

Neutral Citation Number: [2022] ECC Gui 3

**IN THE CONSISTORY COURT OF
THE DIOCESE OF GUILDFORD**

Date: 2 March 2022

**IN THE PARISH OF GREAT BOOKHAM
THE CHURCH OF ST. NICOLAS**

JUDGMENT

1. The church of St Nicolas in Great Bookham is listed Grade I. Just 2.5% of listed buildings are expressed to be Grade I. It is set in a two-acre churchyard with a lychgate. The 11th century nave occupies the probable area of the original Saxon church. The Normans extended the nave to the South around 1140 and North around 1180 when the stonework of the tower was built. The Chancel was built in 1341 and an area adjacent to the porch around 1380. The South aisle and Slyfield (Lady) Chapel were built around 1440, when the stone tower was buttressed and the timber tower and spire were built. The tower door and North facing window in the nave were created in the 17th Century. The North aisle, sacristy (vestry) and sexton's shed were built in the 19th Century, the choir vestry early in the 20th Century and the Church Room was added in 1979. A Pastoral Centre was added at the North west corner of the churchyard in 1996. The roof of the South aisle is Horsham stone tiles and the rest of the roofs are tiled. The framework supporting the bells and shingle covered spire consists of massive oak timbers.
2. No changes are proposed to the external fabric of the building. It is described by the Church Buildings Council as built of knapped flint with some Roman tiles: "the fine architecture of the church is complemented by 15th Century glass in the east window, elegant piscinas, the 12th Century font and numerous high-quality monuments." These elements, I suspect, are largely behind its Grade I listed status.
3. In the early 19th Century, St Nicolas, like many English churches at this date, was filled by private box pews. Unusually, there are several detailed watercolour paintings of the interior of the church in 1827 by the topographical and architectural artist Edward Hassell (1811- 1852). These show the nave, crowded with pews. It is not possible to date the pews from the painting other than to say that they are of the usual 17th or early 18th Century type. There are no known records of when pews were introduced here, but it is known that an Henrician rood screen installed in 1535 was taken down and 'made into

pews', which suggests that some pews, at least, existed at Great Bookham from a relatively early date - perhaps the early-17th century.

4. Hassell made a number of paintings of the church interior (which I have seen) of which one is entitled 'Ancient Panels in Great Bookham Church'. This shows part of a box pew incorporating carved decoration in the Renaissance style of c.1600. The upper panels, with a foliate pattern, are very similar, but not identical, to those that survive today in two of the 19th Century pews.
5. The interior of the building was extensively remodelled in the 19th Century. These had a significant impact on the medieval church, giving us the building we see today. During this period the church benefitted from the work of two important Victorian architects: Richard Cromwell Carpenter and William Butterfield.
6. Carpenter was born in 1812 and died, aged 42, of tuberculosis in 1855. His two most significant buildings were Lancing College and Hurstpierpoint. Lancing College was designed in 1848 but the construction did not begin until 1854. Hurstpierpoint was begun earlier in 1851. Carpenter was described as having an accurate knowledge of ancient work and using "a refined treatment of decorative details."
7. It was Carpenter who introduced the North aisle in 1844-5. He had earlier become a member of the Tractarian Cambridge Camden Society which later became the Ecclesiological Society to which he was introduced by Pugin. Having seen photographs of the interior of the building, the North aisle does indeed demonstrate a restrained decorative style which is, of course, largely unaffected by the proposed changes.
8. The main purpose of Carpenter's extension was to provide free seating, but most, if not all, of the existing private pews in the body of the church seem to have been retained. Their arrangement after the completion of the North aisle is known from a plan of the church made in 1845.
9. Carpenter's work to the North aisle was in response to concerns about the number of parishioners who were not attending services and a desire to allow more 'free seating' for those who could not afford the rent of box-pews. Lambeth Palace Library has two plans of Carpenter's work. The first shows the proposed rebuilding of the North aisle in red. The second plan, dated 1845 and signed by the churchwardens and the vicar is more significant. This shows what was actually constructed, and is very different from the first plan. The North aisle was filled with benches facing east. Carpenter has also removed pews in the body of the nave and South aisle and re-organised these areas with what appear to be benches. The effect was to increase the seating from 310 to 425 and the number of free seats from 123 to 216.

