

St Paul's Church Aldbrough St John



Statement of Significance

Statement of Need

**A Request for a Faculty to carry out
a Re-ordering of the West End
of the Interior of the Church Building**

June 2019

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St Paul's Church, Aldbrough St John

Section 1: Brief history and description of the church building, setting, churchyard and contents.

It seems odd that a village called 'Aldbrough St John' should have its parish church dedicated to St Paul. The reason is that St Paul's was not always the parish church. The original parish church is the historic church of Stanwick St John (Mediæval and Grade 1 listed) which has been vested in the Churches Conservation Trust since 1990. The 'St John', being the name of the *parish* church, was added to the Aldbrough *village* name in the 1920s by the Royal Mail to differentiate it from Ald**bor**ough near Boroughbridge.



St Paul's (Grade 2 listed) was built in 1890 for Eleanor, Dowager Duchess of Northumberland who had been left the care of the Duchy of Northumberland's estates around Stanwick Hall in 1865 by her husband, the 4th Duke of Northumberland. It was intended as a Chapel of Ease for the inhabitants of Aldbrough, many of whom were her tenants, ostensibly to save them the 1½ mile walk across the fields to Stanwick St John, though it is held locally that it was also to give them no excuse to join the Methodists who had recently built a chapel (now a house) in the village.

The church is sited in a conspicuous location in the village on a double bend. Traffic coming northbound through the village gets a full view from the south west corner with the south side being prominent. From the north, the west wall with its small hexagonal bell-cote is most visible. The church is surrounded by a small, grassed churchyard which is not used for burials other than cremated remains which currently occupy a stretch of land by the eastern churchyard wall. The whole curtilage is bounded by a rough-cast, mortared stone wall. There are also floodlights to illuminate the church at night. These were installed to celebrate the church's centenary in 1990 and are sited in the grass just inside the churchyard wall. Access to the churchyard is via a gate made by local craftsman Simon Willis in 2007.



Beyond the churchyard wall to the east and north is a grazing field used for sheep, which has been designated as permanent open space. A short section of wall at the north west bounds the garden of Rose Cottage but the alignment of that property is such that the view from its windows is to the buildings opposite and along the road to the south west, not to the church. To the west of the churchyard is the main road through the village and to the south is a lane into the old heart of the village.

The church building was designed by architect WS Hicks and is a very plain, late Victorian stone construction. It was well built by local craftsmen, (Mr Brown, the mason and Mr Ivison the joiner are recorded) using stone from a quarry on the outskirts of the village, to a design very similar to that seen in many villages and suburbs across the land, and all too often in estate agents' adverts described as 'Sympathetic conversion to dwelling of former church building', or similar, a fate we are keen to avoid.



The construction is of rough cut stone blocks in irregular courses with a ribbon course at sill level. There are stepped buttresses on the corners and in the centre of the south nave wall. The building is roofed in Cumbrian slates of a slightly green colour. These replaced the original tiles before WW2. The windows are recessed, framed in dressed stone and without hood moulds.

The nave is rectangular with a chancel that is slightly narrower and lower. On the south wall there is a porch over the south door main entrance and a small clergy vestry accessed from the chancel. On the north wall there is another small vestry used by the choir, also accessed from the chancel and with an exterior door on its west face.

The windows are lancets and without stained glass other than a narrow yellow glass border around each light. There is a double lancet and a single lancet on the south nave wall and a double lancet and two single lancets on the north wall. The east end has three lancets and the west end a single lancet. The two vestries each have a small double lancet on the north and south faces respectively and a single lancet on the east face. The porch also has two small rectangular windows in its east and west faces.



Inside, the walls are of ribbon-pointed, rough cut stone blocks, wainscoted in wood to window sill height (1.2m). There are fixed pews dowelled into the wainscot leaving one central aisle. The pews will seat about 100 people comfortably. In the north west corner of the church three half-length pews have been boarded over with an easily removable cover to be used as an information centre, newspaper collection point and post-service refreshment point.

In the chancel there are choir stalls – still used by the choir - which will seat a choir of about 16 – 18 singers though



the front rows are designed for children rather than adults and the choir rarely numbers more than eight. There are two steps up to the sanctuary where there is a plain wooden altar table which is kept covered and with a frontal in the appropriate liturgical colours. The communion rails are free standing and can easily be moved if space is required. St Paul's has an electronic organ from Norwich Organs and installed in the SE corner of the nave in the mid-1990s.



