

Saltford Manor Saltford Somerset

An unexceptional terraced house of 1900 will carry the evidence of much use and change: four or five generations of occupation, two world wars, and quite probably innovations such as the introduction of electricity, central heating and communications technology. Think, then, how much change England's oldest house must have experienced.

In 2005, following a *Country Life* competition, the oldest house in continuous domestic use was agreed to be the Manor at Saltford, between Bath and Bristol. This house is believed to date from a few years before 1150. At that point, the country was still adjusting to the effects of the Norman invasion and its innovations such as a French-speaking nobility. England was at civil war as conflict for the throne raged between Stephen and Matilda; the second crusade was just beginning; and now-venerable monastic houses such as Dore Abbey had just been founded. At a domestic level, life was based on an agricultural economy, with feudal service and the potential for famine. Domestic life was far more communal than our own.

Saltford Manor, built in stone and with fashionable Norman detailing, must have been imposing and impressive when new. It is a remarkable survival, and this rarity and weight of history has rightly made it a grade I listed building in the 21st century. It might be argued to deserve treatment as careful as that offered to other national treasures such as Sutton Hoo or Silbury Hill. Nevertheless, it is of historical interest for its continuity of use, and it would be wrong to stifle this by preventing all further alteration or addition. Sympathetic change will add new interest and chapters to the building's extraordinary story.

The Society was not therefore opposed in principle when the idea of constructing an extension was put to us through a listed building application. But we were far from convinced that the scheme was backed by sufficient work to understand the impact on the house or that its



design responded to the historic parts. We have advised the council not to approve the present scheme, but hope there will be opportunity to have constructive input into the development of fresh proposals.

Matthew Slocombe

Christ's College Cambridge Library Court project

The SPAB was recently consulted by Rick Mather Architects, following the firm's appointment to design the new library at Christ's College, Cambridge. The SPAB was asked to consider the current proposals to

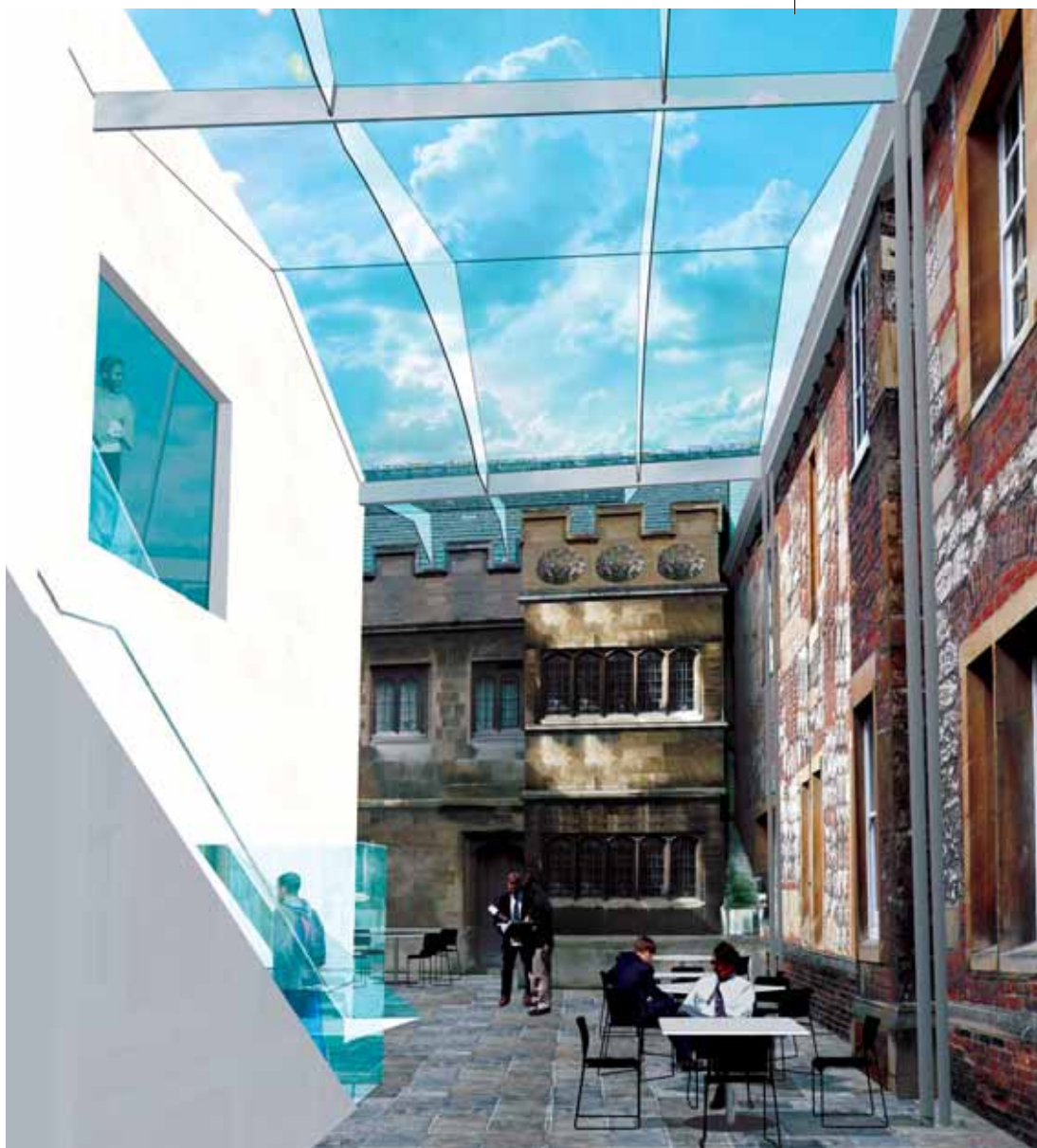
Saltford Manor, identified as England's oldest domestic building in continuous use, is likely to date from the mid 12th century. SPAB has objected to extension proposals

