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| **AC/24/20**  DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  4 July 2024 | Diocese of St Albans MONO Logo |

VISIT TO THE CHURCH OF ST BARTHOLOMEW, WIGGINTON: 22 MAY 2024

**Purpose of Visit: *South porch – structural concerns (and parish room)***

1. The Committee was represented Alan Frost (architect), Peter Lunoe (structural engineering) and Emma Critchley (Advisory Secretary). They were met at the church by Paul Walker (fabric committee) and a colleague, with church architect Stefan Skanski. Refreshments were kindly offered.

1. The church is of smallish medium size, listed Grade II\* and has a mediaeval origin. Much of the stonework was replaced during the work of enlarging and restoration begun in 1857. There is a nave with a south porch, low north aisle (a 19th century addition) and a chancel. The aisle is executed by means of three gables along its elevation. The organ is set under a depressed arch in the chancel north wall, with a vestry behind in a gabled projection. Unusually, although there is no west tower, there is almost a second nave space to the west of the nave proper. This is a large 15th century chantry chapel for the Weedon family. The whole floor of this space, for no apparent reason is distinctly raked, sloping purposefully down towards the east as it meets the nave. The interior is coherently Victorian, particularly in the decoration of the reredos and organ and the other fittings in the chancel. There is a small north-west hall, built in 1973 in flint to match that of the church. The church roofs are of hand-made clay tiles of shades of orange-red. A 19th century bell turret sits over the join between the nave and the western end of the church. In the churchyard, a lych gate of 1910 marks the southern entrance and is listed Grade II in its own right.
2. **Background –** Previous discussions focused on the east end of the chancel, where drainage repairs, limited masonry repair and repointing have since been carried out. The church architect and PCC have also flagged a concern about the south porch, where there is evidence of movement in the east wall and to a lesser extent in the west wall. A trial pit has been dug and the visit was arranged to assess the situation while the area to the east of the porch was exposed.

**Discussion**

1. The ground had been excavated to the depth of the drainage pipes, one of which was clearly cracked. The flint/rubble and stone porch wall was set directly on the ground without foundations. A second pipe appeared to run around the front of the porch, possibly linking in with the west downpipe. It was noted that two yew trees previously stood immediately adjacent to the porch, where paths had now been created around the south side of the church.
2. It seemed likely that various factors contributed to the movement that was visible. The porch roof was relatively light but was reinforced with metal struts perhaps reflecting historic splaying. Water from the cracked drain, the lack of footings, and the trees previously close by had probably contributed to the movement more than the outward force of the roof. The glazed timber frame sitting on the masonry wall had moved slightly in relation to the stone on which it sat and also showed historic joints. The wall had moved away from the church wall, potentially allowing water to get behind. Cracks in the masonry of the wall suggested some moving apart and tilting of both walls.
3. Peter Lunoe rehearsed the option of stabilising the east wall from above ground level, but all concluded this was not feasible. The main option was therefore to take down the wall (removing the glass from the timber frame temporarily), prop the roof, dig footings for the wall and then rebuild it plumb. The architect planned to extend the footings at either side of the wall line to spread the load of the wall. The existing drains and gullies and associated brickwork would be removed and replaced by new gullies and drains linking into the existing system. It was recommended that this should be done right round the porch rather than only on the east side, and that improved drainage should include a drainage channel across the front of the porch. The DAC Secretary would check whether the work legally constituted partial demolition of the grade II\* listed church, in which case some external consultations would be required. The church architect would check if Building Regs approval was needed, but it seemed likely the work would constitute repair.
4. This would be fairly extensive work which would require fundraising and planning. The porch should be recorded photographically before any work was started. In the meantime, the trial pit should be temporarily but firmly backfilled to the base of the masonry and a temporary drainage hose provided to take water from the downpipe and to bypass the cracked drain. When the work was underway the porch would be out of use for a period. Again, this would need to be planned for and communicated to the congregation and other users. The parish room entrance provided an alternative accessible entry route and there were other doors providing a means of escape. The porch could continue to be used for the moment but should continue to be monitored for signs of movement.
5. Although much of the ground had previously been disturbed, and archaeologist experienced in dealing with a churchyard context should be engaged to be on standby in case any buried human remains, or other finds were uncovered. The DC could not make recommendations about firms, but was aware of the following archaeology firms operating in the area:

KDK Archaeology

[Archaeologists in Bedfordshire,Hertfordshire,Buckinghamshire (kdkarchaeology.co.uk)](http://www.kdkarchaeology.co.uk/)

Minerva Archaeology [Minerva Archaeology - Minerva Archaeology Ltd (minerva-archaeology.com)](https://minerva-archaeology.com/)

Thames Valley Archaeological Services [Home - Thames Valley Archaeological Services (tvas.co.uk)](https://tvas.co.uk/)

1. The parish room dated from the 1950s and had external and internal cracks, particularly in the SW corner. A drain had been found to be completely blocked by tree roots and was now clear and discharging to a soakaway. Internal tell-tales had been in place for 12 months and showed no further sign of movement. The cracks were not structurally significant, but they were unsightly, and the external cracks would allow some water ingress. They should be repointed using an appropriate mortar mix for the building construction (or softer) as part of routine maintenance. Internally the cracks could be filled when redecoration was next undertaken.
2. **Next steps** – The architect would provide a specification for the work which the parish would upload to the DAC section of the diocesan online portal. Temporary measures would be put in place (paragraph 7), an archaeologist appointed (paragraph 8) and funding explored with support from Liz West, Church Buildings Maintenance Officer.

**Recommendations**

The visiting members of the DAC invite the Committee to:

(i) Endorse the advice given in its name.

(ii) Encourage the parish to proceed in developing its plans.

Emma Critchley

23 May 2024