

CONSERVATION STATEMENT



BRIDGE STREET CHURCH, WICK

**PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE
TO
RETAIL FURNITURE OUTLET**

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February 2015

PLANNING REFERENCE: 14/04527/FUL & 14/04528/LBC

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INTRODUCTION

Grid ref: ND 363 509. The Bridge Street Church is situated on the west side of Bridge Street, opposite the Town Hall Building, and nestled between the former Temperance Hotel (now a Residential Home) to the south, and the Bank of Scotland Building to the north. To the rear of the church separated by Kirks Lane lies the St Fergus Road Car Park and a modern store known locally as Poundstretcher, which was the location of an old First World War Drill Hall, the original First Free Church of Wick.

The church was built between 1862 and 1864 by William J. Gray (Architects) of Berwick, as commissioned by the elders and funded by the congregation. The Neo-Gothic style building was first listed in 1983 as a Category 'B' (ref 42301) and is currently on the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland under the condition – Fair, and Category of Risk – Low. This rating has been the findings of annual external field inspections since 2012 until 2014.

The basement Session Rooms are accessed from Kirks Lane situated to the rear of the church. The main Church building is accessed from Bridge Street via doors at the base of both stair wells leading to the first floor gallery. The Stores and Boiler Room under the church are also accessed from Bridge Street by steps down to the basement level adjacent to the southern most entrance above.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The Ecclesiastical use of the building ceased in March 2009, and the Church was put up for sale. In October 2011, Messrs D Lovat Ltd acquired the building, and then in November 2014 sold it on to Mr Graeme Bain, proprietor of Jack's Furniture Shop, and Wickblast. Mr Bain has applied for a Change of Use to convert the church into a Furniture Retail Outlet, and Self Contained Flat within the basement Session Rooms.

This Conservation Statement will look briefly at the historical fabric of the building, and provide a short description of each element. The different aspects of significance will be assessed, and also the conservation principles essential to guide the development, and the risk factors to be taken into consideration. The importance of the building's use will be explored, and policies will be outlined which justify the project and will ensure a sustainable future once it is completed.

DESCRIPTION

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-------|----------|
| 1. | Session Rooms | | |
| 2. | External Condition | (i) | Roof |
| | | (ii) | Walls |
| | | (iii) | Windows |
| | | (iv) | Railings |
| 3. | Internal Condition of Church | (i) | Ceilings |
| | | (ii) | Walls |
| | | (iii) | Fixtures |

1. SESSION ROOMS

The Session Rooms are accessed from Kirks Lane externally, and from the stairs to the rear, and underneath, the existing church pulpit internally. The basement arrangement comprise the following :

Session Meeting Room (7.3m x 7.35m approx.), one access door off the entrance hall, central ceiling beam with cast iron column support at mid-span, lathe and plaster ceiling finished with Victorian style plaster cornice, two timber single glazed sash and case windows with arched tops, and walls of lathe and plaster with timber dado trim and vertical lining board wainscote all round. There is a fireplace with timber mantel located between the two windows. The mantel is of plain redwood timber construction and lacking any redeeming features. The fire place has been closed off using a panel board suspected to be of cement asbestos manufacture. There is no evidence of a decorative firebox behind. It is assumed that this fireplace would have terminated in one of the chimney cans on the west gable.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Vestibule at front door (1.45m x 1.34m) with WC off entrance under the stair. The ceiling here is lowered to accommodate the stair construction under the pulpit above. All walls and ceilings are of lathe and plaster construction. The WC chinaware is of no specific historic importance, and is relatively modern. The door has been split to accommodate swing clearance of the sink.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Main Hallway incorporating stair up to church floor level (3.87m x 2.58m). The ceiling and wall finishes are that of the Session Room above, and the stair is finished with cast iron balusters and a standard Toad's Back handrail with full turn to bottom tread. The hall gives access to a large store, a kitchen, and the Vestry.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Store (2.58m x 1.74m); All walls and ceilings are finished in lathe and plaster with two electrical distribution boxes at either side of the door.

