

Neutral Citation Number: [2021] ECC Lin 3

IN THE CONSISTORY COURT AT LINCOLN

In the matter of the St Mary and St Bartholomew and St Guthlac, Crowland
(Crowland Abbey)

Judgment

1. By a Petition dated 19 May 2021 a faculty is sought to change the use of the parvise of the 15th century west porch of Crowland Abbey which has a cruciform plan form, from a storage area to a chapel suitable for Eastern Orthodox worship including the veneration of the skull of Theodore, former abbot of Crowland martyred by the Vikings.
2. There is a proposed shared use agreement between Revd. Charles Brown, priest in charge of Crowland Abbey and Archbishop Silousan Oner, of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the 'British Isles and Ireland'. I am content for such an agreement to be entered into, and will make it a condition of the Faculty that this occurs, pursuant to this imaginative ecumenical project with the Orthodox.
3. The parvise has three shallow pointed arches surrounding the altar and they continue the shallow arch form of openings into the parvise. The design requires the construction of an iconostasis at the eastern end of the parvise (i.e. furthest away from the altar), a new floor covering, a reliquary, credence table, reading stand and curtains for the external windows. If Orthodox worship is to be welcomed into an Anglican church, as it clearly is to be welcomed here, then provision must be made for an iconostasis which separates the nave from the sanctuary and is an essential part of Orthodox worship.
4. Crowland Abbey is listed grade 1 and is also a scheduled monument and is formed out of the north aisle of the former Abbey which survived the dissolution in 1539. It has an ancient foundation, but the present structure originates from the Norman period. It has a 15th century tower and the parvise is part of this 15th century work. It was heavily damaged in fighting

during the civil war. It had 2 major restorations in the 19th century by George Gilbert Scott and Pearson.

5. English Heritage, supported by the DAC, whilst supporting the project in the main have a reservation about two aspects of the proposal. It is proposed that the iconostasis should be aligned with the reveal of the outer arch, whereas HE proposes that the iconostasis is placed behind the reveal so that the full curve of the arch is seen. They also propose that the central section of the iconostasis which is raised should be reduced to the height of the surrounding portions.

6. Revd Brown with the support of the architect for the project, disagrees with the HE assessment. His submission is that by pushing the iconostasis back by 5.5 inches will mean that it will have a provisional added-on quality looking as if it was an 'awkward intruder'. Placing it with the reveal of the outer arch makes the screen seem more integral because of the curve of the reveal going upwards frames the iconostasis much better. Additionally, reducing the space behind the iconostasis even by 5.5 inches would be quite significant given the limitations on space already within the parvise and the need for priest and deacon to be there.

7. There is also a practical issue: if the screen is placed behind the reveal, this will require fixings being drilled into mortar joints. However, if aligned with the reveal it can be fixed by clamps. Revd Brown has also sent photographs of 2 other screens in the Abbey and the effect that fixing them behind or in front of reveals has upon them. I agree it is not to their advantage.

8. Revd Brown also explains that there is a practical need for the raised central section for the celebrant when he comes through the curtain in the screen wearing his kalimavkion headgear.

9. Applying the test In Re St Alkmund, Duffield 1 October 2012 I answer the questions in the following way:

(i) would the proposal if implemented result in harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest?

I am satisfied that the answer to this question is 'no'. Looking at the project as a whole I do not regard the construction of an iconostasis even with the raised central section as causing harm to the significance of this church. I take into account that this project is to be completed in the parvise chapel at the west end of the church on a raised level in an area that was previously a storage area. I do not consider that placing the screen flush with the reveal

as proposed will be damaging to the significance of the church. I am concerned that to put it behind the outer arch will require fixings into mortar joints whereas if it is flush with the reveal then clamps can be used. I have considered the photographs of other screens within the church which are not flush with the reveal and I agree that this gives a 'make-do' ill-fitting quality to the relationship between the screen and the building.

10. I do not regard the raised central portion of the screen as doing harm to the building in the way described in Re St Alkmund. However, this is a more marginal decision. If I am wrong about that and the raised section does detract from the sweep of the outer arch and a view beyond to the other arches, I am not persuaded that the harm would be serious given the reversibility of the project. It is in the nature of iconostases that they act as a form of barrier to the eye travelling onwards towards the sanctuary and the altar. Icons are placed on the screen to provide the spiritual focus for the gathered worshippers. I am satisfied that there is justification for this.

11. The second part of the St Alkmund test is

(ii) if the answer is 'no' to the first question (which is the answer I give to the issue concerning the reveal and the raised section) then the ordinary presumption in faculty proceedings in favour of things as they stand is applicable but can be more or less easily rebutted.

It is clear that this is a reversible project and if the screen is to be fixed by clamps it will always be possible to review the appearance of the screen and how it relates to the rest of the building as the chapel is used, and if necessary my decision can be reconsidered. However, at present my view is that this presumption against change should be rebutted by the merit of the proposal which contains spiritual, aesthetic and ecumenical advantages for this church and its wider mission.

12. It would be prudent for a review after 5 years to see how the use of the parvise chapel by the Orthodox church has worked and whether there are any adjustments required.

13. The condition of this faculty is that:

(i) Revd Charles Brown as Chair of the PCC and priest in charge of Crowland Abbey has leave to enter the agreement with Archbishop Silouan Oner in the terms set out in the documents submitted pursuant to the agreement for 3rd party use.

(ii) fixings by clamp and not into ancient fabric or mortar joints

(iii) the requirements of the insurers set out in their letter dated 18 May 2021 must be complied with

(iv) the use of the Parvise chapel for Orthodox worship should be reviewed in 5 years.

The Revd HH Judge Mark Bishop

Chancellor

31st August 2021