10. Of Carpenter's work only the external walls of the North aisle survive today, and these incorporate medieval re-used masonry. None of the seating or other furnishings installed in the widened North aisle remain. The pews that abutted the North wall were removed in 2013.
11. For our purposes, of much greater significance is the contribution made by William Butterfield, (1814 - 1900). From 1842 Butterfield was also involved with the Cambridge Camden Society and contributed designs to the Society's journal, the *Ecclesiologist*. Butterfield's church of All Saints, Margaret Street, London was, in the view of Henry-Russell Hitchcock, the building that initiated the High Victorian Gothic era. It was designed in 1850, completed externally by 1853 and consecrated in 1859. Its sponsor was the Ecclesiological Society and is said to have been the first use of polychrome brick in the city, with bands of stone on the spire. The interior was even more richly decorated, with marble and tile marquetry. At Oxford, Butterfield designed Keble College, in a style radically divergent from the University's existing traditions of Gothic architecture, its walls boldly striped with various colours of brick. In his buildings of 1868-72 at Rugby School, it is said that the polychromy is even more brash.
12. There is little or nothing to suggest brashness in his work to St Nicolas Church in Great Bookham. However, as a leading Tractarian architect, he was undoubtedly concerned with the liturgical significance of his buildings. The remodelling of the church was clearly carried out as a unified whole which included flooring and furnishings. These furnishings would have consisted of pews, choir stalls, clergy seating, pulpit, lectern, altar and font.
13. Butterfield became involved with the church through his patron the 7th Lord Downe (1812-57) who owned an estate at Great Bookham where Butterfield designed a school (1856-8) and a small group of cottages (1864-6). His first work in the church was an east window in the Slyfield chapel (1858). He undertook some work in 1872, and between 1881-8 he supervised extensive repairs and the re-ordering, which is described in a Faculty of 1885. No associated drawings have been located.
14. The 1885 Faculty described the works as '(a) to take up and remove from the church all pews hat pegs existing fittings and floors the remains of old screens Jacobean pew ends and framing to be preserved and refixed (b) to provide and fix to the wood floors in the nave and aisles stained and varnished deal seats and kneeling boards (c) to provide and fix to the wood floors in the Chancel Riga oak seats desks and kneeling boards.' In addition, the repairs and alterations included a new chancel roof and repairs to the nave roof, new wood block and Minton tile floors, a new stone reredos, relocation of the organ and various monuments, and other repairs and redecorations. The church interior today remains substantially as it was following the 1885 reordering. The

most significant recent change was the removal of the pews from the North aisle in 2013. These are understood to have differed in design from those in the nave and South aisle.

15. As part of this, Butterfield removed all the Georgian box pews and the Carpenter benches. He installed stained and varnished pine pews in the nave and the aisles. It is the future of the existing pews in the nave and aisles that is the principal source of controversy in this petition. These pews are undoubtedly of modest quality and design. They contrast with the choir stalls and the clergy desks which are of oak and of much better quality. This is entirely consistent with the ecclesiology of the period where the furnishings and decoration become increasingly more luxurious as the eye moves from the nave to the Chancel and from the Chancel to the Sanctuary.
16. When the petition came before me in September 2021, I was concerned that the petitioners had failed to recognise in their supporting documents the significance of the Victorian remodelling of the interior. The Statement of Significance does not address what was likely to have been a unified re-working of the church's interior in the late 19th century. It was a startling omission in the Statement of Significance not to have mentioned the contribution of Carpenter and Butterfield. That said, I had seen no reference to St Nicolas, Great Bookham in the list of Butterfield's churches, designed or remodelled.
17. As a result, I prepared a Memorandum which has now been seen by the petitioners and the Amenity Societies in which I identified the need to address this issue. Although I said that the photographs did not suggest any particular architectural significance attached to the interior and that the pews in question were likely to have been mass-produced; nevertheless, the nave furnishings, whilst of no intrinsic aesthetic importance in themselves, may acquire a significance as a part (albeit perhaps limited) of a unified interior of the Gothic revival. It was, arguably, important to acknowledge the Victorian past as an integral part of the petition. Without such an acknowledgement, the petition would have proceeded on the basis of the removal of valueless out-dated pine pews.
18. Various bodies had expressed reservations to the proposals or parts of them, not so much in terms of outright opposition to the proposals but to the need for more information so as to ensure that the proposals were justified applying the principle that the greater harm to significance, the greater justification is required.
19. Christina Emerson of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is typical in this approach. When dealing with the removal of the pews, she

commented on the Statement of Significance merely referring to them as 'of the late 19th century with earlier elements.' She suggested that there should be an expert's report suggesting options for the retention or reworking of the most significant pews and, in particular, 'a significantly robust argument' for the removal of the pews in their entirety. Clearly the aim of the parish to remove pews in order to afford greater flexibility to worship and community activities requires the petitioners to show how the space will be used in the course of its various activities; an 8 o'clock service, a family service, group meetings, concerts, choral events. By this means it will become obvious why the current inflexible arrangement of pews, at least in some parts of the nave and aisles, is inappropriate for current needs. Ms Emerson suggests there should be genuine consideration to a solution involving partial removal of the pews and why the parish does not consider that this is workable.

