

## In the matter of St Andrew, Ferring

### Judgment

1. A faculty is sought for the following works:

Introduction of a new stained glass window to replace a plain glass window, and a spun-steel bowl to sit within the font, as per designs by Mel Howse.

2. The church of St Andrew, Ferring is a Grade I listed building, situated in the Ferring Conservation Area. The listing statement is very brief and reads as follows:

Chancel, nave with north aisle, western bell-turret and north porch. Chancel faced with flints, nave roughcast, bell-turret tile-hung. C13 with Perpendicular windows. Nave added in the C17, when the church of the adjoining parish of Kingston was submerged by the sea.

3. The bowl, which is of a modern design, will fit snugly within the font and appears uncontroversial. It is the proposed stained glass window which has drawn adverse comment in the form of two emails, one from Mrs J Sutton a parishioner, and one from an individual who expressed a wish to remain anonymous. Neither responded to a letter from the registrar inviting them to become party opponents, and accordingly I take the contents of their letters into account in determining the matter. Copies of both emails were sent to the petitioners for comment, although the identity of the writer of the second was not disclosed.

4. The salient part of the first email reads:

I live in Ferring in the Parish of St. Andrews which is my local Church. I normally attend a Service and Communion every week. The Church is very special to all of us in Ferring. The proposed stained glass window is not at all in keeping with the age or architecture of the Church. St. Andrews has a beautiful altar with carvings of the Commandments, stone pillars and floor, a wonderful organ and traditional pews. The traditional stained glass windows are truly beautiful.

The proposed design looks like a plume of smoke. In fact it looks the same as in the film Aladdin when the Genie appears out of his lamp!!! (Another Parishioner thought the design looked as if a tin of paint had been thrown at the window and another the smoke from the Crematorium.)

The words read: "Shine as a light in the World". Where is the light? Has the designer of this proposed new stained glass visited St. Andrew's Church? St. Andrews is in a conservation area and one would think that the design should reflect the requirement to fit in with its historical character.

Please let us see a design in keeping with our beautiful old Church, especially as this window is next to the font and visible to us all. If that is not possible, I for one would rather it be left as it is and we can look out to the trees.

5. The second email states:

I am a parishioner of Saint Andrews Church Ferring. I do not think that the proposed stained glass window, beautiful as it is, is in keeping with the Church at all. I object to it being put there and would like an alternative, more in keeping with Saint Andrews to be considered please. I wish to remain anonymous please.

6. The following opinions have emerged in the consultation process:
  - 6.1 Historic England did not wish to offer any comment (email of 11 May 2020);
  - 6.2 The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings stated: 'We generally do not comment on proposals for new stained glass windows unless there will be a loss of historic fabric to enable the new window to be installed'. (email of 19 February 2020)
  - 6.3 Planning Permission for the window was granted by Arun District Council (15 May 2020).
  - 6.4 The DAC recommended the proposal for approval (Notification of Advice of 23 June 2020).
7. Mel Howse is a highly regarded and award winning glass artist. Her Design Statement for baptism window reads as follows:

St Andrew's has a permanently installed font located beneath a two light window with tracery. It is proposed that a contemporary stained glass window be installed alongside the font. The glasswork would commemorate Stephanie Whittingham, who is a deceased parishioner who has left a legacy to the church.

The words "shine as a light in the world" appear within the design and also the text "In gratitude and loving memory of Stephanie Whittingham and the Burton family".

Vertical metal ferramenta installed on the outside of the window would be removed. The existing glazing is heavily leaded clear glass. The proposed new window designs show limited leadwork. The etched panels can be made in larger pieces, supported by horizontal saddle bars. This would add some colour but retain the light. The glasswork is composed of acid etched hand blown glass. Although the design structure appears in shades of blue, a large proportion of the design would be created from clear glass. The clear areas are shown as white on the designs.

My intention is to make the font area feel like a special and complete space for parishioners and visitors. A place of initiation, for assembly at baptisms, and to celebrate or recall one's own baptism. The window and the font together would send a visual message about the meaning of baptism that is immediate and visually immersive.

The designs depict flowing water, a spring of water welling up into eternal life (John 4:14). Water represents baptism, new life, and a way of life. The rhythm of the stained glass design is soft and lively, visually evoking the flow and movement within the water, which moves across the window.