At the west end wall is the font set on a plinth. It is of a plain design with a simple wooden lid with metal strapping.



The interior fixtures, fittings and furnishings are almost entirely of wood. The pulpit in the NE nave corner is of wood and accessed by three steps. The lectern is free standing and late C20 made by a village resident. In fact most of the artefacts in St Paul's including the War Memorial plaque, the churchwardens' wands, the tea trolley and even the textiles and vestments were made by several very skilled local residents. It is all very plain and functional until one looks at the ceiling. The ceiling in St Paul's is

particularly fine. It is barrel vaulted and decorated with Victorian stencil work in red and green on a cream background. One notable place where there is similar decoration is in the stair case wells and corridors of the Royal Albert Hall. Just below the ceiling is a narrow frieze decorated with words from the Te Deum. In the nave, the ceiling decoration is fairly plain and the words from the Te Deum reflect life on Earth; in the chancel the decoration is more ornate and the quotations are about heavenly things. It was last cleaned in 1995.



There is one bell in the bell-cote, and it is rung from a rope by the font. The rope was replaced relatively recently.



The floor is mainly of wood and carpeted in the sanctuary, aisle and entrance area. Beneath the pews and choir stalls it is bare wood and there are electric tube heaters, covered by guard nets, fastened to the floor below the pews. The central aisle is a more solid surface (stone or concrete) but has been covered with carpet for many years. There were originally heating pipes in channels with grills over them along the aisle but these have been removed.

The interior lights have been updated recently to exchange the halogen bulbs for LED bulbs. The units are located near the top of the walls just below the frieze. There is also a sound system which can be used by those with hearing aids as well as making speech louder and clearer for others.

The two vestries are fully used. The clergy vestry contains a robe cupboard, two safes, one for money and altarware etc., the other for documents. The church's only monument is also in this vestry and commemorates Mr George Robinson, a prominent Methodist minister. It was transferred to the church when the Methodist chapel closed in 1996 and installed in the vestry because it was felt that it was inappropriate to put it in the main body of the church which has been kept free of stone monuments. It is not permanently fixed to the wall.

The choir vestry contains a music library (in an old wardrobe) a rail for choir robes, shelving for choir hymn-books etc. and storage for the altar frontals.



Section 2: The significance of the church in terms of:

Its special architectural interest

As stated previously, St Paul's is a plain, functional church of little special architectural interest from the exterior. It is a relatively small building as a church but quite adequate for

the needs of the village. It's historical interest is mainly in its connections with the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland from 1865 to her death in 1911.

The floodlighting helps to emphasise its importance within the local community. It works well in its setting on a conspicuous corner however, so we would assess its architectural significance as low-moderate.



Any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest

The church's principal feature of artistic interest is its glorious ceiling which makes it particularly important that nothing is installed inside the church which will detract from the ability to view it.

The churchyard is not a burial ground nor does the site have a long ecclesiastical history.

There is some evidence that the field to the north and east of the church was once the site of a building called 'Aldbrough Castle' on old maps, which may have been something like a pele tower. There are now no visible remains and the landowners are reluctant to allow archaeological investigation. There is no known evidence of the church site being of any significant archaeological interest.

Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals on the significance defined in Section 2:

Potential significance of the reordering project.

Removal of the font from its plinth – there may be some significance to this proposal on theological grounds but we have visited other churches where it appears a similar course of action has been taken so we assume no significance in this. It will, however remove the trip hazard which the plinth currently provides and allow the clergy to feel safer during baptisms when some clergy worry about falling off the edge of the current plinth.



The removal of pews and building of a chair storage cabinet at the west end of the church should have no negative impact on the significance of the church interior and will have a positive impact in making it easier to appreciate the interior as a whole. The pews themselves are of a plain design and made in soft pine wood, of no special significance. The new woodwork will be carried out by contractors with a great deal of experience doing such work in churches and very sensitive to the need to 'get things right'.

Statement of Need

Section 1. General Information

The parish of Aldbrough St John (also still referred to as Stanwick with Aldbrough St John) comprises the village of Aldbrough St John and the hamlets of Stanwick St John and Carlton both of which were originally settlements around the respective country houses of Stanwick Hall and Carlton Hall, both long since demolished.