20. James Hughes of the Victorian Society considered that the Statement of Significance did not pay adequate regard to the importance of Carpenter and Butterfield and their contribution to a unified decorative scheme, albeit one created in a very different historical, and perhaps liturgical, environment. Mr Hughes spoke of the need for an activity audit showing how a flexible nave space would be used, how often and by how many people and an exploration of options envisaging the retention of varying amounts of benches. Similar reservations were expressed about the proposal to remodel the font's base.
21. Whilst Mr Hughes acknowledged the introduction of a dais into a church as assisting in providing a more dignified area for the celebration of the liturgy nearer to the congregation, he wanted more details about the liturgical (or other) use to which the additional space would be put. By inference this meant a fuller explanation about current usage, either in the nave or in the Chancel and Sanctuary so that any limitations could form the justification for the proposed change. The supporting documentation proposed a modest extension into the nave of some 1.2m. For my own part, I expressed a view that where the liturgical activity is moved from the East end of the church to the nave, there is a risk that the Chancel and Sanctuary becoming redundant, requiring due consideration being given to the future use of the Chancel and Sanctuary.
22. The Victorian Society, through Mr Hughes, noted the guidance provided by the Church of England relating to seating in a Grade 1 listed church to the effect that they should be entirely of timber. As I had noted elsewhere, the removal of pews and the use of chairs carries with it its own particular problems. The storage of chairs when not in use, the ease of their carriage from place to place and the avoidance of unsightly stacks of chairs placed by well-meaning volunteers who do not know what to do with them. I noted in one of the photographs, DWG No DOC 202, two random chairs placed in front of a

magnificent baroque memorial. It is an object lesson in the downside of introducing chairs into an empty space. How much better would it have looked in the photograph without them.

23. Finally, Mr Hughes remarked upon a minor alteration in the proposal to relocate the donation box and, less contentiously perhaps, the benefactors' board. The donation box was an unusual feature and I can understand why he wanted some information about its origin and significance, if only as a matter of record.
24. Isabelle Ryan of Historic England focused upon the removal of pews and the installation of the Audio-Visual system. She, too, spoke about the lack of information about the existing pews and the absence of an assessment of their significance. Little justification had been provided beyond that a more flexible space was required. The Statement of Needs did not address the proposal for the AV system which is complex and extensive without sufficient justification for the use of such a large quantity of screens, inevitably in prominent positions.
25. Mr Edward Waller of the Georgian Group echoed the concerns made about the lack of information provided on the pews. His view was that, without a full assessment of the pews and their significance, the Georgian Group was unable to offer any advice. (As later transpired, the input of the Georgian Group was limited because the Georgian elements of the interior were themselves limited to some very fine wall memorials which are unaffected by the proposed changes.)
26. Keri Dearmer of the Church Buildings Council commented upon the proposal to install a gas boiler. The Council noted that the Church of England is working towards Net-Zero carbon by 2030. The Council would be able to support the installation of a gas boiler if it were clear that the choice was a result of the careful analysis of the options available and their carbon impact. The electric under-pew heaters for the Chancel were an appropriate solution, especially if combined with 100% renewable electricity from a green tariff. However, it noted that there was no energy audit submitted and therefore it was not possible to establish whether the proposed system was the most suitable solution.
27. Like the other consultees, the Church Buildings Council sought further information about the need for a flexible space within the nave and asked for further details, including what activities were proposed for the space, how many people were expected to attend, what sort of community activities were envisaged and whether there was local support for these to take place in the church given the existing church and village halls. The Council, too, would

have found it helpful in showing possible uses, layouts and a consideration of alternative options such as the removal of only a part of the pews.

28. The Council also commented upon the fact that the Victorian font base, if removed, would drastically change the appearance of the font and that the proposal for a new bronze base of four slender legs could not be easily visualised such as to justify a drastic change of appearance. It echoes what I had said earlier. If the current base of the font is merely a piece of unwieldy stonework, the justification for its removal is easy to make. If, however, it is, as I believed it to be, part of Butterfield's unified design for a Gothic interior, however simple that design may be, the justification for a change would be less easy to make.
29. Finally, the Council noted the lack of information provided about the proposed Audio-Visual system.
30. In addition to the reservations summarised above, my Memorandum spoke of some individual letters of objection which were self-explanatory. One of the principal objections was the suggestion that St Nicolas would be turned into another community hall. In addition, Mr Gordon argued that the chairs were less comfortable than the existing pews with pew cushions. Mr Whitman complained of insufficient time and opportunity for parishioners to study and discuss the proposal (a complaint which, with the passage of time, now no longer holds true) but also that there was no evidence the changes would attract a larger congregation; that there were unsolved problems of lack of parking and difficulty of access to the church; that the ramps were potentially hazardous and that the role of kneelers had been insufficiently addressed.
31. My Memorandum concluded that the petition could not be advanced without a substantially revised Statement of Significance and Statement of Needs. In particular, I suggested the petitioners would be greatly assisted by advice about the various alterations made in the 19th Century by Carpenter and Butterfield. I ended by saying that, at some stage, an assessment would have to be made whether the quality of the interior was sufficiently high to merit its retention when balanced against detailed arguments focusing upon how the church would be used if the petition were granted. I suggested that there was plenty of scope for the petitioners to invite some or all of the consultees to a meeting at the church in an attempt to resolve some of these issues.
32. I now wish to pay tribute to the petitioners who have risen so successfully to the reservations expressed by me and the Amenity Societies. As a result, the petitioners commissioned a report by an historic buildings consultant, Mr Michael Copeman, MSc, BA, IHBC whose report was received by them on 5 November 2021. In addition, the petitioners have greatly enlarged both the

Statement of Significance and the Statement of Needs including the provision of notes detailing why the PCC need a more flexible church building, a note analysing options for the partial removal of the remaining pews, a summary of Chris Redding Associates' heating study of the church, a note showing illustrative seating layouts and a Heating Plan. Following a meeting on 16 November which was held at the church with representatives of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Historic England and the Church Buildings Council further alterations were made to the proposals. As a result of illness, the Victorian Society could not be represented but, usefully, additional paperwork demonstrated working through various options suggested by the Victorian Society.

