

Statement of Significance

Woodlands @ Todmorden CE (VA) J, I & N School

Section 1: The church in its urban / rural environment.

1.1 Setting of the Church

The site stands on the northern side of Todmorden, a small, West Yorkshire town on the Yorkshire/Lancashire border. The site is off the Burnley Road and beside Todmorden Church of England School (often known locally as “National”). The Church was closed as a place of worship in 1987 when the parishes of St Mary’s and Christchurch merged and St Mary’s became the Parish Church once more.

The churchyard was founded in 1826, prior to the building of Christ Church and was transferred to St Mary’s Church in 1987 when Christchurch was closed. The Churchyard remained an open churchyard until 2008 when it was closed by Order in Council.

Officially it is maintained by Calderdale Council but budgetary restrictions mean that there is insufficient capacity to maintain the churchyard adequately. Accordingly, the Community organisation Friends of Christ Church (known locally as FOCC) do much of the maintenance of the Churchyard in practice. It is FOCC, along with relatives, who have raised concerns about the Nursery extension being built over part of the Churchyard.

The former Christ Church, now in private residential ownership, is adjacent to the churchyard and set at the top of the cul de sac alongside which the churchyard lies.

1.2 The Living Churchyard

The churchyard has a large number of well-established trees and is on the shaded side of the valley which to some extent limits planting options. The arrival of a patch of Japanese Knotweed also means that some re-planting will be needed once the Knotweed has been dealt with. However, there are also a number of ferns and a range of insects and birds. Officially, as a closed churchyard, the churchyard should be maintained by the local authority. However, their capacity is limited and in practice the churchyard has been maintained by the Friends of Christ Church (FOCC) along with others in the community, for example volunteers from Todmorden’s Incredible Edibles, an environmental charity. The aim is to maintain the churchyard in such a way as to develop the wildlife and its environmental sustainability, whilst also ensuring that graves are accessible and the churchyard is safe.

1.3 Social History

Christchurch was founded in 1832 and was one of seven Anglican churches across Todmorden and Walsden. Christchurch and St Mary’s were the Town Centre churches, with Christchurch designated as the Parish Church and the most closely linked to Todmorden Church of England Primary School, its neighbour. The work of FOCC includes documenting the histories of those at rest in the churchyard, which reveals that the range of those buried includes:

John William Yourn, originally from Cornwall, who married a woman from Todmorden and having begun work in lowly roles at the mills (scutcher and card-maker) made good to buy two properties in Lydgate, which is further up the Burnley Road.

Thomas Holt, cotton manufacturer, picker maker and farmer

Edna Eastwood, cotton weaver, who disappeared on 21st January 1913 and was later found dead after being missing for 122 days

The Church was closed in 1987, after a decision to retain St Mary's and re-dedicate it as the Parish Church, instead of Christchurch. There are still members of St Mary's congregation (including one of the churchwardens) who were originally members at Christchurch. They are keen to ensure that the history of Christchurch and the churchyard are properly honoured.

Following closure of the Church building there was an extensive marketing process, which lasted throughout the 1990s before a buyer was found. Possible alternative uses that were put forward during that process included a climbing wall, use as an independent school, use by an alternative church, various schemes for residential use and possible use by Todmorden Church of England school (aka National). The latter was desperately in need of more space, but the lack of funding made that option unfeasible. Eventually in 2001 a scheme was approved for sale of the building to be converted to residential use, which eventually materialised in 2003.

It is interesting to note that in correspondence about the development of the scheme for the sale of the Church for residential use there are plans, dating from 2000, that show the classrooms on the churchyard where the current extension is located. There was further correspondence relating to the development of a new path to the memorial ground at the rear of the church but no-one (from Calderdale, the church, the school, the Diocese or the Church Commissioners) seems to have questioned the location of the classrooms and the boundary between the churchyard and school.

1.4 The church building in general

The church building is Grade II listed. It was built as a Commissioners church, for £4,000, in 1830-31 to designs by Lewis Vulliamy. Its exterior remains as it always has been, providing a striking view of the church tower above the trees, but the interior has been substantially altered in the conversion to residential use.

