

Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC)

Delegation Visit Report 15th February 2024

Parish Church of St Peter, Evercreech

Grade I Listing No 1059172

From the DAC

Simon Baker (DAC Chair)
Charlie Peer (Archdeacon Wells)
Julian Gibbs (DAC Adviser)
Jonathan Saunders (DAC Adviser)
Emma Brown (Diocesan Church Buildings Adviser)

From the Parish

Geoff Hamlet (Churchwarden)

Rob or Eric who joined us?

Hilary (PCC member)



Purpose of Visit

A delegation visit to discuss the parishes proposals for the removal and disposal of two pews from the west end of the north aisle.

Background

The Church of St. Peter was built in the latter part of the 15th century. The chancel is earlier and dates from 1300. The fine tower dates from the later 15th century. In 1875 the altar step and later Victorian tiles were laid over the eastern end of the encaustic tiled pavement and the reredos installed. The perpendicular nave was constructed in several stages during the 15th century. The nave was later heightened with the addition of the clerestory, three light windows and the roof. Fittings predominantly late 19th century include reredos, sedilia, altar rails, choir stalls, brass eagle lectern, pews, stone pulpit, and stone font. Organ built in 1870. North and south galleries to aisles, Gothic Revival, constructed 1825 and 1843 respectively.

The new south aisle with matching gallery was added in 1843-44 by local architect and builder Jesse Gane. He carefully copied the existing medieval north aisle, arches and pillars while inserting the galleries in the available roof spaces.

The current floor and pews were renewed in 1920. The pews were installed by Wippen & Co of Exeter and according to records Parson Angell's wife carved many of the bench ends.

Previous successful reordering schemes in the last 20 years, which included introduction of WC and server installations, under north and south gallery. The scheme provided storage provision which is fully utilised and now full. Also permitted pew removal at the west end.

There is additional pew alteration and removal at the far west end of the south aisle, as shown (Pic 5.) creating a regularly utilised arts and crafts area for adult and children's groups. Removal of the same pews on the proposed north side would be symmetrical.

In 2019 thanks to a generous donation a successful glazed entrance screen was installed. The faculty permitted the disposal of two further pews.

The further request for disposal of two more pews is to facilitate the storage of children's toys, used every Monday for the 'Little Fishes' children's and parents' group. In addition, this area could future serve as an area to accommodate those with disabilities, including non-able bodied wheelchair users for services and events; and prams, which can often clutter the main entrance/exit route causing a health and safety issue.

The pews in question have not been used to provide additional seating capacity for some years, as they are not required and on the rare occasion when a large service event takes place the gallery seating and chairs are used to compensate for any pew loss.

St Peter's church is in active use for worship and has a well-established relationship and use by local groups, in particular a successful children's and parent group. Toddler groups are amongst the most exciting and significant starting places for mission for both adults and children. Toddler groups thrive because there are people dedicated to providing a safe, caring and welcoming environment where parents, grandparents and other carers, along with their infants and toddlers can begin to experience the Christian faith. This is very important missionally as the number of these groups decline and the parish and volunteers at Evercreech are owed a debt of gratitude for their dedication, love and sheer hard work running this group.

Summary of advice

The delegation was warmly welcomed and listened to the mission of the church, taking into account the needs of the parish. The DAC supports the desire of the building to evolve and accommodate the current need to store the children's toys and equipment, and offers the following recommendations:

- The current draft of the Statement of Significance should be further developed to include an assessment of the churches interior character and the level significance

including the churches fixtures and fittings. The Statement of Need should be further developed to convey justification for further pew removal to accommodate the children's toys. Emma Brown, Church Buildings Adviser, can help with this.

- The church has undergone several previous schemes, setting a precedent of permitted disposal. The further two 20th century pews are of limited value and readily unfixed, without the need for any remedial works to the north wall or flooring. It would be helpful if the parish could upload a copy of the 1994 NADFAS report relating to the furnishings of the church, as this would serve as useful supporting evidence.
- By removing the two pews the DAC delegation was not confident that this would solve the storage issue and that essentially the pew bases currently serve as shelves and props for the toys and equipment. The parish does not at present have plans to replace the pews with bespoke storage furniture, due to financial constraints. Therefore, the delegation proposed as an option, **a Temporary Minor Reordering**, which would permit the removal of the pews for a limited time, allowing the church to evaluate if this proposal is successful, or will need to develop an alternative proposal. If this route is adopted by the parish, they are reminded they should continue with their full faculty proposal as soon as possible, as this is only temporary and will still be required to provide the supporting evidence as set out in this report.
- Potential future storage provision should be discussed, and drawings produced by an architect. A potential option discussed by the delegation could be to extend the under-gallery length beyond the WC to create smart in keeping storage area, dependent on budget and suitability.
- The additional tables and chairs stored in this area are propped against the pews proposed for removal. Safe storage of this equipment/furniture should be considered, especially by those accessing the toys. The church was proposing to prop them against the wall. The delegation recommended speaking with the churches architect on this matter, and in particular any impact on the hanging painting located here.

Emma Brown
Church Buildings Adviser
15th February 2024



Pic 1. View towards the west showing the most recent reordering with clearance of pews from the west end. Pic 2. view towards north aisle.



Pic 3 and 4. Illustrating how currently the toys and equipment are stored. Including additional tables and chairs.



Pic 5. Pew alteration and removal at the far west end of the south aisle. This is used as an arts and crafts area every week and would not facilitate the storage of the toys.



Examples of the pew ends