

In the Consistory Court of Lincoln

In the matter of St Thomas of Canterbury, Mumby

Judgement

1. The Applicants seek a Faculty to install a glazed door in the 19th century porch to the south door of this Church, which is the main entrance to the church. The Church is grade 1 listed and dates from the 13th century in parts. It was rebuilt in 1874 and there has been extensive reordering in recent years. I visited the church on 28th April 2014 where I met the Petitioners and was shown around this beautiful Church. The clarity of the ancient construction and fabric centred around the 13th century Nave with 4 bays with its arches and capitals with light coming through lancets on both sides of the building contributes to the sense of continuing Christian witness that is being lived out here. As with many churches of this kind the ancient fabric seems to interweave with and promote the continuity of Christian worship and life here 800 years after the first stones were laid.

2. The Church is plainly very well cared for and loved, and well used by the community who have the benefit of a reordered Nave which lends itself well to community use. The raised chancel area provides a platform for concerts. A 19th century rood screen (with rood in place) fills a 15th century arch: there are wooden doors which open into the worship area around the altar. There is a raked wheelchair access along the south side of the nave which rises to the chancel platform. The church has kitchen and toilet facilities and a vestry/ meeting room and has been completely rewired.

3. The 19th century porch is built of brick with stone and a slate roof. The porch frames a 13th century arcade around the doorway which is the main entrance into the church. In Lincolnshire Volume 27 by Pevsner, Harris and Antram 1989 the doorway and arcade are described as follows:

‘ the South doorway, on the other hand, belongs to the earlier parts of the South arcade. It is nice, with its two orders of shafts, the dogtooth bands between them, the stiff-leaf capitals and the dogtooth in the arch.’

4. The English Heritage opinion dated 19 December 2011 from Mr Walsh states that

‘ the very fine early 13th century inner doorway has shafted reveals, stiff leaf capitals, dog tooth decorative detailing and a richly moulded head. It is of a particularly high architectural and historic interest and makes a key contribution to the significance of the church. There are important views of the inner doorway from approaches to the south porch’

5. I understand that the 13th century decoration was a subject of a poem by Tennyson. His father was the Rector of Bag Enderby nearby from 1807-1831 and after his death Tennyson and his mother continued to live in the Rectory for some years, and so it seems quite likely that the poet would have been moved to write about what he saw above the doorway into this Church.

6. Many centuries before Tennyson, the entrance to a church from the south would have been historically very important. Burials were preferred on the lighter south side of churches and churches were built towards the northern end of the churchyard with the entrance to the church facing south towards the place where the dead were buried. This had two advantages: firstly it meant that there was more space to bury the dead and secondly people walked to church and entered through the southern doorway having passed through the area where the dead lay resting in peace and awaiting, as was then believed, the general resurrection. This would emphasise the continuing community of the living and the dead.

7. It is also worth noting that church porches in mediaeval times were also important places liturgically as well as for secular business. The priest met the midwife and the godparents at the porch and preliminary steps were taken with the baby before entering the church for baptism; also the ceremony of churching of women after child birth began with the priest meeting the woman at the porch with prayers and sprinkling of holy water; also a large part of a mediaeval marriage ceremony took place at the porch before entering the church. As well as these liturgical uses, porches were also places where important secular business was done. Sometimes they had an altar

where legally binding contracts were sworn; sometimes if they were large enough they could be places from which justice would be dispensed in a court. I have no information about whether such arrangements ever existed in this church and whether there was any porch arrangement before the 19th century porch was erected. However, all of these ceremonies and binding arrangements were begun at the main door of the church and in Mumby this would have been beneath the doorway with the decorative detail described above. The importance of this southern doorway into the church is the reason why such care was taken to create this decorative detail above the doorway – this was an important place for the community both when they got to the doorway, but also as they walked to the door from the south : this was part of people’s preparation for what awaited them at the church. In the setting of this church at Mumby the southern part of the churchyard is lower than the church building , and so it would have been a particularly powerful focus of people’s attention as they walked up hill towards the church and looked ahead, and thought about what lay through the door once they had passed under the doorway .

8. I have taken the liberty of setting out some of the historical context because I believe that it is important to have in mind in deciding this application, the importance of this south facing door and therefore also the decorative motifs around it, to the many generations of the Christian people who will have come to this Church over many years to worship and pursue their secular business. Even today, as one walks up the pathway towards the south door, the design of the arcade around the door continues to focus the eye from a general view of the church and the surrounding churchyard, and narrows down our focus to a single point of clarity that takes us through the door and into the house of God in Mumby.