33. As a result, we now have an invaluable resource as to the past and present of this building which will remain valuable for future generations wishing to know something of the history of this building and the reasons why changes have been made and may need to be made in future. The petition and the material supporting it should be preserved and made easily accessible for all those wishing to see it.
34. I can deal swiftly with those matters which are no longer in contention or can be resolved summarily:

- (a) The nave platform

As part of discussions with potential contractors the petitioners had been told by a professional stonemason that the memorial brass at the foot of the pulpit steps is on a stone slab that extends some way under the existing chancel step, as well as under the lowest of the pulpit steps. It would be impractical to lift and move that slab without dismantling a significant part of the chancel step as well as the lowest pulpit step, thereby entailing a substantial amount of work and carry the risk of damage to both steps. Instead, the petitioners propose to extend the chancel step a further 150mm (6 inches) into the nave so that it fully covers the brass and install a hatch that could be opened to allow the brass to be viewed. The same approach would also be adopted for small ledger stone (100m 60mm in white marble) that would be covered by the ramp.

- (b) The chairs

The church proposes to buy 200 of the Howe 40/4 chairs. At least 160 of these will be used almost all of the time, leaving 40 or fewer to be stored sufficient to be accommodated on

one trolley. This must be stored in the Church Room alongside the other chairs used in that room.

The petitioners propose purchasing additional seating in the form of the Alpha E101 chair (which has a black plastic seat and back) such as is used in the Church Room and Pastoral Centre to be used only on the rare occasions such as Christmas and Easter when additional seating is required.

The Victorian Society's view was that these latter chairs were inappropriate even for infrequent and temporary use. Given the infrequency of using this type of chair to supplement the 200 Howe 40/4 chairs and that the Howe 40/4 chair is some four times the price of the Alpha chair, it is not proportionate to purchase additional Howe 40/4 chairs. From my own experience, it is not unusual to use chairs from the church hall to supplement the pews when additional seating is required and it imposes no significant aesthetic loss, given the reason for it.

(c) The font pedestal

In view of the concerns expressed about the proposed bronze font base and the high prices by tenderers for this, the petitioners now propose to rebuild the font on its existing base in the proposed new location closer to the main door from the tower. In doing so the lowest level of the plinth would be removed to lower the font to a safer height. This would also enable the stone step to be dispensed with, thereby removing a trip hazard.

(d) The heating system.

Following receipt of Chris Reading Associates' study, the Church Buildings Council now accepts that other heating options have been considered by the parish and is content with the proposed system.

(e) The Audio-Visual installation.

Two amenity societies had expressed concerns about the five proposed screens. SPAB accepted the proposal that two screens should be installed behind the chancel arch (where they will not be visible from the nave). It objected to the screens on the nave columns and in the tower. Historic England objected to all five screens but makes particular mention of the two screens on the nave columns.

I accept that the screens behind the chancel arch are necessary if the choir and servers are to see what is projected on the screens in the nave which, when not in use, are hidden (rolled up) behind the chancel arch and roof beams in the side aisles. The petitioners are prepared to forego the two nave screens

and use moveable screens when they are necessary to assist those leading services and other events. I grant permission to amend the petition to include the installation of wiring and sockets on the two nave columns nearest to the chancel to enable moveable screens to be plugged in without potentially dangerous trailing wires. The wiring must be suitably attached and routed and coloured to reduce the impact of its presence.

(f) The offertory box

There was an issue as to the intrinsic merit of a stone offertory box. Unfortunately, perhaps, this was destroyed by vandals in an obvious attempt to obtain the contents. It was, however, subsequently discovered to have no architectural merit, being a plain stone pillar safe installed in 1968 by Hawkins and Sons, local undertakers. It will be replaced in due course and the subject of a separate faculty application.

35. The report of Michael Copeman has addressed the need for a comprehensive assessment of the historic interior of the church. I summarise its contents below.
36. The choir stalls and chancel furniture are of high-quality oak joinery. They correspond with the description in the 1885 Faculty and display the robust Gothic Revival character of Butterfield's work. At least one kneeling board survives.
37. The bench pews in the body of the church are of stained deal, as specified in the Faculty, but have no kneeling boards. They have shaped bench ends with simple chamfers, plain seats and seat-bookshelves, but no other distinctive design features. The fronts have a simple arcade design. Butterfield used broadly similar benches in many of his churches but, Mr Copeman thinks, they are not part of a 'set' with the chancel furniture. They are of a common 19th Century type.
38. The pews and pew fronts that are the main subject of his report incorporate carved panels of c.1600, each with a pattern of five roundels carved in relief with a stippled background. They comprise one pew front (c.4m long) and one slightly longer bench pew with dimensions to match those of the pews. Each carved panel is a single oak board, roughly 200 x 750mm, their backs roughly chamfered to fit a grooved frame. The carved panels have been incorporated in larger sections of panelling with pegged joints, so that below the carved panels are a series of roughly square panels, with decorative mouldings and a much cruder inscribed bead moulding to the rails, in the style of 17th Century domestic panelling.