8. The PCC approved both the design and this statement. The petitioners' response to the emails of objection adopts the content of the DAC report of 7 September which stated:  
'members agreed that this is a very exciting opportunity for the parish to introduce a new piece of twenty-first century art and were in general supportive of the general idea'

It states that the location chosen was that recommended by the DAC and as it is close to the font, the theme of baptism would be most appropriate. The DAC committee agreed that this was an exciting project, which would create a focal point and 'lift' the whole area of the baptistery and add a certain elegance. The petitioners' response continues:

The brief was therefore for a contemporary design such that it was a contribution to the church in today's times, rather than a historical style that replicated the stained glass that already exists within St Andrew's. The design for the window and the new font vessel 'aims to speak in unison about the newness, rebirth and new life that baptism brings' [according to Mel Howse, its designer]. The chosen location of the window does not seek to compete with the rhythm of the rest of the building, but to represent another chapter in the life of St Andrew's.

Although contemporary in design, the stained glass will be made in traditional materials. The visual texture and area of clear glass within the design (represented as white) will mean that in actual stained glass, the art will not be as visually heavy as it appears on paper. There will be a great deal of light, perhaps as much or even more than presently provided by the existing heavy leaded lights and in places the view beyond the window will still be visible. We would add that the designer Mel Howse has visited St Andrew's church on a number of occasions.

The words "shine as a light in the World" are taken from the Baptism Service to further link to the baptistery area and indeed reflect the intention that all baptised walk in the light of Christ with the lighted candle symbolising moving from death to the light of Christ. The design of both the window and font vessel further represents the flow of water, a Christian symbol of divine life as well as a sign of purity and cleansing from sin.

9. The petitioners note Mrs Sutton's concerns and those of two other parishioners whose views she records in her email. However, they point out that these are very much a minority view and that the project has received a great amount of positive responses. They point out that art is subjective and views may differ, but that the proposal accords with the brief and has been well received both by professional consultees, by the PCC and by the vast majority of those who attend the church. The response concludes:

It is the belief of the working party that they with the artist have found a balance between old and new that contributes a respectful and thoughtful work of contemporary art for God's house in Ferring.

10. The approach of the consistory court where changes to a listed buildings are proposed, is to adopt the so-called *Duffield* framework which considers the harm that would result to the building and the justification for carrying out the works. The crucial final step, mindful of the heavy presumption against change, is whether any resulting benefit would outweigh the harm caused. There is no longer a necessity hurdle for petitioners to meet.
11. In this instance, notwithstanding that this is a grade I listed church, I consider the likely harm to the building to be minimal. The plain glass to be replaced is of no particular historic or other value. None of the professional consultees suggest that harm might result and the SPAB, whose advice is always careful and considered carries the clear implication that there will be no loss of historic fabric to enable the new window to be installed.
12. The justification seems to be well made. A generous benefaction will allow the works to proceed, without presenting a burden on otherwise scarce resources. The Church of England has for generations promoted the arts by commissioning highly respected artisans in successive generations to apply their skills to the glory of God. This commission is well-thought through, will add colour and interest to this parish baptistery and – as has been the case for centuries – will provide visual imagery for deployment in the teaching of the faith, particularly the sacrament of baptism, by and through which infants and adults are brought into the Christian family. The flow and movement of water, as envisioned by

**Mel Howse**, is a powerful reminder that Christ was not brought as a baby to a stone font, but at the commencement of his public ministry, he was immersed in the flowing waters of the Jordan by John the Baptist. As is recorded in the third chapter of St Matthew's gospel.

<sup>16</sup> And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

<sup>17</sup> And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

13. It is a source of regret that this design is not to the personal taste of the two individuals who have emailed the court with objections, or that of a couple of others whose opinion is reported. But it is rare for there to be unanimity. I hope that in time their views may change when the installation is complete. The consistory court is not a guardian of taste, provided the legal framework for change is properly followed and the presumption against change discharged. In my assessment the balance under the *Duffield* questions comes down very firmly in favour of granting a faculty.
14. I do have one minor quibble, however, and it concerns the grammar of the proposed inscription to be etched in the glass: *In gratitude and loving memory of Stephanie Whittingham and the Burton family*. This wording jars slightly: one shows gratitude to or for someone but acts in loving memory of that person. This then becomes somewhat cumbersome. I would suggest deleting 'gratitude and' or moving it to the end to read 'and with gratitude'.
15. I therefore direct that a faculty pass the seal subject to the condition that the new window is not to be fabricated until the wording of the inscription has been approved by the Court. The court fees are to be paid by the petitioners and the window is not to be installed until the order of costs has been satisfied in full.

The Worshipful Mark Hill QC  
Chancellor of the Diocese of Chichester

6 October 2020