

St James' Church Wick

Statement of Significance

Section 1: Brief history and description of the church building(s), contents, churchyard and setting

St James' Church is located centrally in the village of Wick, opposite Wick and Marcross Primary School, and next to Wick and Monknash Village Hall. It is set within a well-kept churchyard, with early and recent tombs. The churchyard remains open for burials. A further



feature of the churchyard is the Grade II listed remains of a Preaching Cross.

The church originated as a chapel in the early 12th century and was subsequently given to Ewenny Priory in the latter half of that century. Some elements of 12th century Early English style construction survive in the chancel arch, south door and a small window in the south wall of the chancel.

The building was restored and remodelled in the latter half of the Victorian era. During this period most of the walls were rebuilt, the tower partially rebuilt, new roofs raised and modern windows inserted, predominantly to the nave under the instructions of John Prichard, the diocesan architect. A porch was added at this time and subsequently a vestry.

Some of the Victorian innovations were removed during the mid-20th century and there were various alterations and repairs. There are no longer dado rails or polychromatic stonework around the windows; the wooden pulpit has been replaced by a limestone structure. During this intervening period that the church was extensively repointed using a hard cement based mortar. This has given rise to problems with damp and the church has requested permission to proceed with repointing with lime-based mortar.

A modern postern gate was added to the southern boundary wall during the 1980's, whilst timbers supporting the intermediate floor of the tower were replaced in the 1990's. In 1995 there were repairs to the roofs, the installation of a lightning conductor, replacement rainwater goods, a new drainage system, rendering to the internal walls at low level, and the installation of a new electrical system.

The nave, south porch, chancel and vestry were reroofed in 2017 in natural Canadian Glendyne slate, with Bath stone ridge tiles. The work was undertaken by Peter Bricknell and Co and overseen by Davies Sutton Architects.

Section 2: The significance of the church (including its contents and churchyard) in terms of:

i) Its special architectural and historical interest

ii) Any significant features of artistic or archaeological interest

Within the church, particular features are the chancel arch, which dates from the 12th century, a small window in the south wall of the chancel, the Norman font and the altar.

The altar is a pre-Reformation mensa slab incised with a consecration cross resting on a masonry plinth. According to local sources, the slab was once part of the steps beneath the chancel arch and was only moved to its present position after its significance was recognised.

There are twelve monuments visible within the church, the oldest dating from 1698. Among them is the Frances Hewett memorial from 1798 which is featured on the Church Heritage Cymru site. Another memorial is currently obscured by the altar. There is also some 20th century stained glass.

The remains of a medieval preaching cross in the churchyard are Grade II listed and ‘at risk’.

Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals on the significance defined in Section 2

The DAC has previously agreed to the external repointing of the chancel walls in order to address the problem of damp. This application relates to the interior and specifically a proposal to move the altar away from the wall.

Members of the DAC visited St James’ Church in July 2019, when they considered a proposal to reposition the altar on stone piers with cantilever support.

In response to their comments, the church held further discussions with the architect and commissioned a method statement from conservator masons. It is proposed that the masons’ recommendations should be implemented.

The altar base currently obscures a memorial. It has not been possible to identify the person or persons supposedly remembered by burial or other memorial in such a position. Uncovering the memorial would enable identification and enable it to be treated sensitively.



Water damage behind the altar, which has been cemented to the wall

The original proposal, involving positioning the mensa slab on a steel plate supported in a cantilever arrangement on two stone piers, would have allowed the entire memorial to remain visible.

The practicality of this approach has however been questioned and it is now proposed that, subject to this being found to be practical and appropriate when the mensa slab is moved, the support should instead be in the form of two walls, which would extend across the memorial.



The memorial obscured by the altar base

Before doing this, the memorial would be cleaned and photographed.

The overall impact of the changes would be to improve the fabric of the building by eliminating the ingress of damp in this area, increase access to the heritage by uncovering the memorial and enhance worship by enabling westward facing celebration of the Eucharist.