replace the existing 1970s library with a building that meets contemporary requirements, a fitting project for the architectural firm which has received public acclaim for its extension to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. While the project is still at a preliminary stage, the proposals demonstrate the detailed and careful consideration of the architects prior to the formal application.

The current library occupies a small plot in the southern corner of the college site between the First Court Buildings (16th-19th century,

Extend England's oldest continuously inhabited house? Not like this; Elmswell Hall saga now heading in the direction of the Secretary of State; ringing the changes at Wookey church – but do keep using the fine ancient bell frame; an ancient chimney partially removed, for the good of the rest of the building; more Croydon heritage comes to light; Welsh community triumph

Casework



RICK MATHER ARCHITECTS

The Library Court at Christ's College, Cambridge, as it might appear should the scheme for expansion of facilities drawn up by Rick Mather Architects be approved

grade I listed) and the later kitchen extensions. The current library was built in the 1970s, and its design created small, cramped areas within that allow study space for just 60 students and provide poor staff facilities. Its proposed demolition will create a rare opportunity to build within the site of one of Cambridge's oldest colleges. The architects view this as a challenge to create an exciting and inspiring design.

The proposed new library makes maximum use of the limited area available, increasing the space within the building from 405m² to 1,200m². The results will create "more than a library". The entrance approach from First Court will be improved. Reading spaces will be increased to 117 readers. The improvements will see the inclusion of digital study spaces, all contained within a mixture of open and closed shelving. Staff facilities will be enhanced and a rare books reading room with associated storage will be incorporated. Most notably, a new connection will be made through to the first floor of the adjacent Old Library, designed by Bodley in 1895, so the two buildings can be used in conjunction. The new library will also provide meeting rooms, an exhibition space and café.

The café will be housed in the new Library Court, currently an inactive space containing fire escapes which will receive a new level floor and a glass canopy above to become a covered communal space linking the library and the buttery. The new library will sit adjacent to the

oldest wall of the college, the historic wall of the First Court range.

The Feasibility Study, prepared by the architects, sets out the intention for the new building to have as little physical impact as possible on the college's historic buildings. The glazed canopy covering First Court is supported from the new library. The detailing has not yet been finalised for how it will meet the historic wall of First Court, but a novel and sensitive connection between the new and the old can be expected from the designers.

The new library seeks to reduce its environmental footprint and will incorporate a ground source heat pump for heating and cooling. The high thermal mass of the structure will allow it to absorb, store and later radiate heat, stabilising the internal temperature.

A major consideration when designing the new library was the possible interruption of sightlines from First Court. Another concern was that the new façade fronting on to Christ's Lane was not seen to be overpowering. The possibility of incorporating shops at ground level to enliven Christ's Lane and provide potential income for the college was considered, but because shops would need a large floor-to-ceiling height this meant that the library building would compromise views from First Court, and would dwarf Christ's Lane as feared. The current proposal for the new library does not include shops, and with the introduction of a

sunken basement achieves a scale that does not interrupt sightlines but still provides a level of interaction with Christ's Lane through its street fenestration. The façade design takes cues from the Bodley Library, but the architectural language is contemporary. Glazed bay windows set at irregular intervals add life to a simple and sensitive façade. The placement of the windows on the other façades deliberately create framed views of the existing buildings within the covered court reinforcing the connection of the new building to the Bodley Library and the college as a whole.