39. It is obvious to Mr Copeman that the surviving panels are part of a larger group from the same source which probably included the 'arcaded' panels; and that they originally formed part of something other than box pews, for which they were re-used, probably in the 17th Century. Whether they were originally part of a high-status domestic interior or church furnishings of some kind cannot be known from the surviving panels alone; nor do we know how many carved panels were present in 1885. There are no religious symbols in the carved panels, which might suggest a secular origin.
40. The reference to 'Jacobean pew ends and framing' in the 1885 Faculty, according to Mr Copeman, is ambiguous. Hassell's painting appears to be of pew fronts, but what survives could well have been the 'ends' of box pews, suggesting that some carved panels were lost between 1827 and 1885. Nonetheless, it is clear that those extant in 1885 were sufficiently valued by the community (and Butterfield) to be preserved, and that the sections of box pew that incorporated the carved panels were adapted in 1885, to conform with the dimensions of the new bench pews.
41. Mr Copeman believes the 1885 pews in the nave and side aisles are standard examples of the type commonly used by Butterfield, and could have been made to his design, although he strongly favoured kneeling boards over hassocks. (He published a somewhat similar design for bench pews in the *Church Builder* in 1885.) However, even if they were designed by Butterfield, they are of an inexpensive, utilitarian type, produced in very large numbers in the later part of the 19th Century. They were not designed specifically for this church and are more basic than the oak choir furniture, which has different details. In Mr Copeman's opinion, the bench pews add a Victorian aspect to the character of the medieval church, but they reflect a liturgical trend, rather than its expression through architectural design. In summary, Mr Copeman thinks they are a relatively minor part of the overall significance of St Nicolas, and their intrinsic heritage significance is modest.
42. Mr Copeman goes on to say that the pews would be of greater aesthetic and architectural value if they were part of a complete new church, or even of a more comprehensive restoration. Butterfield's towering reputation depends primarily on his buildings, and his furniture is important principally in the buildings for which it was designed as part of a complete, cohesive whole. While this is not to denigrate the quality of the choir furniture at Great Bookham, the church is notable for the light touch of Butterfield's work. Mr Copeman remarks that the church was recognised as an ancient building in the 19th Century, and it is experienced as such today. Its spatial and architectural qualities remain essentially and authentically medieval, enriched by the exceptional collection of monuments. Little about the interior of the church feels Victorian, or suggests Butterfield's hand, apart from the slightly garish Minton floor tiles. Butterfield's repairs, although extensive, were sympathetic rather than transformative. They are admirable for this reason, but they display little of his distinctive architectural style. For these reasons, Great Bookham is

a relatively unimportant work in the context of Butterfield's considerable *oeuvre*.

43. Mr Copeman then draws a sharp distinction between the pine pews in the nave and the bench pew and pew front incorporating the carved panels which he considers are of special interest. The carved panels were considered ancient and noteworthy two centuries ago, when they were already some two hundred years old. Their reuse, first in box pews and then as benches, enriches our understanding and enjoyment of the church. The carved panels were sufficiently valued as *objets d'art* to be reused in both the 'low-church' post-reformation era, and again as ritual was reintroduced, by 'high-church' Victorians. They are everyday objects that embody and reveal the history of the church, and possibly - if their origins can be traced or other such panels can be found - the wider local community. They combine high-status decorative art with vernacular craft skills. Mr Copeman continues that their significance derives from their evolution over the centuries. It includes not only the carved panels, but also the plain 'box pew' panels and the Victorian conversion to seating: they tell a story that is greater than that of their individual parts.
44. As a result of these considerations, Mr Copeman concluded that the significance embodied in these pews would best be conserved if they remained substantially as they are. Separating the carved panels from the plain panels would result in a substantial loss to their heritage significance and it could also be difficult to dismantle the carved panels from the plain ones without damaging them. He proposes, subject to the advice of a suitably experienced joiner, the long bench, at least, could be altered to make a shorter one incorporating the 'unit' of carved and plain panels, re-using the 1885 bench ends. This would cause little harm to its historic interest. The pew front could be divided into two parts in a similar manner, or alternatively, adapted to some other use or preserved as flat panels, although its unique history might not then be quite so easily appreciated. In any case, the pews are worthy of preservation in a form that retains evidence of each phase of their long history in the church from which their heritage significance is inseparable.
45. James Hughes' response on behalf of the Victorian Society to Mr Copeman's report maintained his concerns about the impact of the wholesale removal of the historic benches (as he terms them) and the lack, in his view, of the detailed and compelling explanation that would be required to justify it.
46. Whilst welcoming Michael Copeman's report on the benches (notwithstanding its lacking enthusiasm for the congregational seating) Mr Hughes accepts there may be no direct evidence that Butterfield designed the benches but that, in his view, they certainly have a *Butterfieldian* flavour, and may well have been designed by him. Butterfield was very much concerned with details (a "*gesamtkunst* fanatic" as the great Butterfield expert, Nicholas Olsberg, describes him, referring to a "total work of art" and describing a design where different art forms are combined to create a single cohesive whole). Examples of this are found in Butterfield's designing a unique prayer book cover, a parish