9. The theology of our mediaeval predecessors is of course in many ways very different to how we see things today, and our approach to our use of our church buildings must reflect the Christian insights that we have gained today. However, if it is possible to work with the historic witness of the buildings we have been entrusted with, so that modern ministry and historic fabric work together towards the common purpose of building the Kingdom, then so much the better. It is to the process of working out how these aspects can be held creatively together, that much of the Faculty jurisdiction is devoted.

10. The Petitioners' application is for non-reflective glass doors to be erected in the porchway to create a draught buffer. The Statement of Need explains

(i) that when the wooden doors are open cold air passes into the church assisted by a heating system which draws cold air from floor level opposite the doorway. An avenue of trees along the pathway funnel wind up the path through the porch and through the door when it is opened.

(ii) the porch is strewn with leaves and they blow into the church when the door is opened.

(iii) the existing porch and doorway with leaves gathered around the door does not make the church look very welcoming.

11. On visiting the church on 28th April the Revd Robinson explained that the proposal also sought to protect the 13th century doorway from the elements. He also raises this in his letter dated 18 December 2013.

12. The Petitioners propose as a solution to these problems the fitting of non-reflective glass doors which would be set back from the front of the porch as required by the condition of planning permission. They assert that the 13th century doorway designs could still be visible through the glass which they plainly accept is a very important consideration. In the Statement of Need the Petitioners state that their 'first consideration is not to obscure the main feature of the porch a 13th century doorway... we wish to preserve the view of this beautiful arch as you come up the path'.

13. Plainly, the planners' concern about glass doors being placed at the front of the porch was that it would obscure completely the view of the 13th century doorway to people as they walked up the path and for that reason they have required them to be set back from the front of the porch.

14. English Heritage state in their letter 19 December 2011 that this proposal would do 'substantial harm' to a grade 1 listed building. In their letter dated 21 June 2013 they confirm that it remains their view that the glass doors (even if set back as required by the planners) would ' cause substantial harm to the significance of the church through their negative impact on the character and appearance of the church, particularly on the

main south elevation, and on the historical function of the porch'. The reasons they give for their opinion are:

(i) the open connection between the churchyard and the porch is historically important and part of the architectural significance of the church. Additionally the 'very fine' inner doorway has a particularly high architectural and historic interest. Both these factors would be damaged by the erection of glass doors because the doors would provide both a visual and physical obstruction within the porch 'that would damage the important open, spatial, visual, architectural and historic relationship between the porch and the churchyard'.

(ii) views of the inner doorway will be obscured by the glazed doors with light reflected from them. Glazed doors/screens are 'frequently not successful'.

(iii) condensation and dirt may accumulate on the glass doors

(iv) if the wooden doors are left open and the glass doors are closed, there is a possibility that the changing thermal conditions on the inside of the glass doors could potentially harm the stonework of the inner doorway.

15. EH proposed an alternative arrangement whereby a glass partition could be erected inside the church and the existing ramp could be adjusted at its end to allow access through the doorway into the glass partition and then up the ramp as required. The Rev Robinson explained to me on my visit that this was not a practical solution because of the difficulties of manoeuvring coffins up this ramp. He did not think it possible for the coffins to be brought through the body of the church because of the difficulty of the raised steps into the chancel platform. EH also suggested some new lower gates to be set at the end of the porch to prevent leaves from entering the porch. Again Revd Robinson was against this suggestion as working against the sense of welcome that he was seeking to engender.

16. In weighing the arguments for and against the proposed glass doors, I apply the framework set out by the Court of Arches in Re St Alkmund, Duffield 1 October 2012. The framework is:

Step 1: would the proposals, if implemented result in harm to the significance of the church as a building of special architectural or historic interest?

Step 2: if the answer is 'no', the ordinary presumption 'in favour of things as they stand' is applicable and can be rebutted more or less readily, depending on the particular nature of the proposals.

Step3: is the answer to step 1 is 'yes', how serious would the harm be?

Step 4: How clear and convincing is the justification for carrying out the proposals

Step 5: Bearing in mind the very strong presumption against proposals which will adversely affect the special character of the listed building, will any resulting public benefit (including liturgical freedom/ pastoral well being/,mission opportunities/putting the church to viable use consistent with its primary role as a place of mission and worship) outweigh the harm? The more serious the harm the greater will be the level of the benefit needed before an application can succeed. In Grade 1 or 2* building serious harm should only exceptionally be allowed.

