirement. For our church family to continue to look after the building and the paintings, and to be able to continue sharing it with as many people as possible, we will need to ensure that we are as well-equipped as possible.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lewis

**Thatched Cottage
Berwick
Polegate
East Sussex BN266SP**

**Tel 01323870243/ 07711330531
email peterandprue.heathcote@sky.com**

7th November 2020

**Mr Darren Oliver - Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB.**

Dear Mr Oliver,

Berwick Church Pews

We have been worshipping at Berwick Church for the past 20 years and are delighted with all the restoration work which has beautifully enhanced the charm and peace in this wonderful old building. The builders and restorers have done a fantastic job and have really put their hearts into the project. Everything is now much brighter and spacious which creates a spirit of well being. The newly tiled floor and the comfortable new light coloured benches add to the overall effect. It would be a travesty to cover it all up with the dark old uncomfortable pews. Life has to go on.

Best wishes

Peter and Prue Heathcote

*Bramble Cottage
Weavers Lane
Alfriston
East Sussex BN26 5TH*

5 November 2020

Mr Darren Oliver - Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

Re: Berwick Church Pews

I was confirmed at Berwick Church and have been a member of the PCC since 2002, was married there in 2011 and served as a Trustee on the Berwick (Sussex) Conservation Trust from 2016 until 2019. I also serve at communion and read.

All members of our church have observed the conservation and development work at Berwick with pride and appreciation. The attention to detail and care that has gone into all aspects of the work from craftsmen, builders and conservators have resulted in a space that reflects air and light, with mellow tones entirely suited to the clear glass windows, spare landscape and newly revealed matt chalky tones of the wall paintings.

Not all parishioners were supportive of the aspiration to remove the Victorian and 60's pews and replace with lighter flexible seating, but having seen the result of the conservation work, there has been unanimous approval. Have those who object to the removal of pews seen the church since the work has been completed? Fortunately the Victorians, unencumbered by planning restrictions, have been able to leave their mark on many British churches. They have encumbered us with a heavy and dark inflexibility as we offer a broader form of worship and renewal to a broader community.

Berwick Church offers something unique, entirely suited to the sense of place. Is the desire to keep the pews to preserve a snapshot of history? Of which period? Late 60's? This is the preserve of museums and the National Trust not a living church. The fundraising campaign has been contingent upon making the meaning of church available to a wider congregation. We see this work as making this space a place of healing and nurture. Worship as a creative act. A degree of flexibility to the planning of the space; for the disabled and marginalised, young mothers, the elderly, dementia sufferers and their carers, musicians, artists and the young. The pews block the space and make small groups and more informal worship impossible.

The artists themselves were not traditionalists, I believe that they would have responded to seeing their work in the present context with delight. Bp Bell's vision was to create works which through creativity and imagination contribute to our Christian mission and understanding of faith. They should be made accessible to as wide a group of people as possible and in order to make this work, we need a space which can be flexible and open to movement.

With best wishes

Ros Roscoe Ford

rosroscoeford@gmail.com

Mr Daren Oliver,
Registrar, Chichester Diocesan Registry,
Minerva House, 5 Montague Close,
London, SE1 9BB
6th November 2020

Dear Mr Oliver

CHURCH PEWS AT BERWICK CHURCH, EAST SUSSEX

I have been a member of the congregation at Berwick Church for seven years. I am writing to support Berwick PCC's request to remove the old Victorian pews at Berwick Church and replace them with the beautiful pales ones which can be moved around according to need and event. They are a much better match with the new light coloured floor tiles and are so adaptable and practical as well as being aesthetically pleasing. I feel they are part of the new look of the church which is saying we are open to all for many different kinds of occasion and not only for the traditional Sunday services. I feel they speak of a wide spirituality which appeals more to people today who may find Victorian style Christianity hard to relate to and which the dark Victorian pews seem to embody. Didn't Jesus speak of finding a new skin for the new wine. Of course, the Spirit of the Wine has not changed but maybe the new pews are part of a necessary fresh skin to attract young folk.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Chiswell Jones

Msc Couns. Psychology,
Almonds,
2 Hillside,
East Dean,
BN20 0HE

Flint House
The Street
Selmeston
East Sussex
BN26 6UD

20 November 2020

Mr Darren Oliver – Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

For the attention of The Chancellor

Dear Chancellor

391/1158/20 Berwick, St Michael and All Angels

Works: Replacement of pews with lightweight, movable pews

I write in strong support of the above.

