

**Closed church of Frosterley St Michael & All Angels: Statement of Significance and Needs
Faculty Petition OFS Application Ref: 2024-095661**

Confirmatory faculty for removal of Frosterley Marble font, pews and other contents.

SCHEDULE OF WORKS OR PROPOSALS:

1. The Frosterley Marble font and following contents removed and relocated to the Weardale Museum:
 - Frosterley Marble Font and associated brass plaque. (With temporary secure storage provided at the yard store of Coverdale Hughes Ltd until such time as High House Chapel, at the Weardale Museum, is able to receive and install it).
 - 8no. bibles and books – some with dedications and illustrated pages.
 - Frosterley Mens' Society Records – to be taken by the Museum for safekeeping and to be handed to County Archivist upon re-opening of Durham County Records Office later this year.
 - 2no. Royal British Legion Banners
 - The Scouts Banner
 - The Mothers Union banner
 - The brass Altar Crucifix and Candlesticks
 - The processional cross
2. **The removal of twelve fixed pews.**

12 no. fixed pews removed from in-situ in the north aisle. These either to remain stored in the property until the point of disposal of the closed church OR a number of pews (four in total) and any number of carved pew-ends to be given to the Frosterley Village Hall & Institute for preservation, use and display, and other pews to be given, or sold, to members of the parish, as might be requested.
3. **Frosterley Village Hall & Institute to remove and take the following:**
 - Priests' Name Board for preservation and display in the hall.

Context to the petition and submission of draft documents:

The church of Frosterley St Michael and All Angels was closed for worship 1st June 2019 through a scheme made by the Church Commissioners under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. A pastoral (disposal) scheme made on 23 October 2023 provides that the closed church and part of the annexed churchyard land is to be appropriated for residential use. Planning permission [DM/20/02182/FPA] and Listed Building Consent [DM/20/02183/LB] have been secured for the proposed change of use.

After marketing and public consultation, the Church Commissioners and Durham DBF seek to complete on the sale of the church to a motivated buyer who promises to put the church to its agreed new use. It was imperative that artefacts and contents which hold local and regional significance had their future secured and found an appropriate new home. Interim faculty was granted for the relocation of these contents to ensure their preservation and continued enjoyment. Works for the removal of the Frosterley marble font and pews also ensured that the listed building consent, granted in February 2021, was secured.

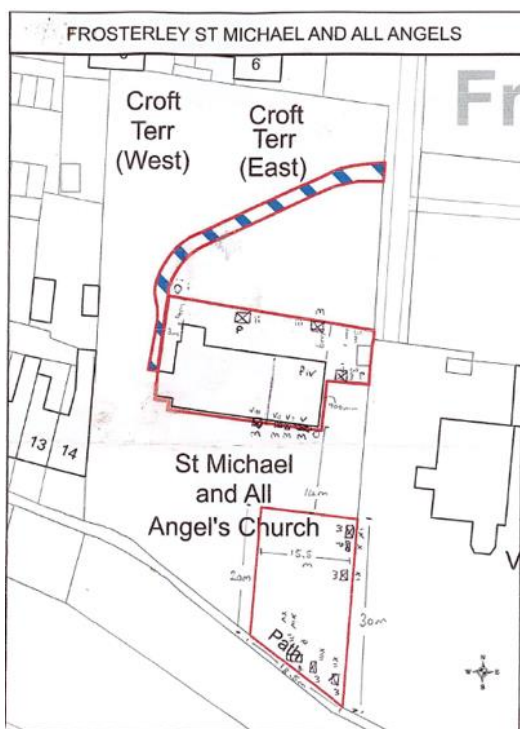
Statement of Significance – The Church:

The closed church of St Michael and All Angels (Title DU383456) is grade II listed ([1231459](#)) and lies within the Frosterley Conservation Area. The 2018 CBC report (PM 2455 - attached) describes the church:



Church Description (CBC Report PM [2455](#)): “Parish church, 1868-69 replacing chapel of ease of c1830 on a different site... a mature and highly attractive work by George Edmund Street, accomplished architect of the Gothic Revival.... Four-bay chancel and sanctuary, four-bay nave and N aisle, organ chamber and vestry N of chancel and sanctuary, two-stage W tower, N porch on W bay of N aisle. The churchyard is medium sized. It is roughly rectangular the long side oriented N-S with the church in the centre. On the S side, a wedge-shaped area is sliced off the rectangle by a foot path which runs alongside the railway line. The churchyard is a green haven, with a variety of trees...”

The Disposal Scheme for residential use:



“ a fine and intact example of the revived early Decorated style by [a] leading architect of the Gothic Revival, [in] his more purist manner; the result, a harmonious and satisfying composition, well integrated to its environment by the use of local materials and making a dramatic impact on the village scene and wider views by virtue of its elegant spire while, close to, forming the main accent to the green centre of the village.”

With the Church Commissioners, Durham DBF has taken the professional advice of agents in seeking an appropriate and alternative new use for the building. Prior to making the scheme for disposal for residential use, the property has been publicly marketed and undergone public consultations through the planning process and through the Mission and Pastoral Measure. This included two drop-in sessions provided by the Diocese and Church Commissioners for parishioners and local residents. There is support in the village and parish for the new residential use and, in preparation for this, many of the contents of the closed church including the organ, altar and marble font, have been removed under the provisions of faculty and listed building consent.