Kitchen (3.1m x 3.28m) The walls and ceiling are the same as the adjacent store, and the room is fitted out with 1970's Hygena QA base units and worktop. There is an integral tall larder unit, and a double drainer sink installed. There is a section of partition adjacent to the entry door which has a small reeded glass window installed. This section is relatively modern and clad with sterling board on timber studs. It forms the recessed wall of the kitchen and lobby off the main hall, also giving access to the Vestry.



Fig. 9



Fig.10

Vestry (4.08mx 3.09m) Accessed off the Hall Lobby, the vestry is finished in a similar fashion to the Session Room with lathe and plaster ceiling and upper walls, timber dado trim and vertical timber board wainscote to lower wall. The vestry has one single glazed sash and case window with arched top, and is complete with a fireplace on the party wall with a storage area next door. The fireplace is similar in context to the Session Room's, and is not clear where the flue may lead to in this instance but assumed to be the second chimney can on the West gable.



Fig.11



Fig. 12

2. EXTERNAL CONDITION

(i) Roof

The existing roof is welsh slate on timber sarking, and from visual inspection at street level, seems to be in good condition. Investigations of water ingress revealed that vegetation growth was causing capillary water movement up under the slate and over the top of the lead valley gutter's edge, and into the attic space below. There are four roof lights on either side of the roof and the light has two panes of patent glass in each. Some of the patent glazing has been replaced to make the building secure. The lead valleys require investigation after cleaning to check for expansion splits and excessive trough wear. The internal face of the sarking boards, where inspected visually from the ceiling access hatch, revealed some discolouration but on the whole, was sound and dry.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

(ii) Walls

The only external stonework exposed on the building are the East, and West Elevation Gables. No visible signs of bulging, or settlement cracks were noted but, capping finials to the south stair buttress pillars have been removed and placed in the basement access stair under Bridge Street. It can only be presumed that these were removed for Public safety reasons.

The East gable is the more decorative of the two, and comprises the two entrance doors with stairs leading to the Gallery seating above. The stairwells are framed by stepped buttresses as 45 degree protrusion from the gable wall. The North tower extends a storey further and capped with an impressive dressed stone steeple. This elevation is formed from dressed sandstone in its entirety, with a coursed rubble stone to the inner face, trapped and lined with lathe and plaster above vertical timber wainscoting. The external stonework is in very good condition, with no signs of delamination, settlement, erosion, or plastic repairs. The finite cornicing above the gothic archways of the doors and windows has suffered some erosion, particularly at expected locations of water drainage runs from features above, but not detrimental to structure or aesthetics.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

The West Gable overlooking St Fergus Car Park is mainly built of coursed rubble stone with sandstone quoins, raked lintels and gothic arch tops to the rose vent, windows and doors. The gable is capped with sandstone skews and a double flue chimney, assumed to be the termination for the fireplaces in the Meeting Room and Vestry located in the basement.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

(iii) Windows

The eight main church windows have sandstone Y-tracery astragals, and glazed with reinforced leaded glass panels. The main congregation area window facing out onto Bridge Street is the most ornate masonry wise, and comprises of ten main panels of diamond embossed patterned glass. The accompanying stairwell windows comprise of only two main panels but replicate the patterns of the central window adjacent. The remaining window at second floor level, and the rose window above the congregational area, has been fashioned

into a ventilator panel using scalloped welsh slate fins backed with predator netting. Some fins are now missing and the predator netting has rusted away, allowing free access to pigeons and smaller bird life.



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

The rear elevation facing out onto Kirks Lane features one rose ventilator (to the attic space), one rose window to the stepped ceiling area above the gallery, two small, two panel arched windows to the gallery seating level (the southern of the two is glazed in stained glass depicting a Saint on each panel). Two large six panel windows are the central focal point shouldering the pulpit between them. The large northern central window depicts two stained glass scenes in the centre panels. These two windows bridge the space between congregation level and gallery level, terminating just below the exposed bottom chord of the main supporting truss frames. The smaller gallery windows are replicated on the congregation level below, and slightly smaller in height to fit under the gallery soffit. The glass panels not fitted with stained glass have either been glazed in embossed diamond lattice pattern, or modern common dimpled obscure glass, and the latter has been installed at low levels as ongoing repairs caused by repeated vandalism. This is further exemplified by the use of self adhesive transparent film applied to the inner face of the lower level panels. The basement Session Rooms, Vestry, WC and Pulpit stair well all have timber sash and case windows. The three large windows have swept tops as the doors, but the smaller windows have a standard flat horizontal lintel. All timber sash windows are in good repair.