I declare an interest insofar as I look after stewardship matters for the benefice. Additionally, my wife is a Trustee of the Berwick Conservation Trust and was much involved in fund-raising and the National Heritage Lottery grant application.

I have read the associated documents notably the Heritage Statement and the Statement of Needs.

I believe the Diocese will be misdirecting itself if it insists on returning the Church to its appearance in 1943. Whereas a point in time, historical restoration works for the nearby Charleston Farmhouse, this is not a precedent for Berwick Church which is constantly evolving. The Diocese commissioned and paid for the Bloomsbury paintings and it is not up others to dictate the context or manner in which they are viewed by insisting on the restoration of the pews which have no rarity value.

I note that the objectives of the DAC on its website are as follows:

The DAC makes recommendations to the Diocesan Chancellor in respect of faculty applications and also offers both formal and informal advice to parishes on the care and development of their church buildings.

The word development is important and covers the evolution of the church consistent with its ministry.

As a condition of the Heritage Lottery grant, the incumbent – Peter Blee – had to develop a comprehensive programme of activities. Quite frankly these activities, particularly with disabled groups, will be severely hampered, if not made impossible, by the return of the pews.

Prior to the restoration of the paintings, Berwick Church received about 10,000 visitors a year. This number will undoubtedly increase markedly once the pandemic is over. The sheer joy that the unrestored paintings brought to visitors can be gauged from the comments in the visitors' book or TripAdvisor (5/5). More so when the church is fully accessible again.

The various grant-aiding trusts with whom my wife dealt, enthusiastically supported the restoration of the paintings. Currently without pews it is possible to view the paintings from various perspectives. The return of the pews prevents this, and the enjoyment of the paintings will be diminished. Undoubtedly, if asked, the benefactors might oppose the return of the pews as being an impediment to the appreciation of the restored paintings.

In another context, the Sistine Chapel would not work if cluttered with furniture.

Turning to the Heritage Statement. The authors refer to Frederick Etchell's report to the DAC in 1943. The following passage is omitted:

"I went with some feelings of apprehension about the scheme in relation to what appeared to be a relatively unspoilt ancient building. I found, of course, that the Church is to a large extent a rather amateurish reconstruction of 1856, and this applies to nearly all the portions of the building which the proposed paintings would occupy. The Chancel Arch is modern, as is the Chancel for all practical purposes, and the North arcade shows only slight traces of the insertion of a few old stones..... I have gone into these details to try to show why I came to the conclusion that no charge of interference with an authentic old building could reasonably be made in this particular instance; indeed if an experiment of this kind is to be made at all, in any but a quite modern building, Berwick Church would seem to be a peculiarly suitable case."

As a result, I would suggest that the authors' subjective assessment of significance can be challenged. Even more so when specifically applied to the pews.

This is amplified by its Grade 1 Listed status (see Historic England website):

Built of flint with stone dressings and tiled roof. Chancel, nave with aisles, and west tower with broached shingled spire. C13 with later windows, spire rebuilt in 1774, the whole restored in 1856. The church contains a series of C20 mural paintings by Quentin and Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant of 1942-3. Monument to John Nutt dated 1656. Easter Sepulchre and Piscina.

The history of the Grade 1 listing entirely follows from the commissioning by the Diocese of the paintings.

The final Duffield question:

Bearing in mind that there is a strong presumption against proposals which will adversely affect the special character of a listed building, will any resulting public benefit (including matters such as liturgical freedom, pastoral well-being, opportunities for mission, and putting the church to viable uses that are consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission) outweigh the harm?

I would observe:

- Despite Mr Etchell's poor review, there are no proposals to modify any part of the church building or fixed infrastructure. Pews and furniture must be at the lower end of the spectrum.

- In association with the restoration of the paintings, the church and its restored floor and lighter interior is joyful and fitting for the 21st century. Reinstating a volume of brown furniture will degrade the effect.
- The outreach work and mission of Peter Blee is truly exemplary and needs to be supported by the Diocese. His views as to how he wishes to use the church need to be respected.
- Used in the flexible way suggested, more people will be attracted to this church and it is possible to believe might become long-term congregants. This should be encouraged.
- Viability: Finally, as an unintended consequence of the restoration of the paintings, it is likely that Berwick Church will become – after the Cathedral – one of the most visited Diocesan buildings. Large numbers of visitors to a small church are incompatible with the reinsertion of fixed pews and represents a hazard or risk.

