

In the Newcastle Consistory Court

The Church of All Saints, Rothbury

Judgement

1. This is a petition, dated 8 August 2015, by Rev Michael Boag, Colin John Wheeler and Wendy Elizabeth Richardson, who are respectively the Rector and Churchwardens of All Saints Church, Rothbury in the Parish of Upper Coquetdale. By their petition they seek a faculty to restore and reposition the Hill organ in the church.
2. The petition has the support of the Diocesan Advisory Committee which, in its Notification of Advice dated 22 July 2015, recommended the works for approval by the court, without any proviso.
3. The requisite public notice was displayed from 9 August to 9 September 2015. By a letter dated 25 August 2015 Mr JC Sheales wrote to the diocesan registrar giving notice of objection and setting out the grounds for his objection to the petition. Summarising his objections, Mr Sheales acknowledged the historical and sentimental value of the organ but suggested that it was obsolete and that the church needed an organ suitable for 21st century use. He was also opposed to the spending of a large amount of money on the restoration at a time when the parish was desperately short of money. He suggested that the chosen organ builders, Goetze and Gwynn, had required the organ to be brought back as close as possible to its original condition which would result in rattling from its tracker action (although he acknowledge that there would be some temporary improvement). He set out what he saw as problems from the limited stops and pedals, in some detail. He argues that the problems with the Hill organ did not occur with a Makin Digital organ that had been loaned to the church for two weeks at Easter 2010. He states that there was a meeting in the rectory in July 2012 when the organists (of which he was one) recommended that such an organ, or a similar one, be used rather than the Hill organ restored. Finally he was of the view that placing the organ in front of the congregation with the necessary removal of front pews would be detrimental to the appearance of the church.

4. Upon receipt of the letter of objection the registrar wrote to Mr Sheales pursuant to Rule 9.3 Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2013 on 22 September 2015 informing him of the options open to him and the consequences of each course. On 26 September 2015 Mr Sheales emailed the registrar informing her that he wished only to have his letter of objection taken into account by me. Thereafter, pursuant to Rule 9.5 the registrar forwarded a copy of Mr Sheales' letter of objection to the petitioners, inviting their comments. By a letter dated 14 October the petitioners replied setting out their responses to each paragraph of Mr Sheales' letter. I accordingly proceed on the basis of taking into account my Mr Sheales' objections as set out in his letter, as well as basing my judgement on all of the original material in support of the petition and the petitioners' responses to Mr Sheales' objections.
5. In their responses the petitioners comment that not only is the Hill organ of historical interest but that it is listed on the national organ register. They give a brief history of the organ and point out that Mr Sheales' financial objection is misplaced as the organ fund was built with funds donated specifically for that purpose and cannot be used for any other. The petitioners comment that to describe the organ as "obsolete" is unfair and emotive as the design is in line with all currently working wind-blown organs, the design not having changed over centuries. A major aspect of the restoration is to alleviate the problem caused by the tracker system. They acknowledge that the organ will never be as silent as an electronic or digital system. They state that it is inaccurate to say that the organ restorers insisted that it be brought back as close as possible to its original condition; rather it was the Heritage Lottery Fund that required the organ to be restored in that manner and contributed £36,000 of the estimated cost of £63,700.
6. The petitioners respond to Mr Sheales comments on the problems caused by the limited stops and pedals in detail by recognising that the organ offers challenges that are not encountered with modern instruments, but going on to state that a number of current organists are looking forward to playing the restored instrument. The organ will provide better support for congregations in normal services and for solo voluntaries played by organists. One local

musician has been taking lessons to learn how to play the organ and organists from Durham Cathedral have expressed an interest in playing it.

7. The petitioners suggest that the congregation was split over the suitability of the Makin organ and that the siting of the external speakers was controversial and interfered with the ringing of the 1893 church bells. In 2012 it seemed that it would be possible to raise the £25,000 which a Makin organ would have cost but that would have had a life of about 30 years. The grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund of £27,300 has now been augmented to £63,700 and the restored Hill organ should be good for about 150 years. In addition the grant also includes provision for education on the history of the organ and training youngsters to play.
8. Mr Sheales' final point about the placement of the organ is answered by an argument that the proposed arrangement will improve the overall appearance of the organ and make communication between organist, congregation and choirs easier. A number of restorers had recommended the re-siting of the organ as proposed, which it is said will enhance the sound when the church is full. Only one pew will be removed and this, in turn, will permit the movement of wheelchairs. The existing pew front will be retained but moved back.
9. The material that accompanies the petition includes the plans for the re-sited and restored organ, the report and estimate by Goetze and Gwynn, the organ restoration project plan and the minutes of the PCC meetings of 19 May 2015 and 15 July 2015. At the first of those meetings 13 person (including the Rector and Archdeacon) were present, at the second 14 person were present – again including the Rector and Archdeacon. One person present at the first meeting was not there and gave apologies; two persons who had not been at the first meeting were at the second. The minutes of the first meeting reveal very detailed discussion and it is clear that a great deal of work and research had been done in advance of that meeting. The proposals received the unanimous support of all present, save for the Treasurer who abstained.
10. It is abundantly clear from all of the material before me that the proposed restoration and other options have been fully and carefully considered before the petition for the faculty has been filed. The advice of the DAC has been

sought and the DAC gives its unequivocal support to the proposal. It is virtually inevitable that proposals such as this will excite differing opinions and that people will genuinely hold different views as to what is the best way forward. Such is human nature. I accept entirely that Mr Sheales views are genuinely held and that his objections, which are set out clearly and in very reasonable terms, represent the view that he holds in relation to this proposed restoration. I have no doubt that his is a perfectly respectable and reasonable position. Nonetheless it is clear to me that that is a minority view. He may not be the only person to hold his opinion, or a similar opinion, but no other person has registered any objection and it seems clear that this proposal has the support of the congregation, as represented by the PCC. It has also been considered by the DAC, with all of that body's expertise, and is recommended by it. The funding for this proposal is in place and has been raised specifically for this project, it is not available for general purposes.

11. All Saints Church, Rothbury needs an organ. All are agreed upon that fact. The current petition is to implement the scheme that has been considered, along with others, and finally found favour with the congregation, as represented by the PCC. At the end of my consideration of the papers in this case I am perfectly satisfied that a faculty should issue and I direct accordingly.
12. The objection of Mr Sheales, perfectly properly and reasonably made, has involved the registrar in further work over and above that which normally attends to the preparation of faculty petition papers and I direct that an additional fee of £90 plus VAT shall be payable by the petitioners in addition to the standard fees which normally attach.

Euan Duff
Chancellor
2 November 2015