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

(iv) Railings

The Cast Iron railings along the front elevation acts as a protective barrier to pedestrians along Bridge Street, separating them from the basement access stairs, and the open pend below street level. There is a gate located at the southern end of the railings allowing access to these stairs, but the gate and hinges require a significant amount of repairs to bring them back up to an acceptable standard. The main railings are reinforced from the Church's front wall by the use of iron bracing placed at strategic centres, and were noted to be in fair to moderate condition.



Fig. 26

3. INTERNAL CONDITION

(i) Ceilings

The main congregation area ceiling is varnished timber vee'd lining boards between six main supporting trusses. The attic style structural trusses have been ornately fashioned with arch bracing and carved infill panels of four and eight petal rose wheels. The trusses step down in line with the gallery extents running from front to back, and this forms a light well in which six stain glass panels on each side, emitting natural light into the centre of the building. The floor of this light well then forms the timber lined ceiling above the two sides of the gallery. The remaining area of ceiling between the two stair wells is finished in lathe and plaster, and painted out. The paint is now flaking badly mainly due to dampness manifesting itself while the building was unoccupied. The varnished timber is bearing up well even though there has been water ingress at two distinct locations within the congregational space.



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

The main congregation space under the gallery is formed with raked joists clad in lathe and plaster, and supported on the main ring beam, held up by eight fluted cast iron columns.

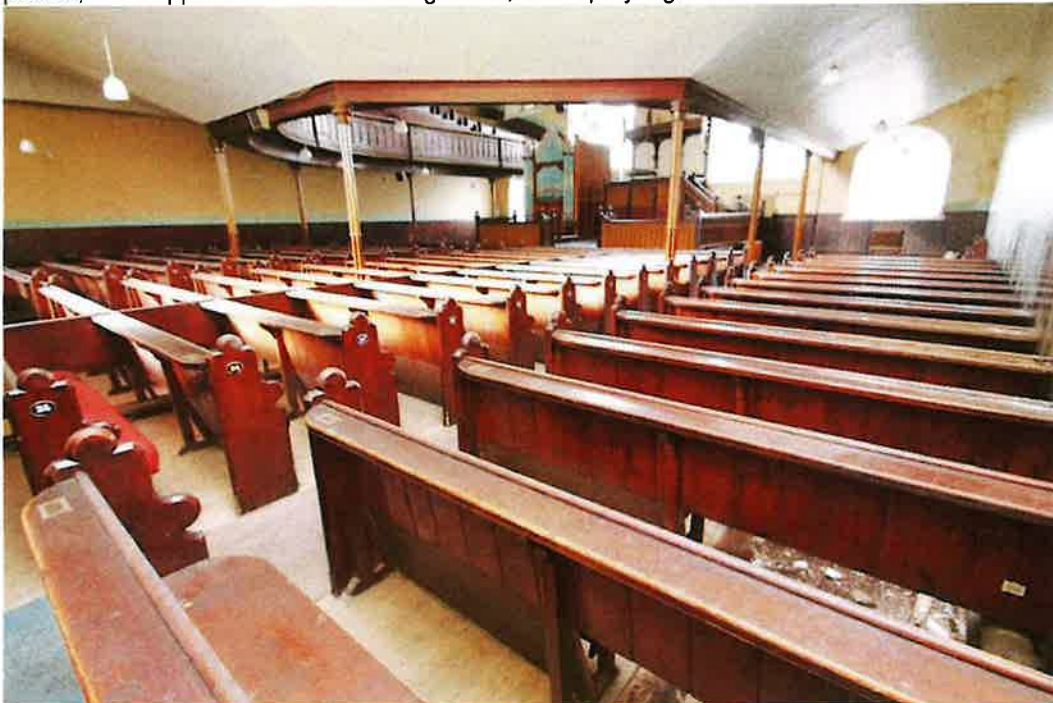


Fig. 29

The Session Rooms under the congregation are also finished in lath and plaster, with the addition of a decorative Victorian style cornice throughout. The floor joists of the church above are filled with a layer of ash blinded cinders on timber boards for sound proofing, a practise typical of it's day. The basement Session Rooms' ceilings are in good condition with only a few stress cracks evident. Some work will be required to eradicate the mineral salts blowing off the paint beneath the stairs up to the pulpit.