The plans for the future use of Berwick Church are inspiring, no harm will result.

If it assists, I can write further,

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Lewis-Grey'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

A B Lewis-Grey

Mr Darren Oliver, Registrar
 Chichester Diocesan Registry
 Minerva House
 5 Montague Close
 LONDON SE1 9B

Mustians
 Eton College
 Eton
 SL4 6EX

19 November 2020

Dear Chancellor,

Re. the pews at St Michael and All Angels, Berwick

You may wonder why someone who lives so far from Berwick is writing to you. It is very simple – my family has worshipped at St Michael and All Angels for the last 30 years or so and even though we no longer are there Sunday by Sunday, it is our place of worship when visiting my parents and a place where my sisters and I continue to offer, when we can, the ministry of music with which we served the church when growing up in Sussex.

The question of the pews came up in a recent conversation and I feel compelled to write because I am surprised that those who worship each week at the church and faithfully serve God in the community feel that they are not being heard over the voices of those who seem to view the church as an historic building in which to preserve art.

The primary purpose of a church is to offer people a space to worship, to explore their relationship with God, which might be through admiring, in this instance, the beautiful art and by being in a place which creates an awareness of His peace.

On seeing photographs of the newly refurbished church, undertaken as you probably know in order to conserve and preserve the paintings so beautifully created by the Bloomsbury Group, I was struck by the sense of space and peace the refurbishment has created, bringing the paintings and building into harmony with each other, brought about by the soft tones of the new floor, the roof beams sympathetically coloured and the absence of the pews. Of course, a modern church cannot be without seating, but the idea of putting back the rather solid old pews in their mismatching colours (the Victorian ones a rather sombre dark brown and the 1970s ones an orangey pine) would introduce dissonance. Yes, the Victorian ones might have historical significance (for the record, the 1970s 'copies' are so badly done I had no idea until two weeks ago that they had been intended as copies), but I believe that it would be a mistake in this instance to make history the master. Rather as a piece of art may be ruined by the wrong choice of frame, so the old pews would detract from the newly realised harmony.

Concerning the flexibility required for ongoing outreach and mission, which would be denied by returning the old pews to their positions, I am sure that members of the church community will have written, and they are more qualified than I to do so. Therefore, if you are not able to see for yourself this place, I would urge you to give due consideration to the views of those who have a heart for God's continuing mission through St Michael's.

Yours sincerely,

Charity Miles

**Winton House
Winton Street
Alfriston
BN26 5UH**

**The Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB**

Dear Mr Oliver

St Michael's and All Angels, Berwick – Pews

I have been a member of the congregation here for over 10 years, and a member of the PCC for six years.

Many of my fellow parishioners have written eloquently about the recent work in the church to restore the murals and to arrange the limited space in this small and beautiful country church in a sympathetic way that more easily welcomes the many different people and groups who visit Berwick besides our regular congregation. We have been very lucky to have the Revd Peter Blee to lead us with his strong faith, aesthetic sense and above all, determination to welcome both churchgoers as well as others interested in Berwick's religious and cultural heritage.

It makes sense to many of us that we need to have more flexible space and seating that can be arranged sympathetically for services, talks and for special education purposes for both children and adults. We also wish to welcome the disabled and other groups in the local community in a way that makes them feel comfortable. The lighter, flexible seating now proposed now makes far more sense than the old fixed pews, and with the light, warm tones of the new flooring, creates an atmosphere that is welcoming, elegant, dignified and flexible.

So, like many others, I very much hope we can move forward on this basis.

Yours sincerely

Charles Anson, CVO,DL

Flint House
Selmeston
BN26 6UD

23rd November 2020

Mr Darren Oliver – Registrar
Chichester Diocesan Registry
Minerva House
5 Montague Close
London SE1 9BB

Dear Chancellor,

I am a trustee and the Secretary of the Berwick (Sussex) Conservation Trust and I would like to add my voice in support of the removal of the old pews in Berwick Church and replacement with the beautiful new oak benches.