The SPAB has been broadly supportive of the proposals and does not object to the removal and replacement of the 1970s building. It considers the decision to take a contemporary design approach for the new building to be laudable. The Society has requested further information about the design of the glazed canopy that will cover the courtyard area – in particular how it will form a junction with the historic First Court buildings – but supports the proposal in principle, feeling that it will make good use of the space and create a sensible covered link to the buttery. Finally, noting that the sunken basement of the new library building will reach a depth well below that of the existing library the SPAB encouraged that an archaeological survey of the area be carried out when work begins.

Elaine Byrne

Barn
Wick Hill Farm
Hartley Mauditt
Hampshire

Dr Caroline Rye is a key figure in the Society's energy efficiency research team, and specialises in the assessment of the U-value (insulation potential) of traditional walling; but she recently gave time to help with a case in her local area.

Consent had been granted some time ago to convert a listed barn at Hartley Mauditt, near Selborne. Though domestic re-use of historic barns is not generally encouraged by the Society, the council had at least ensured that the conversion details were carefully considered in order to help protect and respect the building's agricultural character. Unfortunately, the work carried out deviated considerably from that approved, to the extent that the barn's character was far more severely affected than the consent had anticipated. The council took enforcement action and the owner appealed. Following advice from Caroline, the Society expressed its firm support for the council's action and submitted this to the Planning Inspectorate as part of the appeal process.

MS

Queen Anne House
Epsom
Surrey

The Society recently opposed extension plans for this grade II*, early 18th-century house. They involved demolition of a wing which appeared to be of greater age and interest than the applicants had recognised. The proposals also seemed insensitive to the site, which is screened by a high brick wall, but was to be opened-up with a new entrance and driveway for vehicles. We are pleased that the initial application was refused consent by the local authority and hope to be involved in discussions about a revised scheme.

MS

Chapter Farm
Braunston
Rutland

The Society recently asked architect-member Peter Rogan to visit Chapter Farm. The impressive grade II* listed building was to be repaired for re-use. We welcomed carefully-considered repair proposals by the owner and his experienced team. However, as is often the case with repairs to old buildings, a difficulty was that the extent and detail of works could not be confirmed in the absence of further investigation and "opening-up". We suggested that conditions should be attached to any consent, requiring further approval when the full extent and nature of repair problems could be clarified. If it proved necessary to reconsider the conservative approach to repairs initially planned, we advised that a further application should be submitted.



Top and above right, Grange Farm at Towersey, decayed but now the subject of repair proposals. Above, Chapter Farm, Braunston – further investigation might be necessary

We requested involvement in further discussions if this situation arose.

MS

Grange Farm
Towersey
Oxfordshire

The Society welcomes early involvement in discussions, particularly so where a building is of particular interest to us. Grange Farm, being medieval in origin and quite severely decayed, is certainly that. Some time ago we received, from the local council, notification of an application to carry out investigative work as preparation for a repair and re-use scheme. This exploratory proposal was sensible and uncontentious. It gave us opportunity to contact the architect and request involvement in future discussions.

The Society is pleased that this request was treated positively, and SPAB trustee Andrew Townsend recently visited the site for an initial inspection in advance of the preparation of a full application.

MS



Elmswell Hall
Drifffield
East Yorkshire

Elmswell Hall has featured in many editions of *Cornerstone*. The Society's aim, and that of others, including the Yorkshire Buildings Preservation Trust and Spitalfields Trust, has been to secure repair and re-use of the 17th-century, grade II* listed building. The case has had many bizarre twists and turns, including a damaging, inexplicable magistrate's court decision which prevented the council from completing a compulsory purchase.

In the latest twist, two applications were considered by East Yorkshire Council simultaneously. One, from the Spitalfields Trust, proposed repair for re-use; the other, from the current owner, proposed permanent consolidation of the house in a ruinous state. The council's planning committee hedged its bets and approved both, despite the conflict between the two approaches. The Society felt this outcome demanded scrutiny at a higher level. We, with English Heritage, have asked the government's Regional Office to call-in the owner's application for the Secretary of State's consideration.

