

SITE VISIT TO BERWICK, ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS, THURSDAY 22nd OCTOBER 2020

DAC members present: The Ven. M. Lloyd-Williams, The Revd V. Baron, Ms C. Cullis, The Revd M. Heather, Ms A. Howell, Mr P. Pritchett

In attendance: Dr E. Arbuthnot, Mr G. Moore Dr K. Prior



Description of the church

W tower, shingled broach spire. Nave and chancel windows, some details, late 13C-15C. Poor restoration, 1856 – N arcade, chancel arch “illiterate and clumsy on top” (Pevsner). S arcade – original. Chancel windows – rere-arches in form of shouldered lintels, late 13C feature. Plate – cup, 1630; paten, 1753. Monuments – chancel, N side, Dec. canopy; John Nutt (d.1656), two frontal busts in oval recesses, garlands over. Wall paintings – 1942-3 for Bishop Bell, by Duncan Grant, Crucifixion and Christ in Glory, W side and W wall, W side of screen; Vanessa Bell, Annunciation and Nativity; Quentin Bell, altar, roundels on E side of screen (Sacraments), E side of chancel arch.

Reasons for the site visit

A site visit was organised to discuss proposals to replace the pews with stackable pews, add an extension to provide a lobby and a second extension for a W.C., and reduce ground level around the tower.

DAC consideration

The attached site visit report was agreed by the whole Committee at its meeting on 12th November 2020.

Members of the DAC visited the church on 22nd October and welcomed the opportunity to see the works that have been carried out over the last year and to discuss the latest proposals in respect of seating, extensions to the porch and tower, and the reduction of ground level around the tower.

The delegation has reported to the full Committee which has looked at the proposals and is now able to give its preliminary advice.

Background and Needs

The parish have recently carried out a major project to conserve the decorative scheme by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, improve the facilities in the church, and associated works.

During the course of the works, some changes to the original proposals were authorised by the Deputy Chancellor by way of variations to the existing faculty. The changes included the decision to leave the space at the base of the tower open, so that the memorials uncovered when the organ was removed would be left visible; this meant that the W.C. originally planned has not yet been provided.

The major works that have been carried out included works to address the majority of the recommendations made by Mr Tobit Curteis with the aim of provided the optimum environment for the long-term preservation of the decorative scheme, including underfloor heating. However, one recommendation that has not yet been implemented is the idea of creating an entrance with an air-lock with the aim of reducing the amount of cold air that it brought into the building as people enter and leave.



The parish and their Inspecting Architect explained that their current needs therefore include the provision of a W.C. and the extension of the porch to provide a lobby and additional door. The parish are also keen for the church to be used for a wider variety of events and activities and would like to introduce more flexible seating. Finally, the parish would also like to lower the ground level around the tower with the aim of creating a level an accessible footpath around the church whilst also addressing the damp in the base of the tower.

The DAC congratulated the parish and their Inspecting Architect on the works carried out so far. Members particularly commended the approach to the AV, noting that the screen which had been designed to rise up from the top of the chancel screen was almost invisible and that the projector was cleverly hidden by a small pull-out panel in the servery in the base of the tower. Members also noted that the kitchen and tower space were particularly well-designed and in keeping with the building.

Seating

The parish explained that the previous faculty authorised the introduction of underfloor heating and a fully tiled floor but did not cover any changes to the seating. The expectation was therefore that, by the time the works are completed, the original seating should be reintroduced in its original positions.

The DAC noted that the parish are now in the process of making a faculty application for the removal of the pews and the introduction of modern stackable pews, which would offer more flexibility. The DAC agreed that stackable pews could look well in the space. It was noted that the new floor was very light and that the appearance of the pews and how they would look against the new floor would need to be carefully considered; some members felt that it would be preferable to have light pews that would almost blend into the floor, and that pews in a light wood would pick up the other details in light wood introduced as part of the recent project. However, others felt that darker pews would provide a better balance and would also be a nod to the what went before.

The DAC had the opportunity to see two examples of stackable pews by Treske and Luke Hughes at the site visit, as the parish have managed to borrow some examples to try out and members expressed a preference for the Treske design.

However, as previously noted, the DAC feel that the existing pews and chairs have some character and heritage significance. The existing pews include some dark wood Victorian pews on one side of the church and some twentieth century pews on the other side, in addition to 6-8 rustic looking chairs. The DAC felt that the pews and chairs were not, in themselves particularly significant or beautiful, but that they held some significance as they may have been a reference point for the decorative scheme by Grant and Bell. Some members felt that it would be good to retain at least some of the dark wood pews so that it is possible to glimpse the colours and tones of the church as it was when the decorative scheme was created.



The DAC appreciated that the stackable pews would offer more flexibility and, as explained in the Statement of Need, this would enable the church to be used for a wider variety of services and education and community activities. The Committee advised that the final version of the Statement of Need would need to demonstrate that the benefits of flexible seating outweigh any harm to the significance of the building. As the DAC had not yet received a full application for Formal advice and had not yet had an opportunity to review the feedback from consultees, it was felt that it was too soon to make a definite decision about their formal advice would be.