As a Trustee of the Conservation Trust, I have been involved in the project since its inception and partly to Peter Blee's extraordinary vision for the future of Berwick as a living church dedicated to the inclusion of all. I think that vision for the church building and the restoration of the paintings has come about in a much better way than any of us ever considered. Peter has met with not inconsiderable resistance to almost every aspect of the project along the way and it is absolutely wonderful that the congregation and the community have now come together to support his work and his vision and the removal of the old pews.

The Victorian pews are of themselves of no historical merit whatsoever and to put them back in the stunning light, bright and visually stimulating restored church would to my mind be a travesty. The main consideration in Christian ministry is to spread the word of God as widely as possible and to include all those who have either never been inside a church before or who are disabled or vulnerable in some way. Berwick Church now has the fantastic opportunity to include all in a safe and flexible space, not only for worship but also for all the other activities planned.

Berwick Church is unique. It is all about the whole experience – the small rural parish church, the wonderful surroundings of the South Downs and the now vibrant Bloomsbury paintings. This experience is spiritually uplifting and joyful and needs to be shared in the Christian context which will enhance the ministry of Peter Blee and those who follow after him as Rectors of the church.

Yours faithfully,

Stephanie Lewis-Grey
Trustee & Secretary
Berwick (Sussex) Conservation Trust

Willow Barn,
Langtye Lane
Ripe
Lewes
E. Sussex BN8 6BA

Mr Darren Oliver, Registrar,
Chichester Diocesan Registry,
Minerva House,
5 Montague Close,
London SE1 9B.

19th November 2020

Dear Chancellor,

**Re. Application for a Faculty for disposal of the Pews
at Berwick Church, St. Michael & All Angels.**

I have been a member of Berwick Church for over a decade, and was on the PCC for two years before becoming Church Warden. (I also read and sometimes lead intercessionary prayers in Services).

The question of the pews has been in the background as a point of discussion for over two years. We didn't feel however, in a position to take it any further or come to any decisions, until we were able to get an idea of, and feel for, the space in the church once the underfloor heating was installed along with the new tiled floor. It felt important to take one step at a time. (There was also just a very small number of our congregation who were undecided or unsure about the idea of not having pews, and we wanted to listen to what *everyone* felt.) We were loaned some of the Luke Hughes benches from another church and acquired some Treske ones on approval, and invited everyone to try them out and give their comments.

I am familiar with all our parishioners' views and can only say that the response has been overwhelming. They find the Treske oak benches extremely comfortable and feel they only add to the aesthetics of the church: The benches generously contribute to the sense of light and airy space in the interior. I'm aware that several parishioners are in the process of writing to you, and I can only here corroborate the perspectives and thinking that they represent. There are some who have chronic back problems, and used to have to bring cushions to give them support they needed with the pews.¹ From a practical point of view we likewise *need* the flexibility that the movable/stackable benches offer.

¹ As for the rush-seated chairs - which the DAC considers to be of historic and artistic interest, which we fail to comprehend nor have received explanation -

These points have been amply set out in our Rector Revd Peter Blee's Statement of Need. To carry out the many activities and projects which we have planned (sadly on hold at present due to Covid) – the layout of the old fixed pews is frankly an obstacle. With reference to the Duffield questions, the “harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest” would, I firmly hold, be with regard to the reinstatement of the pews, rather than their disposal. The church in its mission and activities needs the versatility which the pews deny and the benches afford. To quote the final point in these Duffield questions:

“Bearing in mind that there is a strong presumption against proposals which will adversely affect the special character of a listed building, will any resulting public benefit matters such as liturgical freedom, pastoral well-being, opportunities for mission, and putting the church to viable uses that are consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission outweigh the harm?”

Despite my failure to understand how the special character of our church would be adversely affected - *even if* this were held to be the case – it is wholly without doubt to me that any resulting public benefit would outweigh it. It is, as I have previously said, widely held amongst our congregation, that being *without* the pews serves only to *enhance* the church as a place of worship and mission.

I am also entirely at a loss to understand how the Heritage statement takes a view that the five pews installed in 1972 – which are purely copies of the Victorian pews, are classed as having “**moderate-high significance** on artistic grounds as well as for historical reasons” due to the fact that they bear small brass plaques commemorating members of the congregation (including Rev. Ellman's daughter who died in 1937. The plaques of course would not be disposed of). Why is a mere copy of a Victorian pew given merit on artistic grounds? It had been noted that Bloomsbury conservationists - in the knowledge that the pews could be under consideration - wished find cause to oppose it. It seems very odd that these pews are given the same moderate-high significance as the Nutt Memorial, attributed to John Stone, and even the Lady Chapel Altar. The Heritage Statement has in fact made other mistakes of a factual nature in their appraisal.