1.5 The church building in detail

The list description describes it as follows:

Hammer-dressed stone, ashlar dressings, slate roof and north porch. Early English Lancet style. 5-bay nave. Angle buttresses, plinth, string, corbel table. 2-light windows with offset buttresses set between. Porch in 3rd bay of nave has string which rises over pointed arched doorway. Pyramidal finials with cross to centre of parapet. 2-light clerestorey windows. Finials to corners of aisles and clerestorey. West tower is embraced by canted walls for staircase to gallery. 3 stage embattled tower has clasping buttresses. Pointed arched west door. 2nd stage has stepped window of 3 tall lights. 3rd stage has 2-light belfry with to west face clock set within blind arcade. Buttresses continue to form finials. Shallow chancel has angle buttresses to east only. East window of 3 tall-stepped lights set within a pointed arch with hoodmould. Interior: Nave has pointed arched arcade with octagonal columns and moulded capitals. Slightly cambered wooden roof. Chancel is thrown out a further 2 bays, and has waggon roof, and elaborate opus sectile mosaic with texts invoking the Redeemer and companies of saints amongst other scenes.

The exterior remains as it was previously. The stone is largely coal smoke-darkened as with many buildings in Todmorden.

1.6 Contents of the Church

The interior of the church has been much modified by the residential conversion in 2003 so there are no contents to note here as they have been either relocated for appropriate use elsewhere or modified with the conversion. The Order of 1987 for the Church closure was succeeded by a scheme for the residential conversion of the building and disposal of assets such as pews, wrought iron screens, Baptismal font and pulpit. All were disposed of appropriately following a report by conservation

consultant David Michelmore. A new home was also found for the distinctive mosaics from the enlarged chancel. Listed building consent for the disposals was also given by Calderdale Council.

1.7 Significance for mission

In recent years the Churchyard has largely been managed in practice by the Friends of Christchurch (FOCC). Some members of the parish, including one churchwarden (previously a Christchurch member) are also members of the FOCC, enabling ongoing conversations and relationships between church and the churchyard. Exploring the stories of members of the town allows opportunities to share stories of what the church has done and is doing today.

It is also hoped that by being open and transparent about the problems arising from earlier failures to obtain the relevant permissions, there will be an opportunity for the church to build relationships more widely across the town as bridges are re-built and hurts healed. The PCC has previously given a substantial donation towards the work of FOCC in maintaining the churchyard and documenting those buried there.

Section 2: The significance of the area affected by the proposal.

2.1 Identify the parts of the church and/or churchyard which will be directly or indirectly affected by your proposal.

The area of the Churchyard that is affected by the proposals is on the northern side of the Churchyard, adjacent to the school and across what has become a boundary with the school, demarcated by a high, green wire fence, as shown in photos amongst the Background documents.

2.2 Set out the significance of these particular parts.

The graves in the area of the Churchyard affected appear to be intact insofar as can be assessed from brief inspections in the crawl space and from the point of view of the concrete base that has formed the footings of the nursery building. Those who were involved in the Nursery development have said that the graves were not disturbed but it has not been possible to verify this independently. The fact that significant quantities of concrete have been poured to create the footings of the nursery raises some questions. Such headstones as have been identified are also intact and in keeping with the style and character of headstones that remain upright in the remainder of the Churchyard. However, the headstones beneath the Nursery have been laid flat and set in the concrete footings in order to allow the building of the nursery over them. Many are family graves and information to date shows that the following are buried beneath the building:

Nellie and John William Richards

Arnold Cunliffe

Ruth Sutcliffe

John, Mary and Catherine Johnstone and Margaret Moore

David, Betsy and John William Cropper

James, Alice, Norah Margaret, Frederick Samuel and Edward James Sefton and Frances Jane Scriven

Miranda Duggan

Christine and John Barker

William and Martha Jane Sutcliffe

Henry, Mary Ann, John and Rosa Stott
Hannah, Abraham, Mary, Charles and Thomas Dawson
John, Susannah, John Willie and Law Southwell and Sam Wood
Squire, Robert and Betsy Dixon
Sarah, Joseph and Richard Hollinrake
Llewellyn, Emily, Edith, Sarah and John Pugh
William, Charles and Lucy Ann Goucke
Scholfield, Mary Jane and Winifred Mary Collins
Benjamin, George, John, Susan, Anne and Mary Crowther
James and John Arthur Greenwood
Mary, Alice, Sally, Thomas and Sarah Ann Shackleton
John and Ann Law and Ernest Thomas
John and James Thomas and Bridget Falkner
Ada, Agnes, Florence, Samuel, Fanny, Roger and Mary Ackroyd
Susy, Tom, Lord and Jamie Halstead

Of these Mary Ackroyd (1950), Mary Crowther (1956), Richard Hollinrake (1941), Frances Jane Scriven (1955), John William Richards (1950) and Arnold Cunliffe (1960) were buried within 50 years of the 1990's when the mobile classrooms were first placed on the site.

