

# THE MORTON PARTNERSHIP LTD.

CONSULTING CIVIL & STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS,  
HISTORIC BUILDING SPECIALISTS

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Registered in England No. 2727193

Our ref: BAM\BEB\7857~2h

22 October 2002

David Brown  
Pastoral Secretary  
DAC  
53 New Street  
CHELMSFORD  
CM1 1AT

Dear David,

## **RE; ST PETERS CHURCH, BIRCH**

Thank you for asking me to look at the situation at St Peters Church with regard, particularly, to dry rot infestation but I have also cast my eye generally over the church related to safety.

You were kind enough to send me the Feasibility Study report prepared by Freeland Rees Roberts Architects of 25 City Road, Cambridge dated October 1998. This report is a comprehensive document well prepared by this well known firm of Conservation Architects and is backed by a report on timber infestation by Ridout & Partners who are well known to us and can be relied upon.

Thus, my brief report within this letter relates to your requirement to ensure there is no specific danger related to falling elements of the church structure.

The northern aisle, and west end of the northern aisle, including the tower, have been protected with a scaffold sheeted corrugated iron fence which extends across the front of the west end up to the south side of the tower. This scaffolded boarding is providing adequate protection.

On the south side of the church, directly to the east side of the porch, some flints have come away over an area of about 1sq.m and there is danger of further flints falling, although to some degree protection is provided by the porch roof. There is another area further to the east where flints have fallen off adjacent to the last window on the south side, at the east end. With regard to these areas it would clearly be sensible to provide local protection with "Danger" notices just along the side of the south aisle from the porch door to the east end of the aisle. This could take the form of a post and rail fence with warning notices. There are, of course, dangers from other areas that have not been hoarded but there are no obvious signs of flint failure related to its bedding back to the wall.

There are a few odd loose slates, but these will simply slide down into the gutter.

The Stirling board (very poor quality chipboard) is deteriorating to the windows and to the west window of the south aisle the top section is falling away and needs to be refixed while the remainder of the Stirling board is deteriorating.

Internally any possible danger relates to the north aisle and the north side of the nave. Although areas of the aisle have been marked off with tape, my thought is that I would like to see the whole of the north side of the nave taped off from the left hand reveal (north) of the main church door down to the chancel arch. Taping this area off will prevent visitors getting onto the pews that have been affected by dry rot and also will protect them from any timber, or lengths of conduit, that may fall off due to dry rot infestation of the timber.

## ST PETERS CHURCH, BIRCH

The dry rot infestation, as far as safety is concerned, affects the eaves moulding running along the front of the wall plate.

In so far as the structure of the roof is concerned, there are real signs of timber infestation and particularly cracking to one of the bases of the arch braces. Reading Brian Ridout's report he does comment about the need for replacement of these arch braces. I do believe this is a situation where the roof should be looked at again related to dry rot infestation in. say, two years' time. This is because, although load will redistribute itself through the rafters into the eaves over the arcade, there could be a real danger in due course of structural failures occurring.

I am sorry to be somewhat gloomy about the condition of the church. I do hope that the proposed users are successful.

I simply add a comment that the Feasibility Report is very well written and very adequately covers the repair of the structure, spire, tower, roofs and stonework throughout. I do hope the costs associated with the Feasibility report have been properly considered.

If I can help further please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,  
**FOR THE MORTON PARTNERSHIP,**

Dictated by Brian Morton but sent in his absence

**BRIAN A. MORTON C.Eng MICE Dip Conservation(AA) IHBC**