The parish explained that it would be difficult to reintroduce the pews in the short term, whilst awaiting the outcome of the current faculty application, and asked about the possibility of introducing chairs on a temporary basis rather than reintroducing the pews. The DAC advised that it would best to contact the Registry to explain the situation and ask their advice on the best way to proceed; the Chancellor might be willing to consider a variation to the existing faculty or an interim faculty, or the Archdeacon suggested that he might be able to issue a Temporary Minor Re-ordering Licence, if the Registry advises that this is permissible.

Extension to the Porch

The parish explained that they would like to extend the north porch, which is the main entrance to the church, in order to create enough space to install a second set of doors and create an air lock, so that less cold air is brought into the building as visitors come and go.

The DAC was supportive of the idea, noting that the extension would contribute towards improving the environment inside the church for the preservation of the decorative scheme.

The current proposal is to extend the porch by approximately a metre. The extension would be traditionally constructed, and its roof would match the pitch of the existing porch roof. The existing door would be moved out to become the external door, with an inner glazed door.

The DAC noted that the existing porch is attractive and contributes to the character of the church and churchyard. However, on balance, they felt that this would be a better solution than inserting a glazed lobby within the church.



In relation to the proposal to relocate the existing Victorian door so that it becomes the external door with a glazed inner door, the DAC noted that the entrance will be level and wide enough to accommodate a standard wheelchair but that it would be very difficult for a wheelchair user to open the doors without assistance. However, it was explained that the parish are keen to retain the Victorian door and arch and that the shape and height of the door would make an automatic door entry system prohibitively difficult to install.

W.C. Extension



The parish would also like to add a second extension, in the space between the west wall of the north aisle and the tower, in order to provide an accessible W.C. The W.C would be accessed via new door in the west wall of the north aisle.

It was noted that there was some medieval fabric in this wall but that much of it had been rebuilt in the Victorian period. The DAC agreed that it would be best to access the W.C. via a door in this location rather than breaking through the medieval fabric of the tower wall or having a W.C. that is only accessible from the outside.

The DAC noted that the roof of this extension would match the pitch of the existing aisle roof. The Inspecting Architect explained that this approach meant that the roof would cover a louvred opening on the north side of the tower. Some members expressed regret that this opening would no longer be visible, and it was noted that it would need protection during the building works. However, on balance, the DAC agreed that the proposed design seemed the best solution.

Reduction of ground level around the tower

The parish and their Inspecting Architect explained that they would like to reduce external ground level around the base of the tower, with the aim of addressing the damp in the walls at the base of the tower. It was also hoped that, once ground level had been lowered, it would be possible to provide an accessible path around the western end of the church building. It was explained that, currently, there is level access around the eastern end of the church along a path leading to the south door but it is not possible to travel the whole way around the church on a level path.



The DAC was sympathetic to the need to improve the damp in the base of the tower and the wish to provide a fully accessible path all the way around the church. However, it noted that the amount of earth to be removed was quite substantial and members were unconvinced that the benefits would justify the scale of the works.

It was felt that there could be archaeological implications. The area appeared to be quite disturbed and it seemed likely that the excavation for the disused boiler room, which is covered by a concrete slab, would have disturbed quite a lot of disturbance in this area. However,

there are some headstones quite close to the route of the proposed path and it seemed possible that there could also be unmarked graves. It was felt that it would be helpful to arrange a further site visit, perhaps with the DAC Archaeological Adviser and the parish's archaeologist, to discuss the approach to the archaeology.

It was noted that it would be important to leave a slope with a reasonable and safe gradient and members felt that a geotechnical survey and some input from a structural engineer might also be helpful. The DAC noted that the proposal also included the removal of the concrete drainage gullies around the current base of the tower.

Next steps

As explained above, the DAC felt that it would be best to contact the Registry to explain about the challenges that would be involved in reinstating the pews and whether it would be possible to introduce chairs in the short-term, until the faculty application in respect of the replacement of the pews has been decided.

The DAC noted that it would be up to the parish and their Inspecting Architect to decide whether to include all of the proposals outlined above in a single application or whether to divide them up. The consultees for the pews and extensions would include Historic England, the SPAB, the Victorian Society, the Twentieth Century Society and the CBC. The proposals for the reduction in ground level, if that was to be a separate faculty application, would only involve Historic England and the Local Authority.

In the judgment issued in 2019, the Deputy Chancellor encouraged the parish to consult the group of people who objected to the faculty application in respect of future proposals. The Inspecting Architect explained that he had written to all of those people but that they had indicated that they would prefer to wait until the faculty application is at a later stage before responding.

The DAC felt that it would be helpful to have their views sooner rather than later; if their feedback was received before the DAC gave formal advice, the DAC would be able to consider it alongside the responses from the statutory consultees. It was also noted that this would save the parish money as, if objections are received after the petition has reached the Registry, the Registry staff would need to spend time corresponding with the parish and objectors and that the parish would be liable for the costs incurred. The Secretary offered to email this group of people and explain that the DAC and parish would find it helpful to have their views sooner rather than later, if this would be helpful.