

EXETER DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

RECORD OF INFORMAL PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSION

The following comments in no way confer any form of consent or suggest that consent for the proposed works will be forthcoming

PARISH / CHURCH: Woodleigh, St Mary

LISTING GRADE: II*

MEETING DATE: 10 May 2010

PRESENT AT MEETING: Mrs Baker for PCC; James Clarke for DAC

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

There are no proposals at the moment; the parish just wishing to know if there is anything that they should do to retain their bells in use.

ISSUES RAISED BY PROPOSALS

In the small ancient bell tower at the west end of the church, is a peal of five bells hung in an oak frame by Harry Stokes of Woodbury in 1900. They have elm headstocks and plain bearings.

The treble, second and fourth bells were made by the Whitechapel Foundry in London in 1907 and the tenor is from the same source in 1900. The third bell is very unusual, in that when it was cast in 1640 by Thomas Pennington II, the medieval inscription was reproduced: PLEBS – O[MN]IS – PLAVDIT – VT – ME – TAM – SEPIVS – AVDIT (The people all applaud the more often they hear me).

Access to the first floor is by long ladder. This is in fair condition and is fixed at the top as it should be. In the middle chamber, there is a fine crack rising up the centre of the west wall. I trust that the superintending Architect is keeping an eye on this. The bird guards appear to be in good order but there is some bird nesting material on both cills.

The bell frame is supported on four oak foundation beams lying north/south and bearing on granite corbel tables. The beam ends having started to decay the beams are now supported by two galvanised steel universal beams. The oak beams are not secured to the steel beams, just wedged and shimmed up from them.

In the bell chamber, the four sound openings have bird netting in good order. The area is in need of a good clean up. The frame is in fair order except for the cill of the fourth bell pit end against the west wall. The cill is badly decayed, along with the adjacent post bottom. Because of this decay, the ground pulley in this pit has become loose at one end.

The bell headstocks are showing some common furniture beetle exit holes, and the wheel shrouding is splitting at the ends due to corrosion of the metal jointing strips. The metalwork of the bell fittings are all rather rusty, albeit superficial. The straps upon which the clappers hang, have leather liners (Baldricks) and these should now be renewed. The bearings appear to be in fair order. The gudgeon plates of the fourth bell appear to be slightly loose and the treble outer ground pulley is not running freely.

The bells themselves appear to be in good order and sound well.

INFORMAL COMMENTS / SUGGESTIONS MADE

The bell chamber and middle chamber should be thoroughly cleaned out, paying particular attention to the gap between the frame cills and the tower walls. Debris in this area transmits dampness from the walls into the timber, leading to decay and Deathwatch Beetle infestation.

A bell hanger should be engaged to make proposals for the repair of the bell frame in the area of the fourth bell, along with the other minor issues found to require attention as noted above. The frame member which is decayed, is not highly stressed and so I think that it is not yet necessary to suspend ringing. If however, the repair is not carried out within the next two to three years, then it may be necessary to do so.

I also recommend that the timber of the headstocks, stays and wheels, be treated with a preservative.

SIGNED

James Clarke

DATE 15 May 2010