chest and even a key to the vestry door for most of the churches on which he worked. Mr Hughes describes that Butterfield would gift them, if they could not be afforded. He notes the little country schools (such as that in Great Bookham which Philip Webb greatly admired) which get custom designs for desks, stools and boot scrapers. Mr Hughes considers that it seems most probable that Butterfield did design (or at least personally oversaw) the benches at Great Bookham, despite their relative modesty of detailing. The Victorian Society disagrees with Mr Copeman's report's conclusions on the value and effect of Butterfield's work at St Nicolas. The Society believes it was, in fact, quite extensive and actually transformative of the church interior, removing as it did the old Georgian pews. In a strange way the extent, as well as the quality, of Butterfield's work in part explains how seamlessly it is now experienced, even if it was not a comprehensive restoration that he carried out. Mr Hughes concludes that the restoration is 'quite legibly' Butterfield, and not just the benches, but the floor, the pulpit, the credence, the screen (now at the West end). He also believes the reredos of 1891 is of exceptional beauty, notwithstanding the fact that it appears to have been largely covered over, if not destroyed, at some point in the past. Mr Hughes notes that Butterfield had strong personal connections with William Henry Dawnay. They were great friends, and Dawnay was a client, who grew up and became proprietor of nearby Bookham Grove.

47. As a result of these consideration, the Victorian Society's view remains that the wholesale clearance of the benches would have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the interior, and would entail the loss of a major element of Butterfield's work at the church. The harm it would cause to the significance of this Grade I-listed building would be considerable.
48. From this starting-point, Mr Hughes focusses on the parish's case from need, accepting that additional information had been provided to clarify and further augment the original Statement of Needs.
49. This has taken the form of the petitioners submitting documents addressing the potential activities that the church might host if the pews are removed including setting out an option involving the removal of only some of the pews leaving some in the front of the nave in place.
50. A seven-page note has been produced explaining why the church needs a more flexible church building and how that flexibility would be used. This is complemented by a table listing the activities and estimating as far as we are able how frequently the events would occur and how many would attend them.
51. The Petitioners point out that St Nicolas does not have a church hall. Although it has the Church Room and the Pastoral Centre, these have a capacity of between 60 and 70 standing and 40 seated.

52. The services and events which would benefit from increased flexibility include:
- a. Morning Praise, initially once a month, but hopefully moving to weekly alongside the more traditional service.
 - b. Informal afternoon service for families and children.
 - c. Church fellowship events involving food eaten at tables in the church e.g. a celebration event; a 'bring and share' lunch; a fundraising event for a mission organisation.
 - d. 'Tots Alive' – activities and short service for pre-school children and their parents and carers.
 - e. 'Family Fun' – activities for children of all ages and their parents.
 - f. Schools services.
 - g. Concerts by local choirs and orchestras.
 - h. Miscellaneous community events such as lectures, public meetings, local government consultations, election hustings.
 - i. Displays by local societies in rear of nave – offering a 'shop window' in the centre of the village.
 - j. Day centre for older people.
53. The petitioners have also produced a document presenting illustrative seating layouts. Option A represents the conventional seating arrangement where the seats (including north and south aisles) are placed in straight lines in locations facing East which appear to replicate the Butterfield arrangement. Option B represents church-in-the-round with shallow arches of seats facing each other facing North and South with the central focus at a point in the centre of the nave. Option C represents concentric arches of seats facing east with a central aisle. Option D represents a broadly similar layout as in C but without a central aisle. Option E represents a central body of chairs in straight lines facing East but with angled seating in straight lines at the sides. Option F represents seating in straight lines, all facing North enabling the north aisle to be used as a large performance area (much larger than the space at the front of the nave) Option G represents a seating plan with tables and chairs arranged as if for a sit-down meal covering the entire nave.
54. The Victorian Society remains unconvinced. Given the high level of harm that the sweeping clearance of benches would cause, the Society argues that extremely specific and compelling justification would be required. The table indicates that there are three uses, or potential uses, all occurring – or possibly occurring – relatively infrequently (informal afternoon services, church fellowship events and day centre for older people) which would require an entirely uncluttered nave. It is not clear precisely, the Society argues, how the church would be expected to function or be laid out for such events, and it is

not clear whether these uses could be accommodated in other parts of the church or the hall. The Society has previously recommended the production of a liturgical plan, and warned of the danger of undertaking permanent and irreversible harmful changes predicated on occasional and/or experimental liturgies; it does so again. It is also not clear what a 'day centre for older people' would constitute, and the question-marks accompanying its reference in the table imply it is not necessarily even an entirely serious and concrete proposal. The illustrative seating layout document, says Mr Hughes, is itself not terribly helpful either: any number of possible seating layouts could be devised, but if they are not planned or intended, then they are rather meaningless.

