

The Grinling Gibbons Statuary known locally as “The Angels”

Record Updated 7th November 2007

Map Reference: ST 304 494

1 Introduction

The statuary described herewith are fragments from an altar piece that was originally designed to occupy the Chapel Royal at the Palace at Whitehall, in the city of Westminster. A number of these artifacts are scattered around the Church of St Andrews Victoria Street Burnham-on-Sea.

2. Background

The queen's Chapel Royal was built at Whitehall Palace for James II and his wife, Mary of Modena created by Christopher Wren in 1686. The statues were part of an ornate altarpiece some 12m tall, designed by Inigo Jones and carved by Grinling Gibbons and his assistant Arnold Quellin the younger, an Antwerp artist. In size as well as format it resembled the façade of a baroque church, with niches, columns and life size angels and naked cherubs. It is understood that the commission was completed for the sum of £1875.1s 8d. Its design shocked Protestants and was dismantled after James left the throne; it was then put into store at Hampton Court. In 1706 Sir Christopher Wren suggested that the altar piece “*might be placed with advantage*” in the choir of the Abbey. The Queen agreed and it was accordingly reassembled at Westminster Abbey in front of the medieval altar. It was when the preparations were being carried out for George IV's coronation in 1820 that they were thought to be out of place and were offered to Walker King, who by this time had become the Bishop of Rochester as well as being the vicar of St Andrews Burnham-on-Sea. The whole arrangement was erected in St Andrews Church in its full glory (1) occupying the whole of the east wall, blocking out the light from the east window, and there it stayed until a later vicar dismantled it. The structure was cast out and discarded, some parts were later found among lumber and were once again restored to the church. Some other parts namely two columns from the second tier of the altarpiece have found their way to Sledmere House on Humberside.

The Angels were taken in the 1990's to Westminster Abbey for an exhibition and display. Some time later they were returned, but were not re-set in their plinths correctly. Other damage also occurred at this time such as the breaking of some fingers and one of the wings.

The current Parochial Church Council (PCC) is considering the possibility of carrying out a re-ordering scheme within the church. They have resolved to embrace the various component parts including the angels within any finally chosen re-ordering scheme.

Before all of this takes place a number of outside interested bodies have also made their own views known namely that of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), the Georgian Society and the St Andrews Society. The PCC are only just in possession of a condition report in respect to the angels which sets out a comprehensive programme of conservation and repair.

This has been submitted by Cliveden Workshops of Ammerdown Estate Bath in the sum of £7,183 net of vat to restore them in situ.

3. Management Status **St Andrews Church Victoria Street Burnham-on-Sea**

Designation	Monument – Conservation – Artefact – Historical - Museum
Condition	Overall Extremely Poor
Ownership	St Andrews Parochial Church Council
Summary	Two life size Angels in white statuary marble located on the west wall of the tower at the west end of the church. They form part of a larger scheme of an ornate altar piece designed by in 1686 for James II.
Integrity	Good
Site Quality	Poor with limited access – when the church is open although there is an informative group of parishioners who maintain a church watch programme from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm each day between April and November.
Future Use	To be an integral part of the proposed re-ordering of the church. On completion of the planned conservation work it is the hope of the PCC to make the angels more accessible to visitors.
Threats	Lack of money albeit grants may well be available. Another possible source of threat will undoubtedly be the insistence from various factions such as English Heritage, the DAC and the Georgian Society, all of whom have a viewpoint as to the future use of the various artefacts.



“The Angels”



“Reredos”



“The Cherubs”



“The Panel”

Pictures – Bruce Poole – November 2007



“The Complete Altar Piece”

(1)

Picture Roy Louis D Cox date unknown

Bibliography

Mr Christopher Norman – Telephone Interview – 8th November 2007 Author of “The Story of Saint Andrews Church” Booklet

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