Aldbrough is located on both sides of a beck and around a very large village green, reputed to be the second largest in England. The population of the parish is around 550 people. It has a high proportion of retired people though in recent years more younger families have moved into the village despite its lack of a school, the former one being closed in 1989. Six new houses have been added to the village in the last 2 years.

Stanwick is divided into two distinct settlements, the older one being by the church of Stanwick St John and by a bridge across the beck so known as Kirkbridge. About ¼ mile south is the settlement that was originally around the hall and includes a number of properties from the Stanwick Hall days plus a number of newer houses. Stanwick Hall itself was demolished in 1922.

Carlton comprises mainly properties that have been built along the narrow lane leading to the site of the old hall along with a few buildings originally part of the Hall complex.

St Pauls church is located in Aldbrough, the largest of the settlements and is the parish church since the vesting of Stanwick St John (left) into the Churches Conservation Trust. There are two or three Sunday services in Aldbrough each month on a rotation system around the Stanwick Group of Churches benefice. A said Holy Communion or Morning Prayer on Thursday mornings has been discontinued recently for logistical reasons. In addition the church has its turn for major festival services such as the Harvest Festival, Carol Service, Christmas Eve, Easter and Remembrance Sunday with the other churches in the benefice. A new simple Village Service has been introduced recently. With a flexible space, informal worship, other activities and groups which currently take place in private houses, or not at all, could make more use of the building. This could be more attractive to people who may feel uncomfortable visiting the home of someone they do not know well, however, welcoming.



As an open church it is also used as the drop-off and collection point for newspapers which are provided from the shop in Barton, about 3 miles away, since Aldbrough lost its own Post Office and newspaper outlet in 2010. There is also a collection box where donations to the local food bank in Richmond can be



left. This attracts a surprising amount of use. There have been several attempts to use the building for other activities including a Bible group for toddlers with parents and carers but these have all failed due to the lack of toilet provision and most other meetings are now held in members' homes, or the Village Hall rather than the church. PCC and benefice meetings are now held jointly in Village Halls due to the lack of toilet and catering facilities in the churches. It is hoped that this increased open space, and eventually, toilet and kitchen, will make the building more usable but there is no intention of competing with the Village Hall in Aldbrough which we are told is a concern to some residents.

The design of the church with its fixed pews also means that it is difficult to provide any special provision for small children, such as a play area, during services and the narrow gap between the base of the font and the pews makes access for buggies and wheelchairs extremely difficult. Those who come with such vehicles rarely return. Pall-bearers carrying in coffins, and brides attempting a dignified entry also find it a problem.



Section 2. What do you need?

We need a safer, more comfortable and more welcoming area at the west end of the nave for refreshments after services, for meetings, for the display of information, for holding Remembrance observance by the Memorial and Baptism services around the font and simply to make the building more attractive to visitors. At present this area is very congested when refreshments are served there and the plinth around the font is a serious trip hazard. This should be a relatively simple project and we wish to proceed with it as soon as possible.

Section 3: The Proposals

1. Acceptance of a Credence Table

We have been told that a faculty is also needed for the PCC to accept formally a credence table originally in St Hilda's chapel, Caldwell, now closed, where it was the gift of the late Iris Smith, chorister, deputy organist and parishioner of St Paul's. She presented it in memory of her parents. We are therefore including it within this faculty request.





2. The Reordering Project


This project is designed to address the problems mentioned previously of the lack of open flexible and more welcoming space in the west end of the church along with the removal of the trip hazard caused by the present plinth around the font. The re-ordering project will involve the following:


1. Removal of the tube heaters beneath the back 4 rows of the long pews in the nave. These will be retained and, subject to qualified advice on their condition, be retained for possible use below other pews to improve the heating there.




2. The removal of the back four rows of the long pews towards the west end of the nave. The photographs show them with the north side showing also the War Memorial. It will provide an open area of 6.12m west to east and 5.42m north to south, 33.28m² in total.




3. The removal of three short pews (left 1) currently covered by a removable board which houses a Village Information Centre, newspaper collection point and food bank donations collection box.


4. A fourth short pew (L2) just inside the main south door will also be removed.
5. As the pews are dowelled into the wall panelling at one end (L3), much of this panelling will need to be replaced in order to make good the walls. The contractor intends to remove carefully the panelling on the west wall (L4) which, being original, will better match the woodwork on the north and south walls.