Determination

17. I am satisfied that if glazed doors were erected in the porch, even in the position required by the planning permission, there would be serious harm to the significance of this church as a place of special architectural and historic interest. It is inevitable in my judgement that however 'non-reflective' the glass doors will be , there will be a significant reduction, and possibly an elimination, of any view of the decorative arcade above the doorway as people walk up the path into the church. I note that the planning authority have been concerned about this issue in their requirement for the doors to be set back from the front of the porch. However, even in this position, I consider that the view of the arcade will be significantly reduced if not eliminated to the serious harm of the church.

18. Furthermore, I accept the analysis of EH that any glazed doors in the porch will disrupt the significant southern elevation of the church as it is approached up the footpath. The link between the churchyard and the church through this doorway is an important part of the architectural and historic significance of the church, and this would be seriously harmed, if not lost altogether, if the glazed doors were erected.

19. Step 3 of the test is to ask 'how serious would the harm be?' In answering this question I agree with EH that this doorway 'makes a key contribution to the significance of the church'. There are many aspects of the church which contribute to its success, but this very ancient part of the building placed as it is over the historically significant southern doorway, would mean any serious harm done to a view of this doorway from the south would amount to serious harm to the architectural/historic significance of the church.

20. I note that the Applicants themselves recognise in the Statement of Need the importance of preserving the view of the doorway as people come up the path. They assert that their first consideration is 'not to obscure' the doorway: it would seem therefore that they recognise that anything which did obscure the view of the doorway must amount to serious harm to the church.

21. Step 4 requires me to consider how clear and convincing is the justification for the proposals. I understand the problem with leaves accumulating and this having an effect upon the welcoming aspect of the church. However, I would have thought that an accumulation of leaves hard up against the closed glass doors would be even more uninviting than the leaves currently lost in and around the porch. I am sure that leaves are already regularly swept up in winter, but it may be that this is the measure that will be most effective to meet this problem. I also recognise that when the door is opened the leaves could get blown in, but this problem can be met by regular sweeping of the leaves perhaps particularly when the nave is being used for community use. I also can see that cold air is drawn in when the door is opened, although when I visited the church the nave was warm and was being used apparently quite comfortably by a group of ladies around tables in the middle of the nave. I was told by the Applicants that the temperature of the nave on the day I was visiting was not typical. I am not persuaded that the glass doors in the porch would have a very significant beneficial effect upon the users of the nave. I can see that cold air would not be drawn in when the wooden doors are opened and someone enters the church. However, if the wooden doors were left always open when the nave was in use, and the glass doors were shut, the same problem with cold air coming into the church would arise when the glass doors were opened to allow people to enter.

22. Step 5 requires me to assess the balance to be struck between the any public benefit that would result from the proposals as against the harm that would be done to this grade 1 listed building. I remind myself that there is a very strong presumption against a proposal that would adversely affect the special character of a grade 1 listed building in the way that I have set out above.

23. Having considered the needs which the Applicants are seeking to address by these proposals, and carried out the required balancing exercise, I am not satisfied that the Applicants' justification for the proposals outweighs the serious harm that would be done to this building by the erection of the glass doors.

24. I have also considered the additional reason for the proposal (namely that glass doors would protect the 13th century fabric of the doorway), albeit this does not form any part of the advertised justification for the proposals. I am not persuaded that the 13th century doorway needs any further protection than that which it currently receives from the 19th century porch. There is no suggestion by EH that the doorway is being damaged by exposure to the elements, and I saw no evidence of that. In those circumstances I do not consider that this additional reason for the glass doors is made out.

25. I make no judgement about the alternatives put forward by EH, save to recognise that a glass partition that extended too far into the nave would be disruptive to the current open and uncluttered feel of the nave. It may be that further thought could be given to the question of whether coffins could come in through the door way and down the aisle so that it came up through the gathered congregation with the priest walking in front and then up the chancel steps, rather than bringing the coffin up the ramp along the side. However, I am not required to adjudicate on any of these proposed alternative arrangements. My task is to determine whether the application before me should be granted a Faculty, and I must refuse the application.

26. I recognise that this will be a disappointment to the Applicants who serve the work of the Church in Mumby with such great dedication and success. However for the reasons I have given I must refuse the application.

27. I would like to thank the Petitioners for their hospitality when I visited their church and to wish them all well for the future. It was a great delight for me to visit St Thomas of Canterbury, Mumby.

HH Judge the Revd. Mark Bishop

Chancellor

3 May 2014