55. For these reasons the Victorian Society advocates a solution that would see a central block of Butterfield's pews, some 5 pews in depth on either side of the existing aisle, remaining. It argues that the aisles are relatively wide and the usable space they afford, cleared, could be expanded further by shortening the central block of pews, bringing the ends of the benches in line with the outer edge of the arcades. Some clearance at the west end, and particularly at the front (for which the Society is content that specific justification *is* provided), would also be acceptable. Cumulatively this would free up a great deal of entirely flexible usable space, whilst preserving a central core of bench seating, and the contribution it makes to the character, appearance and legibility of the interior. It is for this reason that the Society wishes this option is included in a revised options appraisal. It argues that the removal of benches or pews towards the rear of the nave and the removal of chairs in either the south or north aisles (or both) is commonplace.
56. The Victorian Society states that it recognises that clarifying future uses and intentions for a reordered building is not always a simple task. It is partly for this reason that the Society often advocates a phased approach to church reorderings. In this instance, it considers that a phased approach would be especially appropriate, suggesting that partial clearance and shortening could unlock space that would satisfy the overwhelming majority of the parish's needs. If, in time, it becomes clearer that even more space and flexibility is really required, then at that point the parish would be in a much stronger position to articulate and to demonstrate a need for further clearance. The parish was urged to give due consideration to this option.
57. This option has been expressed in the following plan:



58.

Note that:

1. The existing pews would be relocated to provide 5 pews in strict alignment either side of the central aisle.
2. The pew front which contains the carved panels would be divided into two and used as pew fronts for the two blocks of pews either side of the central aisle.
3. The pews would be removed and then reinstalled on the refurbished floor. They would be bolted down in such a way that they could be moved should an event in the church require this, e.g., a concert involving a choir and orchestra that required additional space.

59. The problem raised by an inflexible Victorian seating arrangement is a very familiar one. It is at odds with so many of the established alterations that have been established during the course of the last century: the moving of the liturgical theatre from Sanctuary to nave; the greater use of churches as a social resource in the local community, often the largest building and one most capable of providing space for concerts; the desire to provide a space for social gathering over coffee at the end of the service; the movement away from a pipe organ as the sole source of musical accompaniment but with the corollary that larger space is required for musical instruments; the acknowledgement that children within a service need their own space. Added to this is the fact that the removal of pews and benches, when adopted, have been so startlingly successful, particularly in cathedrals and abbeys where the sense of space created by the lack of furniture opens up the architecture and enhances the spirituality of the space. As I have said elsewhere, there are drawbacks such as the need to store and manage many dozens of individual chairs in a way that does not counter the effect. Even, however, the effect of introducing contemporary, minimalist wooden and chrome metal chairs has proved to be remarkably successful, given their jarring juxtaposition against mediaeval architecture and their peculiar quality of looking neither domestic nor churchy.

60. All of these factors weigh heavily in favour of a petition to remove Victorian pews. There is, however, yet another, perhaps more compelling, reason why the removal of an inflexible Victorian arrangement of pews may be justified.

This concerns the need for many churches to engage more closely with the younger congregation, especially where the size of the existing congregation is dwindling and the remaining congregation is becoming increasingly elderly and, to that extent, forming something of a barrier to a younger generation. It is easy, therefore to see why the church of St Nicolas has employed a member of staff to engage with the new generation of churchgoers. If the 'Mission' of the church is hampered by the physical constraints of the building than the church ceases to be effective within the community and its very *raison d'être* is lost. That is an unacceptably high price to pay for the undoubted benefits of preserving an historic structure and interior. It is all the more difficult to justify when our great Victorian architects who have so graced the interiors and exteriors of so many landmark churches in so many communities were themselves ruthless destroyers of old-fashioned Georgian interiors in pursuit of what they undoubtedly saw as their 19th Century Mission that was to see more and more of the burgeoning, unchurched population enjoying the consolation of a revived religion which was directed towards every strata of society and every age group.