MS

Casework



Left, Elmswell Hall, Drifffield. The latest chapter in the long story of efforts to save this fine, grade II* 17th-century building has opened with the SPAB and English Heritage seeking a call-in of two applications by the owner for works to the building, for scrutiny by the Secretary of State.

Below, left, Addington House – yet another Croydon gem. The Society is working with the local authority to secure the reinstatement of ancient timbers



Addington House Croydon London

The spring edition of *Cornerstone* emphasised how Croydon, despite having a reputation as a heritage desert, in fact has many hidden historic gems. Little noticed until recently, for example, was Addington House. The building, which was at one point on the Borough's "at risk" register, is listed as having an early 19th-century main block and a 17th-century rear range. In fact the rear range is a hall house of the mid-late 15th century, with date now established through dendrochronology. It is possibly Croydon's earliest surviving domestic building. A new owner acquired the house, but embarked upon works without necessary consents. In the process much ancient timberwork was removed. Fortunately, the work was discovered and halted while the timberwork was still on site.

The Society is now working with Croydon Council and expert historic building consultants acting for the owner with the aim of identifying the former location of historic timbers and securing their reinstatement.

MS

Manor Farm Wood End Ravensden Bedfordshire

Manor Farm is a grade II listed, timber-framed farmhouse which was built in the 17th century. A large, unstable chimney stack caused the building to experience severe and progressive structural difficulties, and became the focus of an interesting case for the SPAB in the first months of this year. The internal chimney stack had an uneven foundation which caused it to lean. This lean probably began almost at its date of construction when it began pushing over the south wing of the building.

Listed Building Consent was granted in 2010 for investigative works to establish how the chimney and building could be stabilised. Upon commencement it was recognised by the structural engineer that the situation was substantially worse than feared. The engineer put an immediate stop to the opening up works as the stack appeared to be in imminent danger of collapse.

The engineer drew up emergency works proposals which included the demolition of the

Continued on page 18



Continued from page 15

stack to first floor level and the introduction of additional shoring to the lower half of the stack. It was intended that the upper sections of the stack would be taken down by hand in order to protect and preserve historic fabric and to allow for recording of that section of the building to take place.

Due to the level of demolition proposed, Bedford Borough Council contacted the SPAB to seek its opinion. Former SPAB Scholar and structural engineer David Evans visited the site on behalf of the Society. He concluded that, unfortunately, the chimney stack did need to be taken down. He said that, while it was not possible to say exactly when the stack would fall, its collapse was inevitable and that this could cause “catastrophic circumstances” for the rest of the building.

Due to the health and safety risks resulting from the seriousness of the situation, the owner of Manor Farm was unable to obtain insurance to cover necessary demolition and repair works.

In the month following the SPAB visit it became clear that the stack was still moving and threatening the remainder of the building.

The owner, with the best interest of the building at heart, made great efforts to ensure that the necessary demolition and propping of the stack could take place in order to stabilise the rest of the building. However, scaffolding

companies and building contractors were unwilling to work on the building because of the danger of collapse. Having exhausted all other avenues a demolition contractor agreed to conduct the works and take down the agreed section of the stack using a demolition grab. This measure was deemed necessary to bring the situation within the safe limits specified by the structural engineer to allow the remainder of the stack to be propped and allow repairs to the building to take place.

Bedford Borough Council had strong concerns about the proposed method of demolition and the possible damage that might occur to other parts of the building.

A further complication was that the building was situated in a remote and vulnerable location and was suffering from repeated burglaries. Following discussions with the demolition contractor, and accepting that all other possible routes had been exhausted, it was agreed that the demolition of the upper part of the stack using a remote mechanical grab was in the best interest of the building and any person who might enter it.

The essential demolition took place as proposed under the supervision of Bedford Borough Council. Regrettably, much of the south wing fell with the chimney stack. This had been anticipated as a possible risk and was not altogether surprising. Before demolition the

Manor Farm, Ravensden. A portion of the old chimneystack has been removed to prevent damage and injury should the unstable stack have collapsed. Above left, a plumbline shows the extent of lean in the centre of the wing, before demolition

council requested that as much recording as possible of the south wing take place, although, because of the health and safety risks on site, this was not done by a professional. Timbers in the south wing were also marked *in situ* to record their original positions within the frame.

The possible reconstruction of the south wing of Manor Farm raises a number of philosophical questions, and the SPAB will remain involved in discussions about the future of the building. The outcome has not been altogether satisfactory, with the loss of a significant part of the building, but it is accepted that the demolition works have helped secure a future for the building, preventing the total collapse of Manor Farm.

