

In the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Derby
In the Matter of a Faculty Petition
St. Helen Etwall

Re St. Helen Etwall

1. By a Petition dated 27 March 2025, the Rector and Churchwardens of St Helen's Church, Etwall seek permission to introduce a memorial plaque to Flight Lieutenant Kevin Barry Main who was killed on active service in Iraq on 22 March 2003. The plaque is to be attached to the interior wall of the church to the side of an existing war memorial. A photograph showing the proposed location is included with the papers supporting the petition.
2. St Helen's is a Grade I listed church and the Statement of Significance sets out details of the reasons for that listing.
3. The Statement of Need provides details of the church's active involvement in the community before turning to this specific proposal. It is a request for approval of the installation of a new plaque to commemorate Ft Lt Main. The parish wishes to add a plaque alongside existing plaques for World War Two and Malaya. The reason given is that there is a family in the parish who suffered the loss of their son in Iraq in 2003. They regularly attend the Remembrance Sunday service but have no memorial. The aim is to create a memorial for him and others that currently have no memorial within the parish. There is a wish for this particular family and others in the future to be able to remember their loved ones in the parish church. Others who come into the church, including school children, will also be able to recognise and remember those who are lost.
4. The Diocesan Advisory Committee recommends the works for approval by the consistory court.
5. Nothing in the supporting paperwork suggested that Ft Lt Main had any link with the parish, only the fact that his parents now live in the parish. His parents' support for the petition is confirmed, although they are not the petitioners.
6. A request for further information elicited the following response from Mr Gotch, formerly one of the Churchwardens and now PCC Secretary. He writes that Ft Lt Main's parents have been residents of the parish for over 20 years. They are on the electoral roll and attend worship. Prior to living in Etwall, they lived in Burntwood in Staffordshire. Ft Lt Main left home at the age of 17 to join the RAF. Given that he was 35 years old when he died in 2003, that would be around 1985.
7. Ft Lt Main is buried at RAF Marham in Norfolk, in addition to which there are inscriptions on the war memorial at Burntwood and at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas.

8. The reason for this petition arises from a discussion between Mr Gotch and Mr Main. Mr Gotch's wife and Mr Main's daughter are both buried in the churchyard. It appears that Mr Main always laid a wreath at the Remembrance Sunday Service and, having noticed this, Mr Gotch asked why this was. It was then that Mr Main explained that it was due to the death of his son, Ft Lt Main, on active service in Iraq.

9. Mr Gotch raised this at a subsequent PCC meeting and it was agreed that there should be a memorial to Ft Lt Main and other service personnel with links to Etwall who had died on active service. The latest such memorial in the church records a death in Malaya in 1950.

10. Due to the absence of any evidence of a link between Ft Lt Main himself and Etwall, I gave directions recording my concerns, giving the parish the opportunity to provide any further evidence they wished and indicating that I proposed to determine the petition on the basis of written representations.

11. Mr Gotch responded with a letter setting out information about the other War Memorial Plaques in St Helen's, Etwall. While one of those to whom there is a memorial appears only to have had tenuous links to Etwall, the remainder were either born, lived or died in Etwall or the surrounding area. I cannot see that any of this evidence is supportive of the petition for a memorial to Ft Lt Main.

12. Having then considered all the evidence provided and mindful of the view of the DAC, while, in my judgment, it would be entirely appropriate for those who have died on active service with links to Etwall to be commemorated in memorials in the parish church, and while I understand and commend the pastoral motivation behind this petition, Ft Lt Main does not appear to have had any links with Etwall at all. He is commemorated entirely appropriately in three locations: At Burntwood where he grew up, at RAF Marham, where he was based at the time of his death, and at the National Memorial Arboretum. In my judgement, there must be a real link between the service person him or herself and the memorial location, if there is not to be an excessive proliferation of memorials. I can see no such link in this case.

13. For this reason I am unable to grant the petition and a faculty will not issue.

14. In my judgement this petition is for a memorial. The fee for a memorial petition is normally paid by the person seeking the memorial. In this case, therefore, the petition fee should be paid by the PCC rather than the diocese. I will, however, waive my fee for this judgement.

15. If the PCC is dissatisfied with my decision, an appeal lies to the Court of Arches. The initial application must be made, in accordance with Rule 23.1 of the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015, not later than 21 days after the date of this judgment.

Timothy Clarke, Chancellor