

In the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Newcastle

In the matter of the Church of Rennington All Saints

JUDGMENT

1. By petition dated 24 September 2021, the petitioners seek the court's permission to remove and dispose of a 'redundant altar table' of varnished pine construction from All Saints, Rennington, an unlisted Victorian church in rural Northumberland.
2. The justification claimed is a desire to upgrade the east end of the north aisle, which is used as a social area, and replace this table with one which would be more in keeping to be used for serving refreshments with a longer term plan, when funds permit, to install cupboards, a more practical floor covering and water and drainage to be able to boil water and wash up.
3. The Church of England Cathedral and Church Buildings Division published a helpful document in March 2021 in respect of disposals and loans which is available on its website:
https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/CCB_Disposals_and_loans.pdf
4. It notes that church treasures are not an asset of the PCC and that all moveable goods belong to the parishioners at large with the churchwardens acting as custodians on their behalf (see Canon E1.5). It reminds parishes of the presumption against sale emphasised by the Court of Arches in *St Lawrence Oakley with Wootton St Lawrence* [2014].
5. The table is helpfully illustrated in accompanying photographs. It measures 1950 x 850 x 950 mm. It does not appear to have any very great age. Being pine, it is made of the least costly type of timber material. It is very plain but has a crucifix carved into a lozenge hanging beneath its top at the middle of one of the long edges. It is not suggested to have any significant aesthetic, financial or other value.
6. Little is known about this table which is currently positioned in the north aisle. In a statement accompanying the petition, the following is noted:

'We cannot find any history of this Altar despite my wife having spent many years researching the history of the church. The main Altar in the Chancel is of historical significance having been purchased using a large donation to the church in 1949 in memory of three Middlemass sisters who died during WWII in Bath. Their ashes repose in the churchyard.

We assume that the altar which we wish to dispose of is the original altar from the Chancel, but can find nothing in the records to substantiate this. I have been a member of the congregation of All Saints Church for 14 years and have only seen it in use as an Altar once when the Chancel floor was being re-laid. (approx. 8 years ago).'

7. In its notification of advice, the DAC recommended its removal for approval by the court, noting:

'The Committee could not fully determine if the table was an altar but recommends that consent for its removal is sought from the Bishop'

8. Pursuant to that recommendation, the petitioners did indeed consult the Bishop who, on 17 November 2021 responded:

'I have read your letter setting out the case of disposal and having made the necessary enquiries, I am content that the altar is of no historic significance, may not have actually been consecrated and am happy to give you my permission for its disposal.'

9. I am satisfied that proper investigations have been carried out by the petitioners. The concern that the table was a consecrated altar is allayed by the petitioners having, very properly, consulted the Bishop in accordance with the advice of the DAC. Having considered the evidence, the table in question is not one that can properly be categorised as a treasure whether as described in the Guidance mentioned or in *Wootten*. Its history is not known despite appropriate enquiries, in the court's judgment, it has no particular aesthetic or other value. Its disposal would not appear to excite any adverse reaction from parishioners or any previous but unidentified and likely unidentifiable donor or their heirs. Its continued presence is a hinderance to the reasonable ambitions of the petitioners to enhance the facilities and, thus, the mission of the church.

10. Accordingly, I grant a faculty authorising its removal.

11. No proposals have been made in respect of its disposal. Assuming that the petitioners have not identified any alternative use to which the church can put it and, further a lack of space to store it pending a use being found, in the first instance it should be offered to other parishes who may be able to put it to good use. If after a period of 12 months from the date of the faculty, no other

parish has agreed to take it, I will permit its sale on the open market. I do not anticipate its financial value to be such as to warrant the obtaining of a professional valuation or justify placing any particular reserve in the event of sale by auction.

Simon Wood
Chancellor
29 November 2021