Elaine Byrne

St Mary's Church Mallerstang Cumbria

St Mary's is a rural church in the east of Cumbria, near the border with North Yorkshire, serving a small but growing congregation. It is a grade II, stone-built chapel dating from 14th century, and largely rebuilt by Lady Anne Clifford in 1663. Its small, single-cell layout has led to the development of plans to extend the church to provide toilet and kitchen facilities and a meeting room.

The community has formed a working party and developed a thorough and considered Building Development Plan, which demonstrates the need for additional facilities and highlights the consultations that have



Left, St Mary's, Mallerstang. The SPAB is concerned that proposals for an extension to this ancient building would nearly double its size, and spoil its traditional setting.

Below, Ripon Cathedral's West Front. How wise are plans to bring its ancient doors back into heavy use?

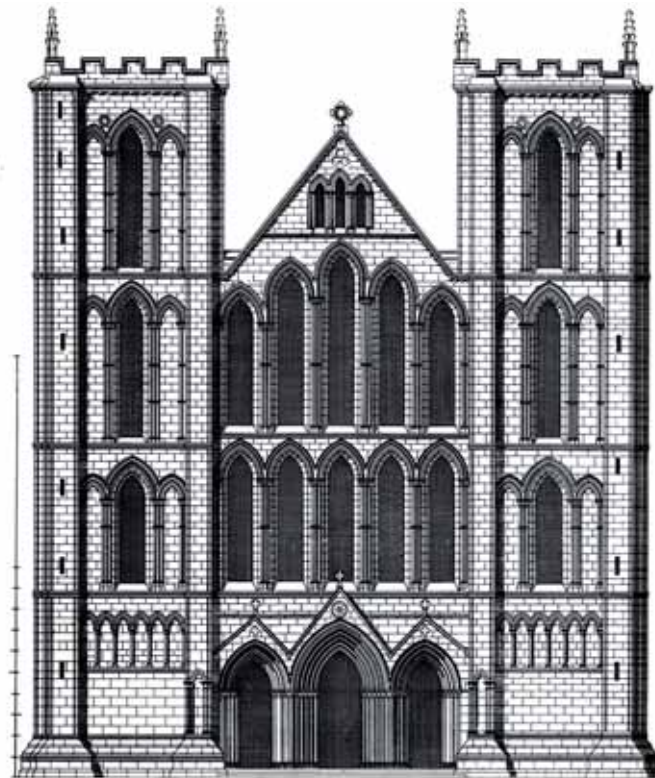
already taken place with the Diocesan Advisory Committee, Eden District Council and English Heritage. We expressed regret that the Society was not also consulted by the church at an earlier stage as we felt that our comments would have beneficially contributed to the development of the proposed scheme.

The church sits within its own graveyard and has an important relationship with the open rural landscape. Therefore, it will be important that the extension does not compete with the existing church building. The proposed new building is to extend perpendicular from the north side of the church, with a rectangular plan similar in size to the existing church and a duo pitch slate roof with stonewalls to match the existing church.

The Development Plan points towards St Patrick's church in Patterdale as a similar type of church extension. Whilst we agreed that St Patrick's appeared to have been successfully extended we noted that the extension is well shielded by trees and vegetation, tucked discreetly to the rear of the church and is smaller in scale to the church. In contrast, the proposed extension to St Mary's church will be exposed in its open rural location and is of a similar size and scale to the existing church. Therefore we felt that comparing with St Patrick's extension was not appropriate in this instance.

We have questioned whether a number of options have been considered in developing the current design, including providing an extension alongside the existing church rather than at right angles or providing a stand-alone building within the graveyard.

We were concerned that the right-angle extension might look too suburban and that a



parallel extension might look less obtrusive in its open rural setting. We have also suggested that a scaled-down extension could achieve the space needed.

Naomi Hatton

Ripon Cathedral

In accordance with the Cathedrals Fabric Commission's request that the SPAB should be notified of detailed repair work to the 17th-century timber West Front doors at Ripon Cathedral, we received this information from

the Cathedral Architect. The Society's Guardians Committee subsequently reviewed it.

There are three West Doors – one central larger door, with a smaller, centrally-set wicket door and a smaller door to the north and south. All the doors are made of oak, with two leaves hung on hinges and pintles set into the stonework. The doors are constructed of vertical timber boards joined by tongue and groove with a frame and diagonal lattice arrangement of timber battens. Metal studs adorn the outside of each door, in a decorative fashion.