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

(ii) Walls

The general finish to all walls and partitions is lathe and plaster on studs to the upper areas, with vertical vee'd timber board wainscote linings to the lower portions. The only exception to this is in the two front stair wells, where there is no wainscote detail above the stair stringers. As mentioned in the ceiling section, the paint finish to the plaster has been affected by manifesting dampness, and is now flaking severely on the east and west gable elevations, and the side walls where water ingress has occurred. The west gable looks to have suffered worse, as the dampness has affected the surface of the plaster also, and mineral salts are evident in several places.



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

Water ingress from inboard valley gutters above are noticeable between truss seats 4 & 5 on the north wall, and truss seats 1 & 2 on the south wall. The ingress has affected the plaster mildly but had a worse affect on the wainscote to the north side, and the decorative moulding between the trusses on the south. Further investigation is required to find the sources of the leaks before reparative measures can be assessed. The timber wainscote linings can still be used, as the damage has been mainly to the horizontal timber straps behind. The decorative moulding can also be repaired as the dislodged piece is intact, sound, and on site.



Fig. 34



Fig. 35

(iii) Fixtures

The pulpit is elevated above the ground floor and fronted by a raised stage area adjacent to the organ body. Access to the Vestry is by two stairs hidden behind the raised stage and organ, leading to the main stair run down into the basement Session Rooms. The Pulpit steps and Stage area is surrounded by a timber handrail on Y-tracery cast iron balusters mimicking the windows behind.

The pipe organ currently situated beside the pulpit started its life in the Wick Congregational Church (now Sam's Furniture Shop), High Street. The Johnston Collection has some photographs of this organ in its original location (ref: JN23484B029), and it was later relocated to the Bridge Street Church in 1961.



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

The church clock is missing from its housing in the frontage of the gallery upstand. It is thought that the original clock was gifted to the last outgoing minister before the church's closure in March 2009. It is not known where the plaque from under the Bridge Street window went to.



Fig. 38



Fig. 39

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bridge Street Church is one of many strong, vertical and imposing gables forming Bridge Street itself. Study of the Hydrographic Office Map and Chart of 1857 suggests that the Church, and its neighbours on either side, were the last to be built, thus completing the street as a whole.

The documented listing for the church mainly describes the impressive façade and spire overlooking Bridge Street, and only touches upon the interior in general.

There is no proposal to alter the external features in any fashion, and it is the owner's intention to conserve, repair, and retain as much of the fabric as possible. General emergency maintenance repairs have been carried out to valley gutters, broken and missing slate, broken glass to roof lights and low level windows, in order to keep the building secure and weather tight.

The internal feature listed is the 'Ornate Gothic Galleried Interior' which surrounds the organ and pulpit area in an ornate panelled upstand on eight fluted cast iron columns. The pulpit and raised altar feature Y-tracery cast iron balusters under a toad's back handrail between timber posts to all corners, steps and stairs.

The stepped ceiling over the ornate main timber roof trusses, complete with stained glass feature lights, gives a cathedral air to the congregation floor and galleries alike.

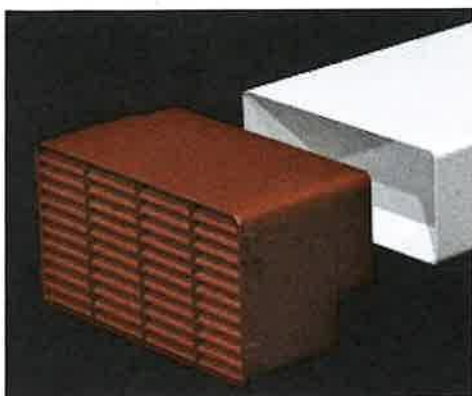
PROPOSALS

(i) Basement Apartment Proposed Kitchen

Located along the north wall of the Meeting Room, two core bores need to be undertaken to allow for a balanced flue outlet from a new gas combi-boiler, and a kitchen extractor hood. Both cores will be 120mm diameter, sleeved through the stone wall, and spaced a minimum of 750mm apart.



