

Judgment

1. This is an application for an extension and major reordering of a Grade I listed church of early 12th Century origin with 13th, 15th and 19th Century alterations, and a mixed 15th, 17th, 19th and 20th Century interior. The original proposal was for a two storey extension but, after consultation with the relevant amenity bodies the final application included a petition for; an exterior single storey extension to the north of the north aisle and north west corner to north of the tower providing a meeting space, an accessible lavatory and a vestry. A new door is proposed in the west wall and the internal reordering will include a new floor, underfloor heating, new sound and lighting systems, the introduction of a servery area to abut the north wall to the west of the organ and an internal partition under the tower to create storage space and the relocation of the chancel screen and pew to the 'Bradfield Chapel. There was also a proposal to move the Victorian font from the West End to the north Aisle to the East side of the organ apse.
2. The petition was practically a model of its kind, well researched and thoughtfully produced, amended with care and thought having taking into account the representations of the amenity bodies. When I received the petition it seemed almost churlish to raise a concern, but there was one matter that I needed assistance with.
3. There are apparently currently two fonts in the church, one is fourteenth century and appears not to be used. The second is the Victorian one which, it was proposed, should be moved to the west end of the north aisle to the east side of the organ apse.
4. It was also proposed to introduce a third font 'a small bowl on a tasteful moveable wooden stand'.
5. I directed the parish to the article Stancliffe 'Baptism and Fonts' (1993) 3 Ecc LJ 141) where the practice of having more than one font in a parish church was deplored. I was also concerned that the Victorian font appeared to be being moved into a space which was not 'as near to the principal entrance as conveniently maybe' (Canon F 1 para 2).
6. With characteristic zeal, having been sent the article, I received a full and helpful reply from the Revd Christopher Bryan, Priest in Charge.

7. An offer is made to dispose of the unusable 14th century font by burying it in the Church yard. I leave that to the discretion of the PCC. If it is attractive enough and has enough support, the unusable font may remain in the church unused as an item of historical interest. If it is not considered attractive enough or indeed popular enough, it must be buried appropriately in the church yard
8. The introduction of the moveable font has been abandoned.
9. In relation to the movement of the Victorian Font the Revd Bryan identifies the fact that the font is only in the place it is due to a relatively recent faculty (relatively recent in terms of this church's history, the faculty was issued on the 30th July 1907). The font will have to be moved to a more suitable location, he asserts, as the amended re-ordering (made in the light of planning permission requirements) means that the servery now has to be in the area that the font now occupies, with the attendant lack of reverence that that will entail if the font is not moved. He also identifies the fact that the proposed re-ordering will make the font the 'first thing one see as one enters the church' whereas, with the reordering the font will be hidden from view. He concludes by submitting that the inconveniences of having the font near the principal entrance are particularly marked, and the circumstances unusually extreme and out of the ordinary so that the 'compromises of a font near the door would be too great'. He concludes with a courteous offer of a site visit.
10. In the particular circumstances I am prepared to issue a faculty as prayed, being satisfied that there are exceptional reasons for the Font to be moved. I am satisfied that, although the Font shall not 'stand as near to the principal entrance as conveniently may be' it will 'be set in as spacious and well-ordered surroundings as possible'.
11. Although a site visit proved unnecessary I would be delighted to attend the dedication service, when it occurs.

St Wulfstans Day, 2016

Justin Gau,
Chancellor