The doors are generally in good condition, with minimal decay to timbers at their base. The architect proposed splicing in new timber to the areas of decay, and we have asked that well-seasoned, air-dried oak of similar moisture content to the existing timbers be used. We expressed concern at the proposal to lightly clean the doors and finish with new penetrating oil, and have stated our preference for the existing historic patina of the doors to be retained. We felt that the proposal to re-instate missing diagonal lattice members was not perhaps necessary, as a timber report had suggested that these were not providing structural support to the vertical boards.

The purpose of inserting the internal glazed lobbies was to allow the timber doors to be opened regularly to allow more light to flood the cathedral and to provide a more welcoming entrance for visitors. We have expressed concern over the intention to open and close the doors daily. It is unlikely that they were ever intended to be used in this way, with the presence of a wicket door supporting this view. We have therefore suggested that the doors are regularly monitored for signs of distress and that appropriate action taken if the historic fabric is found to be suffering.

NH

St Matthew's Church Wookey Somerset

The Society has been exercised about yet another application which would result in the loss for its original purpose of an important 17th-century bell frame.

The case also raises important questions about the extent of a Chancellor's authority to vary an existing Faculty.

Dr John Eisel, bell historian and expert, has described the bell frame at St Matthew's, Wookey, thus: "*The detail is enough to indicate that the frame of four parallel pits, with one transverse, is of the seventeenth century.*

An interesting, and unusual, feature is the ledge in the bearers which support the ends of the sills of the five parallel trusses. Each of these trusses have endposts, a feature which would be rather unlikely in the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century endposts do occur, but not in such a regular and organised way. Moreover, the jointing in the lower sills is a give-away of an earlier date.

"My view is that the frame is of the seventeenth century, and I would have thought of somewhere about the middle of the century, perhaps 1660."

The frame contains six bells, three of which are on the Church Building Council's list of historically interesting bells, the oldest being c1480 by a Bristol foundry.

A Faculty was granted for refurbishing the bells with mostly new fittings in the existing frame in August 2010, according to details



JOHN LAWRENCE



St Matthew's, Wookey, with its ancient wooden bell frame (above), in situ. The SPAB is greatly concerned by proposals to either remove much of the frame, or to relocate the bells to a new frame. The Society is keen that the frame, which is in a very good state of repair, should continue in use for the purpose for which it was constructed some 350 years ago



JOHN LAWRENCE

supplied by a bell hanger with a schedule of work specified by the church's architect. In granting their certificate for the works the DAC had recommended that consideration be given to removing the canons on all the bells and that the bells were retuned. A subsequent variation to the Faculty, granted by the Chancellor, permitted the bells to be moved via one of the belfry windows. In passing, it seems strange that the practicalities of removing the bells were not sufficiently considered at the time that the original Faculty application was made.

We note that it is not accepted good practice to retune medieval bells.

Once the bells had been removed the bell hanger advised that the frame was unrepairable, following which an architect member visited on behalf of the DAC. His advice was straightforward, that the frame was generally

Casework



SIMON BARBER



SIMON BARBER

Above and left, St Peter's, Oundle, which dates in main from the 13th to the 15th centuries. The parish wishes to extend access to the church through the very fine, late 15th-century south porch (left), work which would involve a considerable amount of physical intervention into what is a largely untouched part of the building. The SPAB urges the use of another, less sensitive entrance to the church to improve access

in excellent condition, but needed some comparatively minor repair. Meanwhile, to complicate matters the parish accepted the offer of three more bells from the Keltek Trust (a Trust which finds homes for bells from closed churches). The Tower Captain has reported that there is little movement when the bells are rung.

Following an inspection and advice from a structural engineer who was deemed "acceptable" to the parish and the bell hanger, the parish is considering one of two proposals. The first would result in the destruction of much of the 1660s frame, and the second the preservation of the frame without its ring of bells, the installation of a new floor below the existing belfry floor and the installation of a new steel frame.

Structural engineer Clive Haywood has visited on behalf of the Society. His advice is unequivocal: "*The frame is fantastic and the*

ends of the foundation beams need a micro drill survey and maybe a minor repair as does one corner. Really minor stuff compared with the overall condition."

What is being contemplated is destruction of a piece of craftsmanship which has survived unscathed for 350 years, when all that is needed is modest repair. We will fight to see this bell frame repaired and its bells rehung according to the original Faculty.

