



11<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
Our ref: SPAB/CC /2019/  
Your ref: 0406-pcs-190117-SPAB

Dr Nigel Walter MA Cantab, MA PhD York, FRIBA SCA, MAPM  
Director, Archangel Ltd

By email to nw@archangelic.com

Dear Dr Walter,

**St Mary's Church, St Mary's Street, Ely**

Proposed re-ordering of the interior of the church  
Grade I

Early 13<sup>th</sup> century with long and wide Transitional seven bay nave with slender piers and scalloped capitals, 15<sup>th</sup> century clerestory, excellent early 13<sup>th</sup> century north doorway and west tower and stone spire of 14<sup>th</sup> century, Early English chancel with double piscine and sedilia, double piscine also in chapel east end south aisle

We apologise that we were not able to respond to your previous consultations but thank you for your letter of 18<sup>th</sup> January and attachments and for consulting the Society again. We are grateful to Jack for sending your drawings: 0406 - 11b; 0406 – 21, and thank you very much for helpfully answering our questions on the telephone.

The general appearance of the interior as it is now derives much from the restorations of Ewan Christian for the chancel and Frederick Franey for the nave. The introduction to the church in the latest edition of the *Cambridgeshire* volume of *The Buildings of England* by Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, 2014, page 528 states starkly in the introductory section on the church:

“The interior has more of interest than the outside.”

We agree with this comment and particularly note the late 12<sup>th</sup>/early 13<sup>th</sup> century nave arcade with its piers and capitals, the arches being pointed “and finely moulded”.

**Floor**

Two years ago the Society ran a campaign about historic floors and the need to preserve them, especially in the light of the increasing number of applications for underfloor heating which, inter alia, often lead to the destruction of existing floor coverings and below ground archaeology, and which can have a significant detrimental impact on the special interest of the historic architecture and spatial qualities of an interior. We always recommend that a full heating options survey is undertaken in the light of the current and probable future use of a church. In the Society's view underfloor heating is only appropriate when a church is in constant, or nearly, constant use.

From our telephone conversation it seems that you have considered other heating options, but perhaps your survey has not been written up. We understand that, with the Bishop's encouragement for St Mary's to become a regional hub and resource church and the parish's commitment, the church will probably receive much greater, if not daily, activity, in which case underfloor heating might be appropriate although potentially destructive of the surviving below ground archaeology. In our view underfloor heating would not be appropriate if the level of current use continues. The parish should at least make provision for



archaeological monitoring if the floor is taken up and should expect to find burials or parts of burials/vaults.

The statement of significance refers to ledger stones to members of the Cropley family, and we assume that these will be retained in the proposed new floor, which we are pleased to note would be of stone.

The detail at the base of the piers and junction of the raised floor will be critical, if the columns are not to appear foreshortened.

### **Extended Gallery**

While we do not oppose the principle of the extended gallery we suggest that this intervention, which would inevitably have a very major impact on the west end of the church and the rhythm of the arcades, should be delayed until the need for it has been irrefutably proven. It could be considered as a separate project.

### **Treatment of the Chancel**

The writer does not know of a similar treatment to shorten a chancel which has been successful and we suggest that there would be an impact on the spatial qualities and volumes of the interior.

The Society would regret too the loss of visibility and, perhaps, meaning of the piscinae and sedilia and, to some extent, the unifying string course, resulting from the chancel foreshortening proposals. To visitors we suggest these fittings would be reduced to historic or archaeological features largely separated from meaning and purpose. Could not storage and vestry facilities be readily provided in the adjacent halls?

As discussed on the telephone the tidiness of the vestry would need to be impeccable.

### **Fittings**

We understand that the pews and other woodwork are all 19<sup>th</sup> century and therefore defer to the views of the Victorian Society. However, on the basis of photographs the pews appear to add to the special interest of the interior, and we agree with the remark of the contemporary newspaper article quoted in your note of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019 *Proposed Re-ordering Response to Representations from the DAC and CBC*:

“...open benches having shaped ends of simple and graceful design giving a pleasing appearance to the body of the church”

In the event that some of the pews are removed, we are pleased to know that new chairs would not be upholstered and that the wooden Theo chair would be among those to be considered.

Again, we apologise for our delays in giving our responses on this important re-ordering.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Cullis  
Temporary Caseworker

Cc Geoffrey Hunter, DAC; James Hughes, Victorian Society; Christina Emerson, CBC

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