A typical balance flue gas fire pipe. Cold air comes in around the inner pipe and is warmed by the inner pipe which is the exhaust. This system has a higher efficiency as heat that would be lost is recovered.



Alternative to the flap or louvre vent with 110mm DN circular dust. Square duct from extractor hood terminating in coloured brick vent built into masonry wall.

Proposed Bedroom 1

Formerly the south west corner of the Session Room, a new bedroom is formed using traditional timber stud partition clad both sides with plasterboard. The former kitchen door is re-used within the new partition. All timber studwork is to be formed around the existing cornice detail, and not cut into the plaster. The existing fireplace is to be properly blocked up with a hit & miss louvre to allow the existing stack to vent.



HM96BAA – Rytons 9x6 Brass Anodised Aluminium Hit & Miss Ventilator

Proposed Shower Room

Formerly the store cupboard, this room is large enough to accommodate a modest shower unit, WC and sink. An extract vent will be wall mounted at ceiling height, and run through containment to the west gable wall and terminated as the cooker extract depicted above. All new wastes will be laid under the existing floor and lead to an existing SVP adjacent to the Apartment entrance door, and connects into the local combined sewer network in Kirks Lane.

Bedroom 2

Bedroom 2 is the former Vestry with the modern kitchen partitions removed. Only minor finishings will be required to the walls and ceilings, as it is presumed the kitchen area has been formed at a later date, and relatively recent. This bedroom also has a fireplace which requires the removal of a bulging infill panel, indicating that the firebox is full of soot or debris. This needs to be cleaned out, firebox built up, and a Hit & Miss vent installed above skirting level.

Hall //.

Hall

The main entrance hall is to have a fire rated partition built around the existing stair to isolate it from the apartment and Retail area above. The Apartment faces of the partition is to be clad in such a fashion that it closely replicates the existing finishes as possible.

Floors

The existing timber floor boards will be retained and relaid where uplifted to accommodate hot and cold water supply pipes, waste and foul sewer pipes, and any electrics necessary in the re-wiring of the apartment.

Walls

Minimal intervention of the wall and ceiling fabric is necessary to conserve as much of the original character of the rooms as possible.

Ceilings

The existing ceilings are noted to be in good condition, with only some mineral deposits on cornices above sash windows where the internal stair landings are visible as steps in the ceilings within Bedrooms 1 & 2. Discussions with Building Standards will confirm what action will be taken to address adequate fire proofing, and acoustics between floors. This may be as simple as a 'Thermoguard' type fire retardant paint system to the ceilings throughout the apartment, and an acoustic underlay to the shop floor covering directly above. In so many cases, the easiest option is to overclad the existing ceiling with a suspended grid system and plasterboard which, is not only invasive but secretes the original features behind a dull, flat and featureless panel.

(ii) Retail Area

In order for this building to function as a retail outlet, an expanse of clear floor area has to be created. This floor also has to be lit effectively to show off exhibit displays, and be heated economically.

The ground floor space is currently populated with four columns of pews, each with thirteen to fourteen rows in each column. The existing heating system runs around the periphery of the congregation area and galleries, and centrally up the ground floor central columns of pews. This heating system is to be retained for the foreseeable future but, being fed from an oil-fired boiler at present, presents a huge overhead to keep the building adequately heated. It is the intention to tap into the local district heating scheme once it comes across the river, but in the mean time, oil is the only viable option.