In our view it would be entirely inappropriate for the Chancellor to consider making a variation to permit an application for either option being considered by the parish on the basis that either variation is a fundamental reversal of the Faculty already granted. In the event that the parish decides not to continue to use the bell frame we trust that the Chancellor will require the parish to submit a new Faculty Petition with full supporting information,

including Statements of Need and Significance. A Consistory Court would follow from our opposition to the proposals which would allow all matters to be aired publicly.

At the heart of the Faculty Jurisdiction is a democratic process. It would set a fearful precedent for the Chancellor to set this aside and to decide that he has the authority to issue a variation on such a fundamental reversal. There exists no comparable power in the secular system.

Catherine Cullis

St Peter's Church Oundle Northamptonshire

Former SPAB Scholar Maya Polenz represented the Society at a visit with members of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), parish and their professional advisor to consider a broad range of proposals for the interior of St Peter's, Oundle, including providing equal access. The church is built on a noble scale. Much of what survives dates from the 13th to the 15th centuries, and its spire is the tallest in Northamptonshire. This thriving church is host to the Oundle Music Festival and is engaged in youth work as well as being extensively used by the local and wider community.

While the Society is sympathetic to the parish's wish to provide a new gate to the west doorway to stop the misuse of the tower entrance, we considered that the proportions of the proposed design were unresponsive to the architecture of the very fine archway.



SIMON BARBER



SIMON BARBER

St Peter's, Oundle. The south porch (left, and interior, above), is facing highly damaging proposals to enhance access. This, and other planned works, would, the SPAB believes, harm the historic interest of the grade I building

The proposed method of fixing was, in our view, both visually unacceptable and might introduce unsuitable force into the slender stonework of the arch.

However, the aspect of the proposals which most concerned the Society was that designed to provide equal access through the south porch. The principle of everyone using the same, usually the main entrance, is one we support. However, on occasions, this may not be achievable because of the level of impact and scale of damage that would be done to the historic building and alternatives have to be adopted. We believe that this is one of those occasions.

The south porch is very handsome Perpendicular work, built c1485 by Robert Wyatt and his wife, Joan. The proposals would require a new screen to be built in the centre of the porch and would cut in half its elaborately decorated interior, including the central roof boss and the stone benches, in order to accommodate sliding doors. Due to the difference of level inside the church, the porch floor would need to be relaid lower. This would require the ledger stone set into the porch floor to be disturbed. The DAC Archaeological Advisor considers that this stone may be in its

original location with, possibly, a tomb below. On purely practical grounds we do not consider that the proposal represents a feasible solution. Leaving, as is planned, both the porch doors and new glazed doors permanently open during the day would mean that there was no physical barrier between the outside and inside – a recipe for cold and draughts in the winter and a waste of heating and energy.

Yet there is a simple alternative to this very damaging proposal – the use of the door in the north aisle, where external levels are only about a step above church floor level and where there is already a temporary ramp. We urge the parish to improve and make permanent the temporary arrangement which is close to a well-used public footpath and church car parking. We also encourage the parish to adopt a more holistic approach for disabled access and facilities since the existing lavatories are not accessible for those using wheelchairs.

Previous generations have undertaken repairs to the stone steps of the tower spiral staircase in oak, one of which is dated 1674 – repairs which are, in our view, of very good craftsmanship, simple and effective. We therefore advised that the timber steps should be repaired on a like-for-like basis.

The parish wishes to install underfloor central heating in the Lady Chapel, and to enclose the Chapel by providing a new partition or screen to the west arch, giving on to the chancel. We advised that it should be possible to heat the enclosed space using the existing large, cast iron radiators connected to a new separate heating circuit – thereby avoiding the wholesale disruption of the floor which includes a number of ledger stones and the surviving archaeology beneath it. We urged the parish to consider a design for the proposed new screen which responds to the architecture of this grade I building while retaining the visual connection to the chancel through the medieval screen.

Taken together, the proposals considered at the site meeting with the DAC are, in our view, likely to be highly damaging to the interior of this church, and, principally, to the south porch. We have no doubt that the parish can achieve what it believes is necessary for its continuing ministry and the broad range of activities held in the church by adopting different (and, probably, cheaper) alternatives and by designing in response to the architecture of the building.

