

**Re Dorchester St Peter, Holy Trinity and All Saints [2022] ECC Sal 4**

**Summary of “Consultation and advice – support and objections”, [18] to [26]**

- The **Diocesan Advisory Committee** (DAC) issued its formal Notification of Advice on 14 July 2014, which recommended the works to the Chancellor for approval, subject to certain uncontroversial provisos about the replacement memorial. The DAC was largely supportive of the position of the Church Buildings Council (CBC), and also provided the petitioners with more detailed feedback in which it commended the wide engagement and options appraisal by the petitioners [18].
- The **Church Buildings Council** provided three letters of advice in relation to the petition; it considered that the petitioners’ case for removing the memorial was well made and did not object to the proposed works. It acknowledged the range of options considered by the parish. Furthermore, it considered that the historical and evidential value of the memorial was higher than its artistic value [20].
- The **Ancient Monuments Society** (now using a working title of **Historic Buildings and Places**) confirmed that it would ordinarily support the “retain and explain” approach of Historic England in relation to manifestations of contested heritage, *but* acknowledges that the inscription, in this case, is particularly challenging morally for an active place of Christian worship and accepts that the confronting and explaining of the contested heritage should appropriately take place in the museum rather than the church building[23].
- **Dorset Council**, the local planning authority with responsibility for this church building considered that the removal of the memorial from the church would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the church building, the impact of that harm being somewhat lessened by the lack of a local connection between John Gordon and the church or town of Dorchester. [24].
- **Historic England** concluded that the removal of the memorial to the museum would harm the special significance of St Peter’s church and the significance of the monument itself; the appropriate way of recognizing and responding to the legacy of Britain’s involvement in the slave trade would be to explain and contextualize historic monuments *in situ* rather than removing them. Such interpretation within the church could be linked to a broader exhibition on the theme of slavery in the museum next door [21].
- Likewise, the **Georgian Group** accepted that the memorial caused offence but, considered that the best approach to the contested nature of the memorial would be to provide in situ powerful reinterpretation. It expressed a clear view that insufficient justification has been provided for the removal of the memorial from the church to the museum [22].
- The letter of objection in response to the public notice came from two parishioners who have been regular worshippers at St Peter’s Church since 2007. They expressed the view that the memorial had caused no problems for approximately 245 years and that the expense of moving the memorial next door to the museum was not warranted. They emphasized that history could not be changed, excised or rewritten by the removal of the memorial. They asked that the memorial should remain in place until such time as “the Church Authorities issue a national directive on removing long standing memorials in Anglican Churches for specific reasons, e.g., association with the slave trade”. [19].
- Several of John Gordon’s descendants have been consulted. Whilst expressing full sympathy with the Black Lives Matters movement, the great great grandson of a direct descendant of John Gordon’s sister, Catherine, opposed the removal of the memorial from its current location, supporting instead “an appropriate addition to the memorial setting out briefly, in a neutral fashion and in line with modern liberal opinion, his actions relating to the slave riot

of 1760 in Jamaica.”. He feared that the proposed relocation is an over-reaction which could, if followed, “lead to a wholesale desecration of our national heritage”.

Another descendant was concerned that history should not be distorted, but ultimately expressed the view that the removal to the museum next door was the “ideal answer” to the issues which the memorial raises.

A member of the Gordon clan involved in the convening of the House of Gordon website has stated that he would “be happy for the memorial to be removed”. [25].

- The Victorian Society and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings have, understandably, taken the view that this petition concerning the future of an 18th century memorial (albeit set within a medieval building with a substantially Victorian interior) falls outside their remits and have not offered comments on the proposals. [26]