

Re St John, Broadbridge Heath

Judgment

1. This is an application by the parish of St John's, Broadbridge Heath for the removal of a crucifix from the external wall of the church and its re-location to Horsham Museum. The application also extends to the replacement of this crucifix with a plain cross. The church is unlisted and was built in 1963 to a design modeled on a nomadic tent. The northern aspect of the church comprises a large white triangular surface with rectangular panes of glass set in white panes. They are on four levels and the amount of glass in proportion to the frame increases as the triangle reaches its apex. It is a striking building which may not be to everyone's taste – a feature common to civic architecture of the 1960s.
2. Following public notice there were two letters of objection; one from Dr and Mrs NH Rathod and the other from Mrs Katy Stringer, which is accompanied by a poster, petition and comment sheet. No replies were received following the statutory process under rule 16(3) of the *Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2000*, nor were written particulars of objection in Form No 4 lodged. Thus I take these letters into account in reaching my decision. In addition I have read a letter from the team vicar, the Revd Ewen Souter dated 14 June 2006 written on behalf of the petitioners. I construe this letter as written consent on the petitioners' behalf for me to determine the petition on written representations. To complete the picture I have read a letter from the Archdeacon of Horsham which supports the petition and letters from some eight parishioners which also lend support.
3. The DAC issued a certificate dated 10 March 2006 in which it declined to recommend the proposal and gave reasons for this decision in a letter dated 13 March 2006 which accompanied the petition.
4. A letter from Horsham District Council dated 7 May 2003 indicated that replacing the crucifix would not amount to operational development and therefore planning permission was not required.
5. When the matter was referred to me in June 2006, I required service of the papers on the CCC which has provided its advice on this proposal in a letter dated 30 October 2006 from Jude Johncock. Mr Souter has provided the petitioners response to the comments of the CCC by letter dated 9 November 2006. The CCC supports the petition. Against this factual background I make my adjudication.
6. The onus of proof in this as in all faculty applications lies on the proponents of change, but the standard of proof is not as high as for a listed building. The parish produced a thorough and detailed paper dealing with the matter which was discussed at the PCC and, in due course, contained within the papers submitted to the DAC. I do not propose to repeat in this judgment each of the reasons advanced by the parish. They are persuasively argued and sensitively thought out.
7. I hope I do not do a disservice to the various objections when I summarise them as follows:
 - i. that the crucifix is an integral part of the church, and may have been designed

- and fabricated specifically for that purpose. It complements the modern architecture of the church and is site-specific;
- ii. that for some 40 years it has been in place and is an important symbol for the community and village as well as something of a local landmark;
 - iii. that it depicts very vividly Christ's suffering for mankind and represents, through art, an important part of the Christian message, described as 'an icon of great power'. The graphic portrayal of Christ's agony on the cross is striking and challenging;
 - iv. that there are few works of art in Broadbridge Heath, and the loss of this one would be felt acutely in the village. It is of high quality, described as 'an arresting work of art, bold and unique';
 - v. placing the crucifix in a museum would alienate it from its sacred location, and the proposed new location would not permit it to be viewed to best advantage, with insufficient height and space for an appropriate perspective;
 - vi. that the proposed replacement cross is simple and plain, inappropriate for the location, and not speaking of the resurrection;
 - vii. that there was insufficient consultation within the community and that public opinion is, at best, divided and quantitatively opposed to the proposal.
8. The evidence which I have seen indicates that although the crucifix has been in position for a considerable time, it was not erected at the time the church was built nor was it part of the original design. Indeed, the architect objected to the introduction of the crucifix in substitution for a plain cross which had been part of his holistic vision for the church. There is therefore nothing site-specific about the sculpture. It is also apparent that the family of the artist approve of the re-location of the crucifix to the museum.
 9. The proposed location for the crucifix is Horsham Museum which already houses work by the artist. It will enable it to be seen by a greater number of people albeit severed from its sacred context and less public in its position. It may be possible for the museum to arrest further deterioration in the state of the crucifix and to restore a crown of thorns which was lost over time.
 10. The parish takes the view that they wish to communicate a theme of hope rather than despair. Emaciation and torment are the theme of the design as opposed to any message of resurrection. There is a genuine difference of opinion on these matters. The crucified Christ is essential to any understanding of the Christian faith, but, as any catechism or creed makes plain, it is not merely the supreme sacrifice of sending His son to die on a cross but also the fact of rising from the dead. A popular refrain goes 'we are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song'; and it should not be forgotten that it is the empty tomb – as opposed to the empty cross – which lies at the heart of our understanding of the resurrection.
 11. I have been impressed by the courteous and restrained manner in which sincerely held but opposing views have been articulated in this case. It falls to me to make a decision upon the evidence before me in a situation which is finely balanced. I take the view that it is right for this petition to be allowed. Whilst there is force in several of the objections, there is greater force in the case advanced by the parish with the support of the expert advice from the CCC. I have regard to the mission and witness of the church; and the views of the worshipping community as to the message their building presents carries considerable weight. I therefore order that a faculty passes the seal. I share the concerns of the DAC, the CCC and those who oppose the petition concerning the quality of the

design for the replacement cross and I note that the parish is prepared to revisit this matter. Inevitably this will involve greater expense to the parish but if it is serious about its commitment to providing a meaningful Christian image in the heart of the community then a high quality of design and manufacture is justified and I urge the parish to take professional advice in this regard.

12. There will be a number of conditions attached to the faculty:
- (a) that the placing of the crucifix with Horsham Museum shall be on the basis of a permanent loan, the terms of which will need to be approved by this court prior to the removal of the crucifix. This will include a term that the crucifix will remain subject to the faculty jurisdiction;
 - (b) that the crucifix shall not be removed until the design of a replacement cross has been approved by this court. Such design will be expected to be of a high quality and should be submitted to the DAC and the CCC for comment prior to being lodged at court for approval;
 - (c) that the removal of the crucifix and the erection of its replacement shall be carried out under the direction of the parish's inspecting architect;
 - (d) that the proposed design for the replacement cross be submitted to this court within 12 months of the grant of this faculty.

The Worshipful Mark Hill
Chancellor

21 November 2006