The report does state however, that were it not for the paintings (now most painstakingly and beautifully restored) – the Church would not merit Grade I listing.² Since Berwick church's Grade I listing is held as a consideration in the matter of the pews, it must surely be borne in that there are now many Grade I listed churches throughout the country which have installed this bench seating. Buildings of very valuable historic and architectural significance in their own

they are avoided at all costs by parishioners, since to be seated on one for even a short period results in loss of blood circulation to one's legs.

² The architect who made a report in 1942 made the same statement.

right (ie without the paintings) - from cathedrals to small country churches.³ All of them would have needed to submit their proposals with their respective DAC's and Faculty petitions, clearly with positive results.

In terms of our Chichester-centric DAC, whilst we naturally understand their need to consult with the various bodies as to the church's architectural, artistic and historic interest, we trust that this is not at the cost of, nor detriment to, our needs. Whilst their function is to give (and take) advice and guidance on the architecture, art and history, I may be forgiven for citing this reminder: "Members of the DAC are required to have due regard to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission. To that end, the DAC supports and enables the re-imagining of our buildings in line with the goals set out in The Ely 2025 strategy."

Likewise – I draw attention to the fact that in proposals in a petition for a faculty, consultation with the Church Buildings Council is mandatory. As the CBC states: "We operate the Rules ourselves. They allow us to give special attention to the role of the church as a centre of worship and mission."

In terms of the required Statement of Significance,⁴ the CBC states that "whilst every place of worship will have aspects that require specific, often professional expertise to identify, describe and evaluate",

"...it is not necessary (or even really desirable) for a Statement to be written entirely by an external consultant, it is just as important that the significance of a feature or aspect to the community is recognised and recorded as it is for the architectural, archaeological or art historical merit to be assessed."⁵

Our parishioners and congregation are of a conservative nature. Berwick has a tradition of Anglo-Catholic roots (dating back to the time of the revered Revd. Elman, and his Oxford connections with Newman) – which is why so many of its parishioners come from far beyond Berwick Village as well as from the village itself. There is a reverence for the solemnity of the Liturgy, and our church is held and treasured as a sacred place. In early November we had a Service to re-dedicate the church - our first since September 2019, prior to Works - and to say farewell and give our thanks to the conservators. Both the Service and the

³ As examples and just a few out of many: Holy Trinity Church, Bradford-on-Avon (Grade I), St. John the Evangelist, Taunton (Grade 1), All Saints, Little Kimble (Grade I), St. Giles Cripplegate (Grade I – 28 benches to be delivered February 2021). Grade II listed churches which have replaced their pews with benches or chairs run into hundreds in number.

⁴ In our case, it would appear to be largely the Heritage Report commissioned by the Bloomsbury Conservationists. From our side we trust that alongside the Statement of Need, letters from parishioners will also receive due attention.

⁵ Notwithstanding the laudable foundation of the Victorian Society, whose sole aim they state "is to protect our Victorian and Edwardian buildings for future generations", and who I believe are consulted, might we venture to add that the church is infinitely more ancient than their era or focus.

Church could only be described as luminous. Also people were able to move around freely - whilst keeping social distance - which would not have been possible with the pews in place. Every person present commented on how beneficial, as well as aesthetically pleasing it was without the pews. The space also affords far better viewing access to the paintings.

As a very active community, we need to be able to host gatherings, retreats, exhibit artwork, have talks and performances, and continue our projects with local schools and the Universities of Sussex and Brighton. It is undeniable that for our work and projects to continue and to grow, the flexibility of space with movable and stackable benches is both becoming and essential to our church.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Nares
Church Warden

PS

Since writing this letter, I note that Historic England, in their Advice of 18th November, have made the suggestion for "some of the historic pews and chairs to be retained, to illustrate the history of the seating."

To me this would amount to a gesture of perfunctory "tokenism". (The pews in themselves hardly engender historic merit.)

In terms of the history of the seating, it might be remembered that before the time of the Reformation there were no pews anyway.

In terms of layout they would be regarded as an obstacle, and aesthetically as an impediment.