

North Aisle Project

In 2019 the lead from our N aisle roof was stolen and we had to mount a project in 2020 to reinstate the roof ([SOS Ceiling - St Michaels Church Brent Knoll](#)). In October 2021 the pews in the N aisle were removed to redecorate the walls. We thought that, provided we could demonstrate the value of the new space, the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) would permit us to continue to use the space without further significant work being done. Unfortunately, permission was not granted, and we instructed our architects, Chedburn Codd, to develop a scheme that would lower the floor of the N aisle platform and replace the wooden flooring with stone.

Following this major work we shall need to furnish the new space. The DAC are keen to ensure that any furniture that is purchased will be in keeping with the Grade 1 status of the building. We are hoping that this stage of the whole project will be specified and costed separately.

The following pages cover:

- A report on the Victorian pews that we were seeking formal permission to remove
- The sequence of planned work
- The current position and budget considerations
- A brief description of the new stone floor



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Report on pews

The DAC requested a Pew History. When were the N aisle pews introduced, and why? Before answering this Q let's look back to before the pews were removed.



This rather dismal picture shows how much space they took up. One can just make out the font in the background. This was moved from near the W tower vestry to the N aisle in 1966. There used to be very limited space for families around the font at a baptism.

We researched the pew history at the Somerset Records Office and found that:

- There was no record of the pews being purchased, so we assume that they must have been ***donated by the Vicar in the 19th C at his personal cost***
- It is probable this was the 2nd set of Victorian pews
- After WW1 dry rot was discovered in the wooden flooring that supported these pews. As a result, **all** pews were raised on platforms to avoid rising damp

One of the national bodies that had to approve our reordering plan was the Victorian Society. We were relieved when they approved our proposals last year.



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The sequence of planned work

The overall plan is to remove all furnishings and furniture from the N aisle and to lay a new stone floor.

- The first stage will be to remove the wooden parquet flooring and the Lady Chapel furniture, and to dismantle the concrete base of the platform (the font will be lifted and set aside temporarily)
- A limecrete base will then be laid on the exposed floor (limecrete “breathes” *ie is porous*, and will allow moisture through the new base)
- When the limecrete has cured sufficiently to take the weight of the new stone floor, this will then be laid, and the font will be winched back to its new site (realigned with the window spaces)
- The new stone flooring will be of **Purbeck stone** with a border of Blue **Lias** (see page below)



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Current position and budget

Following the **building work**, we shall have to **furnish** the area with tables and chairs that meet the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) specifications. We are hoping that this furnishing phase can be costed separately. This overall scheme has been welcomed by the DAC, but some further work on drainage issues still needs to be resolved. Recent work at our annual church clean up in March has unearthed some interesting issues over drainage at the NW end of the N aisle (*see separate poster on local flooding issues*).

Our major concern had been **to try to reach a decision on the contract in the 2025/6 financial year**. One reason for this was that the *Government support for VAT exemption on historic building was about to end*, and we wished to ensure that VAT would not inflate the project cost. The other reason was that specifying the work and inviting tenders for the work was going to be *the best way of determining the cost of the whole project*. On the VAT exemption front we believe that the new scheme introduced for 2026 to 2029 will mean that *we shall still be able to apply for this exemption*. However, the details of the scheme are being worked out, so we don't yet know for certain that VAT will **not** be payable. The Tender process has given us a much clearer estimate of costs, and we think that the project will now cost St Michael's church around £50k. This sounds like an alarming sum, but we have recently received a substantial legacy that should help us meet this target.



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The new stone floor



This picture is of a church that has been reordered after pew removal and shows the general effect of introducing a light coloured stone. The floor is Purbeck stone with Blue Lias “cross hatching”.

Purbeck stone should not be confused with Purbeck marble, which is dark and polished. Blue Lias is the basic floor stone of St Michael’s. However, the current floor is “rough and ready”. The colour of the *polished* Blue Lias that will be used in the N aisle will be like the stone slabs that have replaced the old broken coping stones on the S steps earlier this year. Some people have been concerned that these slabs are out of keeping with the rest of the old Blue Lias that remains. The stonemason who did the work assures us that these new slabs on the steps will weather and look like the old ones “in a year or two”.



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**There is “many a slip
twixt cup and lip” but let’s
look forward to autumn
2026 when we hope to
have completed the
building stage of our N
aisle project**

**Furnishing the space
created will provide us
with another set of
challenges....**

