

BATH AND WELLS DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TOWER ARCH SCREENS

One of the commonest congregational complaints is of draughts from areas under West Towers. The reason for these “draughts” is seldom understood. In most churches the under tower space is virtually unheated (and it is often lofty) so that warm air from the body of the church circulates into the cold part of the building and returns as a chilling convection current. (It is to prevent such draughts that particular attention is given to the heating of stage-towers in theatres).

In order to get rid of convection currents, towers are often screened off but some, or all, of the following problems can then arise:-

- Lack of ventilation – this results in the walling of the base of the tower turning green with mould, and the contents of cupboards can be similarly affected. In summer there can be a “greenhouse” effect and in winter considerable dampness.
- Screen glazing – glass in church interiors becomes quite grimy; a relatively tall screen may be fairly easy to clean on the west side if for instance there is a ringing gallery but an east side is almost impossible for anyone to clean without a scaffolding tower.
- Due to their scale, tower arch screens are often designed to include relatively large glazed areas. This can introduce alien components into an historic interior where the main parts of the fabric are composed of small elements. The resulting reflections, too, can be unwelcome and can cause glare from the lighting and windows.
- Aesthetic loss – the tower arch, west window and the fine unimpeded space are generally very notable constituents of an interior. A screen itself would comprise a major new element to the interior and would need to be commensurate in quality with the existing architecture, particularly in the case of a medieval church. This is likely to be expensive.
- Loss of accommodation – Ringers’ galleries in some churches are used as overflow spaces on festivals and other special occasions.

It is advised that before any consideration is given to screening, the heating layout should be carefully examined and that reference should be made to the booklet “Making Changes to a Listed Church” issued by the Rule Committee of General Synod – copies available from the Diocesan Registry.

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