This will be replaced with new panelling matching the original panelling as closely as possible and not directly adjoining it so any difference will not be readily obvious. The electricity distribution board and heater switches seen on photo 2 (above) will also be boxed to reduce conspicuity and increase security.


6. In the north west corner, a wooden cabinet will be built to store folding chairs which will only be used occasionally. The design will also incorporate a box for donations and space below it to store items for post-service refreshments. Its footprint will be little more than the short pew currently there.
7. The loss of heating capacity from the removed tube heaters will be replaced by a new system to be installed by Christopher Dunphy Church Heating. It will comprise four electric, clay filled radiators with a sophisticated control system that ensures the required temperature is maintained when it is needed. The radiators will be coloured to match the woodwork as closely as possible. The picture is taken from Dunphy's website, dunphychurchheating.co.uk


8. The heating will be on its own electrical supply. In addition, as part of the overall project, two new double sockets will be installed on each of the three walls. These will be positioned to take account of refreshment preparation, use of projectors and audio equipment, cleaning and other items needing power. The contractor has also agreed to use front plates for the sockets more in keeping with the building than the white plastic ones currently installed.

9. We also wish under this faculty to install a telephone line to the church to make wi-fi provision possible. As can be seen in the photo (left) the pole is very close to the church (less than 10m) and entry for the cable at the base of the west window would be minimally intrusive.



10. The font will need to be carefully removed from its present plinth so that the plinth can be completely removed. The font will be replaced in its present position once the contractors are satisfied with the condition of the floor below. The new carpet will be brought up to the base of the font.



11. The existing carpet in the project area will have been removed at the start of the project and the floor will need to be made level throughout. This will involve screeding, sealing and plywood sheets being laid to ensure the new floor is level with the solid floor down the central aisle which is about 1cm higher than the wooden floors under the pews.

12. The new carpet has been selected to comply with church requirements regarding breathability. It will have a recycled foam underlay which the supplier assures us also complies with the advice provided. The colour has been selected by popular choice of service attenders. We believe it also complies with the advice for a dementia friendly church.. A larger copy of the label showing carpet specifications is at the end of this document.



13. The seating capacity lost by the removal of pews will be replaced by one row (8 places) of permanent wooden chairs, two of which will have arms. Wine-coloured fabric is also the preferred option for the chairs. These will be placed informally around the new open area when not required for congregational seating.



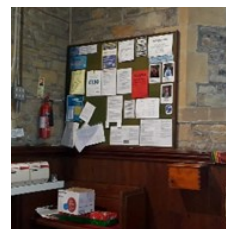
14. In addition, for occasional use, there will be 20 folding chairs. We have opted for a more expensive design with a more robust frame and padded seating and back. We believe these are similar to ones used in Ripon Cathedral (photo) which we found comfortable to use. They will be stored when not in use in the cabinet mentioned in para. 6.



15. The Village Information Centre and newspaper collection point is an important facility which we plan to replace with a number of display items for which we believe we can get local authority funding. The items shown here are designs currently available which we believe fulfil our requirements. However they are sold in a market place where designs change frequently so the final racks may only be broadly similar.



16. The present notice board needs to be replaced with one of similar size. The present one is made of hard wood which is difficult to get drawing pins into, and covered in an aged, short-pile felt which does not make Velcro stickers an alternative option. There are many boards available on the market and we will get one of similar size, with a wooden frame and a cloth surface that can take Velcro stickers as well as drawing pins.



17. A smaller notice board in the porch also needs to be replaced by one large enough to take two A4 notices rather than just one.

18. We also wish to purchase some of these office divider panels which can be used to display short term notices such as Diocesan Training Events, and make flexible use of the new space e.g. to have a screened off prayer corner or children's play area. The suggested dimensions are 1200 x 1200mm and in a neutral colour.



The PCC has costed all these proposals and has funds to cover everything in this proposal. We set up a fund for Special Projects over 10 years ago and have been adding to it since then with a view to using it for projects such as this. The result is that we can cover the cost of this project but we are also doing some local fund-raising specifically for it in order to make the local community feel that they are also involved in it as well as restore our depleted reserves and prepare for our new building project.



The Carpet
referred to in
para 12.

Specifications
←
and colour
↓