61. If the driving force for change is a belief that getting rid of serried ranks of Victorian pews will solve the problem of a dwindling congregation then this, too, may be illusory. The removal of a Victorian interior may then become a scapegoat rather than an opening-up of the future.
62. I was attracted to the suggestion that a step-by-step approach has many advantages, as the Victorian Society point out. However, I am also aware that there are potential shortcomings. First, it would prevent many of the layout options set out in paragraph 53 above to be tried out. I accept that their utility cannot be fully established until they are put into practice so they will inevitably be speculative. Secondly, whilst the removal of the bolts securing the Butterfield pews may be possible on rare occasions when, for example, an orchestral concert is to take place, it is unlikely to be feasible for a routine weekly service in the round. Thirdly, I am conscious of the potential aesthetic appearance of a church with 5 rows of dark Victorian pews on either side of the front section of the nave surrounded by a sea of light modern chairs to the side and to the rear of them. I am uncertain whether this will preserve the Butterfield *gesamtkunstwerk*, his concept of a comprehensive and exclusive decorative scheme involving every item within the church. Arguably, it is a case of all or nothing. Fourthly, a step-by-step approach is not without cost. The benches with their historic carved panels will have to be reconfigured if, after the period of experimentation, these benches are relocated near the tower. Further, I am not sure whether the proposed position of a radiator and the kneeler display unit will require alteration if the 10 remaining benches are eventually removed.
63. I was conscious of the fact that the DAC has never been involved with the significant changes which the petitioners had proposed since my Memorandum. I, therefore, invited the DAC's help on all of the revised

proposals and, in particular, what is now the principal remaining issue, namely, whether there should be partial removal (perhaps as a first step) or whether there should be the wholesale removal of the nave pews (barring the 'historic' panelled ones) without trying the option of partial removal. Having viewed the church, the DAC might have been able to form a better view than me about what the interior would look like with a block of 10 pews (5 on either side of the aisle) at the front of the nave. I was concerned about whether the effect would be jarring to have such a small remnant of the Victorian pews located in the most prominent position in the nave, surrounded by a host of contemporary seating as the plan in paragraph 57, above, might suggest. Would this properly evoke Butterfield's Victorian conception or look simply incongruous? A step-by-step approach has the distinct advantage of permitting the petitioners, the PCC, the congregation, the DAC, the Amenity Societies and me to see what it would actually look like 'in the flesh' (as it were) without the inevitable speculation of what it might have been. However, if the outcome were, in its judgment, to be obvious, the DAC might recommend biting the bullet and suggesting all the pews are removed now, perhaps, saving the additional costs of a phased reordering.

64. Following my invitation, the DAC have now discussed the proposed changes to the plans at Great Bookham, and in particular the pews in the nave. Their considered view is that leaving 5 rows of pews either side of the nave would not be in any way appropriate, sensible or aesthetically pleasing, as well as going against the desires of the church for a more flexible space. They, therefore, recommend that all the pews in the nave be disposed of, as they had originally advised. (They were content with the rest of the changes).
65. I appreciate the wish of the Victorian Society to maintain the integrity of the Butterfield interior as a whole but also their recognition that this would hamper the PCC's wish for growth that renders it impossible. Hence, their compromise solution that there should only be a partial removal. However, I have concluded that this solution serves neither the goal of maintaining the integrity of the Butterfield interior, nor of satisfying the parish's needs for a flexible space. True, it affords *some* greater flexibility in *some* parts of the nave; true, it affords a glimpse of what the church *would* have looked like if the visitor *imagined* the nave filled with serried ranks of pine pews. But, in seeking to serve two masters, present needs and past aesthetics, there is the risk that it properly serves neither. I am satisfied that the parish's genuine wish is to be able to offer a resource to the community that it cannot presently offer. Whilst the exact scale of the benefit cannot currently be quantified, that is the nature of the experiment. Projections can be both expanded to one extreme and, at the same time, minimised to become marginal, depending entirely upon the point of view of the projectionist. However, in order to realise the parish's aspirations to engage the community more fully, I have concluded that they should have the best opportunity to do so. That leads me to the ultimate conclusion that the removal of all the pews is justified. Hence, I will grant the petition to do so.

66. Finally, I am satisfied that the objections raised by Mr Gordon and Mr Whitman should not prevent the granting of this petition. St Nicolas will not become a community hall by reason merely of the presence of chairs, any more than Westminster Abbey or St Paul's Cathedral has become a community hall by reason of the presence of chairs. If, however, there are occasions when the interior of the church is given over to a social or fund-raising supper, it is none the worse for that. I do not accept that there is intrinsically greater comfort in a pine pew than a modern chair. I recognise that the kneelers are now an established part of the life of St Nicolas, having been made as a millennium project, but their preservation and continued use have been ensured in the form of purpose-built units to display and house them. It is also axiomatic that ramps can and will be designed to avoid trip hazard, thereby undoubtedly promoting the benefits of accessibility.
67. The Victorian Society believes the reredos of 1891 is of exceptional beauty, notwithstanding the fact that it appears to have been largely covered over, if not destroyed. There may well be a significant heritage gain if this can be uncovered and restored. Although this is not part of the current petition, I ask the petitioners to give full and proper consideration to the Victorian Society's comments and to formulate a strategy to address them.
68. The Bishop of Guildford authorised my continuance in office as Chancellor until 30 November 2021 at which point, as my Memorandum of 22 September 2021 makes clear, I was seised of this petition. Pursuant to section 3(9) of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018 the period of continuance has and will continue until the conclusion of these proceedings.

ANDREW JORDAN
CHANCELLOR
(pursuant to s.3(9) of the 2018 Measure)