With the economics of heating in mind, the formation of the retail area requires the following work to be undertaken;

- Removal of the majority of pews within the central ground floor space, and the retention of existing pews backing onto the side walls of the ground floor. Woodworm has been exposed on the pews, and investigations are ongoing as to the extent of infestation.
- The retention of the existing heating system to be covered in a heat emitting enclosure which complies with Low surface Temperature (LST) panelling.
- The installation of a temporary, single span, ceiling system over the gallery upstand in order to facilitate low voltage feature display lighting, and a physical barrier to lower reduce the effective volume to be heated. Trace heating will still be necessary to adequately air the top floor gallery space.
- Temporary partitions erected to the base of each staircase to cordon off access to the galleries by the general public. Controlled access will be available for maintenance

only. These partitions will be situated in such a fashion as to minimise damage to the existing fabric of the stairs and surface finishes.

- The pipe organ will be removed to make way for staff welfare facilities as required by the Factories Act. The organ is currently the interest of a third party wishing to dismantle it, and relocate it elsewhere.
- The raised altar space and pulpit are to remain as they are.

Retail Area Walls

The existing finishes are to remain and be repaired where necessary at cracks, damp spots, and unsafe hollow areas however, the finished paint colour will be a brighter white to reflect as much light around the display areas as possible. The dark timber wainscote to the periphery walls will remain, with only a wash down and re-varnish as necessary. It may be that Building Control required the varnish finish to be of an Intumescent nature (ie: Fire proofed).

Retail Area Windows

The Bridge Street Elevation main window requires no glazing work however, the splayed sill and side ingoos require significant refurbishment work, along with making good the wall area where the Kirk Plaque used to be, directly under the sill.

The Kirks Lane elevation however, has not fared so well, and succumbed to vandalism during its unoccupied state and into its current owners time. Previous attempts to safeguard the glass have been futile at least, and the application of an off-the-shelf self adhesive film to the inner face has only minimised the spread of shards within the church interior.

The rear tracery windows identified on the Elevation drawing (Ref: W08 & 09) would benefit from a toughened safety glass substitute replacement, with a transparent film applied to the inner face to closely match the original patterns adjacent.

Retail Ceilings

The existing raked Gallery ceiling soffit is to remain, and be repaired as necessary. This soffit will also be painted a lighter white to aid maximum distribution of all natural and artificial lighting available. The new temporary, single span ceiling will be plasterboard, taped and filled, with low voltage display lighting installed in its soffit. Another option was to install destratification fans to the original high level ceiling, but was deemed more expensive to install and run, and only offered a notional saving in heating.

The single span joist system and plasterboard cladding has been installed in a supporting frame, off an existing structural Gallery support beam, and can be easily dismantled to reveal the existing fabric again. The row of pews for removal to allow the framework to be built will be kept on site for future reinstatement when required.

The existing ceilings in both Galleries, and Congregation areas, have suffered some water ingress damage, and this is being repaired with modern lathing techniques, and finished in hardwall plaster with scrim coating as the existing adjacent finishes. It is interesting to note that the areas of repair recently carried out by the current owner, are that of earlier repairs carried out under ecclesiastical use also, therefore a vigorous inspection from the roof structure down, is required to identify where the ingress originates.

CONCLUSION

From the building's conception following the 'Disruption of 1843' and the formation of the Free Church of Scotland whose ministers were elected by their congregations, the Wick Free Church and patrons, financed the current Bridge Street Church building as we see it today. Over the years, this church has had many a role in, and supporting, the local community in one way or another. Since 1843, there has been eleven ministers presiding over the church's congregation, and in July 2007 the last minister, Rev. Alistair Roy MA, BD, originally from Brechin, retired after fiftytwo years of service. On 29th March 2009 the final service was held in Bridge Street Church by Rev. Ronnie Johnston, and a new alliance was forged with the New Wick St Fergus Congregation (formerly Wick Old Parish).

The Church of Scotland decided to off load the Bridge Street Church in October 2011 as surplus to requirement, to a property developer who in turn, put it up for re-sale in October 2014, and consequently purchased by local Business Man, Mr Graeme Bain.

It is concluded that this building will not be of ecclesiastical use in the foreseeable future, and that a Change-of-Use is the next rational step for the church's long term purpose in Bridge Street, and ultimately securing its maintainable listed status through amicable agreement with Highland Council's Planning Authority and Historic Scotland.

We deem to preserve as much of the original fabric possible in the refurbishment, and resurrection of such a prominent building in Wick Town Centre.