CC

Church of St Ciwg Llangiwg South Wales

Travelling along some of the industrial valleys of South Wales can be an overwhelmingly urban experience, but, often, a sharp turn left or right will soon bring you into a landscape of deep lanes, grazing fields, woods and forests and then high pasture and open moorland. It is at these



St Ciwg, Llangiwg. A medieval church altered in the Georgian period, it is deconsecrated and redundant – a rare ancient survival in a modern, industrial landscape. It has been bought by parishioner and passed on to a community group. Intended reuse of the church includes concerts and other events. The SPAB is pleased that repairs are in the hands of a member of the Society, and that a sensitive new use for the ancient building now seems achievable. Left, the tower's remarkable lean

ALL IMAGES: JOHN LAWRENCE

higher levels than many of the area's medieval churches are to be found. From them the views are of scattered, traditional farmsteads – a landscape centuries away from the conurbation below.

Such is the case of Llangiwg church, alone on a hillside, the population now centred round the mainly 19th-century town of Pontardawe in the valley. It is a medieval church, “considerably altered in 1812”, as a plaque records, on an earlier site. Its congregation diminished and it was declared redundant and deconsecrated in the early years of this century. Put up for sale, it was bought, in a brave leap of faith, by a loyal parishioner and has now been transferred to the Llangiwg Community Association, with The Friends of Llangiwg promoting an ambitious programme of community and cultural activities.

As this is a deconsecrated church, though the

lovely graveyard and surrounding traditional stone wall are retained by the Church in Wales, the consultation for listed building consent came from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. A joint visit with the Georgian Group, as the medieval church was remodelled in the early 19th century, elucidated the special circumstances of this secular church. It was encouraging to find that the programme of repairs and alterations was being directed by an SPAB member, in sympathy with SPAB values and open to suggestions and discussion.

The main intervention is the erection of a balustraded mezzanine or gallery, not inappropriate in a part-Georgian interior, to provide extra seating for concerts and events. The modest box pews and incomplete dado panelling are to be retained, though a section partly reconfigured. Monuments including an unusual early-Christian stone are to be



JOHN LAWRENCE

Plas Penydeuglawdd
Rhyl
Denbighshire

Plas Penydeuglawdd was built as a farmhouse, and is noted in the list description as being one of the few buildings that pre-date the expansion of Rhyl as a resort. The house is now surrounded by suburban development, and it is hard to imagine a time when it stood in open countryside.

The house is a multi-period building, with the original farmhouse possibly dating from the 17th century, slightly earlier than indicated in the list description. This building forms the rear range, and in the early 19th century the building was extended to the front.

In 2007 the SPAB commented on a scheme that included the development of two substantial houses within the grounds, as well as alterations to the farmhouse. The Society successfully argued that the new houses, together with the associated landscaping and car parking, would detract from the setting of the farmhouse. The proposals for the conversion of the farmhouse were also felt to be unsympathetic, with surviving historic fabric swept aside with little thought to its interest.

A new scheme is now being considered for the building. Fortunately, this is an improvement on the previous proposal. There would still be some development within the grounds, but the new dwellings would be single-storey and designed to reflect the former agricultural use of the site. For the existing building, the current scheme advocates a more sympathetic approach than was previously proposed, but the Society has voiced concerns about the plan to further divide the building to create a third dwelling.

Historically, the early 19th-century range was divided into a small cottage on the left hand side with the rest combining with the rear range to form a larger second dwelling. This arrangement survived throughout the 20th century. The third dwelling would be created by spitting the larger dwelling into two. This is felt to have a negative impact on the internal layout and historic fabric, as well as compromising the setting of the building by the division of the external space into small, separate gardens.

The condition of the farmhouse is poor and continuing to deteriorate. It is hoped that a suitable solution can be reached that ensures a sustainable future for the building without compromising its interest and character.

Janet Poole



conserved. The tower visibly tilts to the west, and any further movement is being monitored. Some stabilisation of the tower is proposed, but the extent of the support needed awaits specialist engineering advice; the tower, incidentally, will accommodate facilities for astronomy. The exterior masonry will have its cement pointing replaced and be protected with limewash.

SPAB very much welcomes in principle this

scheme which retains the church in public use and to public benefit. We will be making some suggestions of detail and look forward to the production of some more detailed plans on which we will be pleased to comment further, and we certainly pay tribute to the commitment of the local population and encourage them in their search for major funding.

Judith Leigh

Casework



‘WE ARE ONLY TRUSTEES FOR THOSE THAT COME AFTER US’

William Morris

A legacy to the SPAB is one of the most effective ways you can help us continue our work for future generations. For more information and a legacies leaflet, please contact the Society – or visit our website, www.spab.org.uk

