

By Email

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Wednesday, 22 April 2020

Dear Christina

ST MARY'S CHURCH, ST MARY'S STREET, ELY - REORDERING

Your ref: SPAB/CC /2019/

I trust this finds you well. This letter responds to the letter from Catherine Cullis dated 11 February 2019, which in turn was a response to mine of 17 January 2019. The client is on the point of submitting their faculty application, which will of course include updated drawings, statements and supporting documentation. The purpose of this letter is not to forward that information – which you will very shortly have access to in the normal way – but to respond to the specific points in Catherine's letter, which are followed in turn.

Floor

We appreciate – and indeed share – the Society's concern that historic floors are not needlessly removed, both in terms of the floor covering and the potential for below-ground archaeology. In the case of St Mary's, the floors were thoroughly worked over – as is not unusual in our experience for a sizeable church like this – in the second nineteenth-century restoration. At that point, all of the ledger stones were gathered in the south chapel and raised timber pew bases and tiled alleys were installed; these are, of course, also 'historic', but more in the sense that the 1980s hall extension is historic than that a fifteenth century floor is. Whether any older material remains below the Victorian floor will only be known for sure when it is fully exposed, and we confirm that archaeological monitoring will be undertaken in case any burials or vaults are found. The one place where we are anticipating that a vault will be found, on the basis of T.R. Clark's account of the 1876 restoration (see statement of significance) is at the east end of the north aisle, no there is no sign of this visible on the current floor.

In terms of the justification for an underfloor heating system, I draw your attention to the recently completed report by Michael Barham, attached. We concur with the Society's view that heating should reflect the anticipated pattern of use for the building; in this case we can confirm that the proposed use of the medieval part of the overall building will be much more frequent than at present – this is not a Sunday-only church organisation or church building.

With respect to the four smaller stones commemorating members of the Cropley family (deaths 1817–1830) at the west end of the nave, these will indeed be incorporated into the new stone floor.

The decision to raise the level of the floor throughout the main spaces (except the chancel) allows level access to most of the remaining areas that currently lack it, while avoiding changing the main level of the chancel floor, and reducing the required below-ground dig. The detail to the base of the piers varies, but there are essentially two conditions: first, the arcades either side of the nave and, second, the south chapel. With respect to the former, the plinths of the nave piers have plain vertical sides, and while the new floor comes close to the point at which these splay, the proposed arrangement is little changed from the existing, as the new floor level is similar to that of the pew bases. The latter condition – the south chapel – is more critical, and I attach the sketch detail, which has been discussed and agreed with the DAC.

Extended Gallery

We are pleased to note that you do not oppose the principle of the extended gallery. The need for the gallery – both for the space beneath it and as a means of providing proper access to the tower room – is already set out in the revised statement of needs.

Chancel

We agree that there would be an impact on the spatial qualities and volumes of the chancel interior from introducing the screen; in part, that impact will be positive. I can think of a number of successful precedents, including St Stephen's, Norwich and Great Yarmouth Minster, where the space beyond the high altar is used both for storage and for north-south access. The introduction of the screen is partly driven by liturgical concerns – the wish to bring the communion table forward towards the gathered congregation – while giving it a positive backdrop to provide better focus to the building. The design of the communion table will itself be an important element – both visually and liturgically – for the success of the building as a whole; in agreement with the DAC it has therefore been agreed to allow additional time and deal with this under a separate application.

With respect to the piscinae and sedilia, neither is used at present, while in the proposed arrangement the piscinae would return to use for the post-communion washing of chalice and patten; this is a heritage benefit. It is agreed that the vestry must remain tidy; when the building is 'at rest' outside of service times, the large door to the vestry will remain open, allowing visitors access to these features. For reasons of both security and tidiness, the vestry has therefore been designed with tall, lockable cupboards along the entire north wall.

The suggestion that storage and vestry facilities could instead be provided in the adjacent halls does not account for the core need for the two halves of the building to be separately usable. There is already far too much independent activity within the modern parts of the building to allow the medieval part to rely on the modern parts for storage. Adequate and close-at-hand storage to facilitate the hard-won flexibility is essential for the success of the building as a whole, and particularly of the medieval part with which we are all rightly most concerned. Without that concealed storage, the building would end up resembling a furniture store, sadly like so many other church buildings.

Fittings

Comments noted; the church is well aware of the importance of the choice of chair for the overall feel of the building.

I trust that the above, when viewed with the documents in the faculty application, helps clarify the points raised in Catherine's letter.

Yours sincerely



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for and on behalf of Archangel Ltd

cc: Derek Tye (St Mary's), Geoffrey Hunter (DAC)

enc: Heating report: 0406-dmr-200316-19-ALA05 Church of St Mary Ely Heating Report P3

Plinth sketch detail: 0406-SK190503-south chapel pier base