

Judgement

1. This is an application for a Faculty to remove permanently some rotten pews, pave the area where the old pew platform was located in the north aisle, and in the area where the font is currently located, and then relocate the font from the south aisle to a more central place to be agreed once the pews are cleared and the old platform is removed. There is also to be significant work done on the pews that are not rotten to restore them and then reintroduce them to the Church.

2. The Church is Grade 1 listed dated from the 8<sup>th</sup> century with additional work in the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and 1808. There was a complete set of 16<sup>th</sup> century pews which were restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The font is 12<sup>th</sup> century noted by Jenkins to have a ‘very interesting 12<sup>th</sup> century design’.

3. The advertisement of the Petition led to 2 objections from Mrs Jean Joyce in a letter dated 18 November 2013 and from Mrs Atter in a letter dated 1 November 2013. Both were written to by the Registrar on 21<sup>st</sup> November and the procedures explained. Mrs Joyce in her letter dated 10 December 2013 stated that she did not wish to be a party to the proceedings but wanted her letter and objections taken into account by the Chancellor. This I will certainly do. Mrs Atter did not reply and therefore as stated in the Registrar’s letter, I will treat her as having taken the same decision as Mrs Joyce. I will take Mrs Atter’s letter and objections into account in my decision.

4. English Heritage in their letter dated 17 April 2014 advised that a Statement of Significance was required (one has now been supplied) describing the significance of the pews particularly setting out details set out of pre-19<sup>th</sup> century fabric. Once these matters had been addressed they had no further comment to make and were content for the matter to be determined without further reference to them.

5. The DAC recommended the works subject to the following provisos:

- (i) if limestone slabs other than Ancaster were to be chosen, samples should be supplied to the DAC for their comment.
- (ii) the flags should run and be bonded to match the existing floor flags and the size of the stone flags should match the existing flags
- (iii) the font should only be taken and down and moved by an experienced stonemason experienced in church monument work or a conservator experienced in dismantling and erection of stone monuments.
- (iv) they sought confirmation that there would be drainage from the font.

6. The architect has provided brief answers to these provisos in an email dated 7 May 2014:

- (i) samples of limestone to match the existing limestone will be provided: it will most likely be local limestone from the Ancaster bed.
- (ii) the flags in the north aisle will match the existing slabs and monuments which run East/West, in the south aisle they will be subject to a layout drawing to bond in with the existing slabs to the crossover.
- (iii) the architect refers to notes 6 and 7 of drawing 1270.03. These notes provide for a method statement to be submitted and approved for the removal of the cement mortar, pointing and mortar repairs to the font, and for a method of lifting, moving and placing of the font into its new position. Samples of lime putty/stone dust mix are to be approved.
- (iv) the existing drain to the font will be used

#### The pews.

7. Drawing 1270.04 sets out the extensive planned work of restoration to the existing pews. In the north aisle the platform upon which the pews sit had deteriorated significantly and the flooring of the pews collapsed recently. The plinth bases are rotten but the seats, side panels

and backs are in reasonable condition and it is proposed to restore the pews with new individual oak plinths and then make up from all the parts 11 free standing pews plus an additional pew from the south aisle with the two poppy heads. There is to be careful recording and numbering to take place before removal to the joinery shop for this work to be done.

8. Mrs Joyce's letter of objection 18 November 2013 objected to the proposed work to the pews although in her most recent letter she makes clear her main objection is to the re-siting of the font. Mrs Atter was also concerned about the 'removal of much needed pews'.

9. I am satisfied that the works to the pews are entirely appropriate and will restore to the church for many years further use the pews which have been used for so many centuries by those worshipping at St Michael's. No harm to the special architectural or historic significance of the church would be done by this work. I am satisfied that the proposed works are careful and measured and will result in a restoration of the pews the greatest extent possible.

#### The font

10. The proposal is for the font to be moved to a more central location at the back of the church as indicated on the plan. It would seem that the final position has not yet been decided although the spatial characteristics of the interior are to remain largely intact. The reason for the move of the font is so that the administration of the sacrament of baptism can be better seen by the congregation and that there may be an improved liturgical focus on a baptism conducted during the main Sunday morning worship. There is only .5m clearance on the east and west sides of the font at present.

11. The font has been previously rebuilt and repaired although I have not been told when.

12. I have considered the concerns of Mrs Jones and Mrs Atter in their objections. I quite understand the concerns that can be engendered by work of this kind done in a sacred space which has been a place of great significance over a life time. Any work in a church that is loved and in which the worship of God occurs, will inevitably bring about unease and sometimes distress. The place where baptisms have been conducted throughout living memory is obviously going to be a highly significant location for many people; it is a 'fixed point' where this immensely important sacrament of initiation into membership of Christ's church has been administered. This will invest this place with significance for many people

and the Church should not be surprised when proposals of this kind give rise to the type of concerns that have been expressed in the objections. These are signs that St Michael's is a place where people's faith has been expressed and has developed over the years, and this speaks eloquently about the life of God experienced by people throughout their lives at St Michael's. For these reasons objections of the kind expressed by Mrs Jones and Mrs Atter are to be treated with respect.

13. Against this background I have considered these proposals. If the font was moved more centrally and away from the wall I can well understand the view of the Applicants that by making the administration of baptism more easily seen by the congregation and those immediately involved, the baptism could be better focussed liturgically into the seamless worship of the whole congregation present.

14. I am satisfied that the proposed move can be achieved without causing harm to the special architectural or historic significance of the church. In these circumstances I am satisfied that these proposals can be granted a faculty. In making this decision I have considered the objections expressed by Mrs Jones and Mrs Atter, and I realise that this decision will disappoint them. However, looking at the question in the context of the test I must apply as set out in Re St Alkmund's Duffield, Arches Court 1 October 2012, I am satisfied that the Petition should be approved.

15. The precise new location needs to be agreed and referred to the DAC secretary and the Archdeacon for their comment before the works can go ahead. I delegate to the Archdeacon approval for the precise new location for the font in the area indicated on the drawing. I also require the appropriately qualified and experienced stone mason to be approved by the DAC as well as their method statement before work commences. An archaeological watching brief will be necessary. I require a fuller answer to be provided to proviso (iv) concerning the drain.

#### Conclusion.

16. I am quite satisfied that this Faculty can be issued for these works with the conditions I have imposed as set out in the Order I have endorsed on the Petition.

17. I am grateful for the comments from Mrs Jones and Mrs Atter which clearly arise from their love for this beautiful church.

18. I wish the Applicants, Mrs Jones and Mrs Atter and the whole congregation at St Michael's well for the future.

Mark Bishop

Chancellor

16 July 2014.