There has been correspondence with all relatives for whom contact details are available, advising them of the intention to seek a Faculty and canvassing families' views on what has happened. Those who have replied have expressed considerable upset at how their family graves and headstones have been dealt with and made inaccessible to the public.

Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals

3.1 Describe and assess the impact of your proposal on these parts, and on the whole.

The Nursery is an environmentally sustainable and well-designed, aesthetically attractive building which is providing, with the school, a vital educational service to children, their parents and the community. As outlined in the Statement of Needs the Woodlands Nursery provides a very popular educational, pre-school service, catering for groups of vulnerable children who are not provided for by any of the other schools in the area. Further information about the design of the building, and in particular its environmentally sustainable features, is attached with this Petition.

However, the impact of the building is significant as it has taken over a significant area of the Churchyard and covered the graves and headstones beneath, preventing family and public access to them.

3.2 Explain how you intend, where possible, to mitigate the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the parts affected and the whole.

The building of the Nursery over the parts of the Churchyard affected has caused harm in that the headstones and graves are no longer accessible to the public, as it is not safe to allow access beneath the building where the graves are located. In addition, the headstones have been laid flat without

authorisation, instead of standing upright, as originally designed. The fact that they have been set in concrete makes re-locating them impossible without damage, as confirmed by memorial mason Sean Uttley and photographs of the crawl space showing the limited headroom beneath the nursery.

Another concern is that the research undertaken to document the headstones has identified that some names are missing when checked against older records that pre-date the Nursery Building. It is thought that these are side stones that recorded burials, and names of those buried beneath, but may have been removed in a mistaken belief that they were simply side kerbs.

It is understood that the building has been constructed in such a way as to be raised above the ground and so is not directly laid on the graves. Assurances have been given that the graves have not been disturbed by the digging of foundations. The footings of the Woodlands building seem to be 60cm depth of poured concrete, which, whilst it may not have disturbed the graves beneath, has somewhat buried them in a thick layer of concrete. However, there is little information available about the engineering involved in order to verify the assurances that no graves were disturbed.

Assuming that the assurances are correct about the graves not being disturbed in building the Nursery, the risk of physical harm to the graves has been mitigated by the way that the building has been constructed.

To mitigate the harm to graves and headstones beneath the Woodlands the possibility has been considered of exhuming the graves, re-interring the remains and moving the headstones, to a more publicly accessible location in the churchyard. This would enable access for relatives and the public albeit in a different location from the original burials. However, the concrete footings rule out any question of exhumation and re-burial of remains. In addition, the passage of time means it is highly unlikely that there would be distinguishable remains to be exhumed and re-interred, so this course of action is not feasible.

Having viewed and photographed the headstones and their setting, advice from the local stonemason indicates that there is insufficient space to lift and move the headstones safely. The fact that the headstones are now set in the concrete also means that they cannot be lifted without damage to them. This option for mitigating the harm is also therefore not a possibility.

As an alternative, work has been undertaken, funded by the school, to document the headstones and take photographs so that, whilst the graves and headstones themselves are inaccessible to the public because of the Nursery extension, there will be a complete and publicly accessible record of them. Work is ongoing across the Churchyard to identify and tell the stories of those buried there. It will still be possible, via the interactive portal, to carry out this work in relation to the graves on the school side and to enable them to be part of the local history project. The work of documentation will mean that the history of the graves is made available and accessible along with the histories of graves elsewhere in the churchyard.

The limitations on public access to the graves are being mitigated by the documenting of the headstones and histories, at the school's expense. This research has been made available to the public via the FOCC and Church websites as part of the wider exercise of documentation.

In addition, it is hoped that the Faculty may allow for the installation of a Noticeboard at the Church Lane entrance to the Churchyard, to provide public information about the graves, headstones and local history, as well as the interactive link for the graves beneath the school. If the noticeboard is permitted this will have the potential to broaden access to information about the Churchyard.