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i. **Statement of Significance Frosterley Marble Font:**

Described by the CBC's report:

"The star item, a magnificent font made entirely of Frosterley marble, the best example of this prized stone on public show in the village and in that way a key marker of the community's identity..."

At the E end of the N aisle: a magnificent font with a dodecagonal bowl resting on a thick circular stem and round base on a keyhole-shaped platform; polished Frosterley marble, displaying large and prominent specimens of the white fossils for which the stone is prized, made 1888. The font was made for All Saints church, Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, to commemorate three members of the Bacon family who died in the 1880s (the celebrant's step bears an incised inscription accordingly). The parish installed a new font in 1967 and buried this one in the churchyard; it was retrieved in around 1986, repolished and installed here on the initiative of Basil Noble, to display the qualities of Frosterley marble (see Miscellanea and More detailed history below). The font cover is original, circular form, with six scrolls radiating from a turned spindle in the centre; it is made of walnut or mahogany. A plaque on the N wall of the aisle records the bringing of the font here and its rededication on 29/10/1989."



Statement of Needs (Frosterley Marble Font):

[Please also refer to separate statements made by the Weardale Museum]

The Frosterley Marble Font has been removed from the closed church (by interim faculty) into temporary storage and is to be set into High House Chapel, at the Museum, upon its reopening. The aim is to salvage the font prior to the building's disposal for conversion to private residential use. There is listed building consent in place for its removal. The Museum provides a sense of place for those who live and visit Weardale by telling the stories of its history and heritage. Attached is Grade 2 Listed 1760 High House Chapel. As they develop the property to create The Weardale Heritage Centre they seek additional artefacts to demonstrate and explain the Weardale story. Acting under the advice of their Design and Conservation Stone Mason Consultants, they are committed to conserving all acquisitions.

The Museum will provide a permanent place of safety and significance for the Frosterley Marble Font, thus retaining this unique item of spiritual, social and heritage value in Weardale. When re-located to *The Weardale Heritage Centre* it would become an artefact for display and not used for the purpose for which it was created (baptisms) other than to be placed at the entrance to the former High House Chapel, serving as a reminder to those who enter of their baptism and for pilgrims and believers, of their Christian faith whilst also demonstrating the geological beauty of Wearhead. Despite efforts to find a new permanent home for the Frosterley Font elsewhere in the Diocese, this has not been possible. The Parish Church and the Weardale Museum have enjoyed a long and close association since the creation of the Museum in 1985. Fully accredited by The Arts Council for England, the museum is the custodian of some 17,000 Weardale related artefacts and believe The Weardale Heritage Centre at High House Chapel will provide a fitting location for the Font to be preserved and appreciated by the Weardale community and worldwide visitors alike.

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ii. Statement of Significance Contents Fixed Oak Pews with Carved Ends:

CBC Report Describes:

“In the nave and N aisle: a substantial part of a purpose-made suite of congregational seating consisting of three blocks of fixed pews as follows:

- *12 on the S side of the nave: 11 four-seaters and a three-seater at the W end (perhaps resited from the E end of the N aisle, where four rows have been removed),*
- *11 on the N side of the nave: 9 seven-seaters and two four-seaters abutting the first and last arcade piers with single seats the other side,*
- **12 in the N aisle, all three-seaters.**

All stand on deal floorboards flush with the surrounding floor and are accessed via the central W-E alley in the nave and from the N aisle alley. Each pew consists of a simple bench seat, a raked plain-panelled back and bench-ends shaped to provide a curved armrest terminating in a foliate-carved upstand; the thickness of the timber has reeded ornament. There are bookrests and kneelers attached to the back of each pew except those at the rear, which have panelled backs. The front bench in each block has a pew front showing panels defined by traceried muntins with flowerheads and top rails with mouchettes. Construction is of oak throughout, perhaps c1869 and if so designed by G E Street, but more likely later C19 or early C20. The quality and condition is excellent. The seating conforms to the 1869 Street plan...”



All pew ends have been recorded by *Belief in the North East Project* as part of a complete Level 2 Historic Building Record of the interior taken prior to the property’s point of sale, after which many features may be removed, as per the Listed Building Consent secured for residential conversion. This will be provided as a Historic Environment Record with Durham County Records Office and established the pews are not original to the G E Street church but date from the early C20 Arts & Crafts period and replaced plain dark (stained) pine pews, examples of which appear to remain in vestry and elsewhere.

Statement of Needs – Pews:

In addition to removal of the Marble Font, DAC also recommended Durham DBF’s proposal to remove 9 -12 pews, (to remain in church but with future potential for the buyer of the closed church to allow some to go the Village Hall and members of the parish). Removal of the fixed pews to the north aisle was required to allow practical removal of the marble font and to ensure a start to the works as per the listed building consent which had been secured, and to the architect’s plans for residential conversion.

The removed pews remain inside the closed church and have been stacked in the former organ chamber and also line the north wall. Much of the oak will be appropriately re-used in the church’s conversion to residential use. If any of the oak remains, individual requests can be made to the buyer of the closed church. It is hoped a number (four pews) and a number of the carved pew ends might be acquired by the Village Hall for continued public use and future show. (NB – This entirely to the discretion of the buyer of the closed church.)

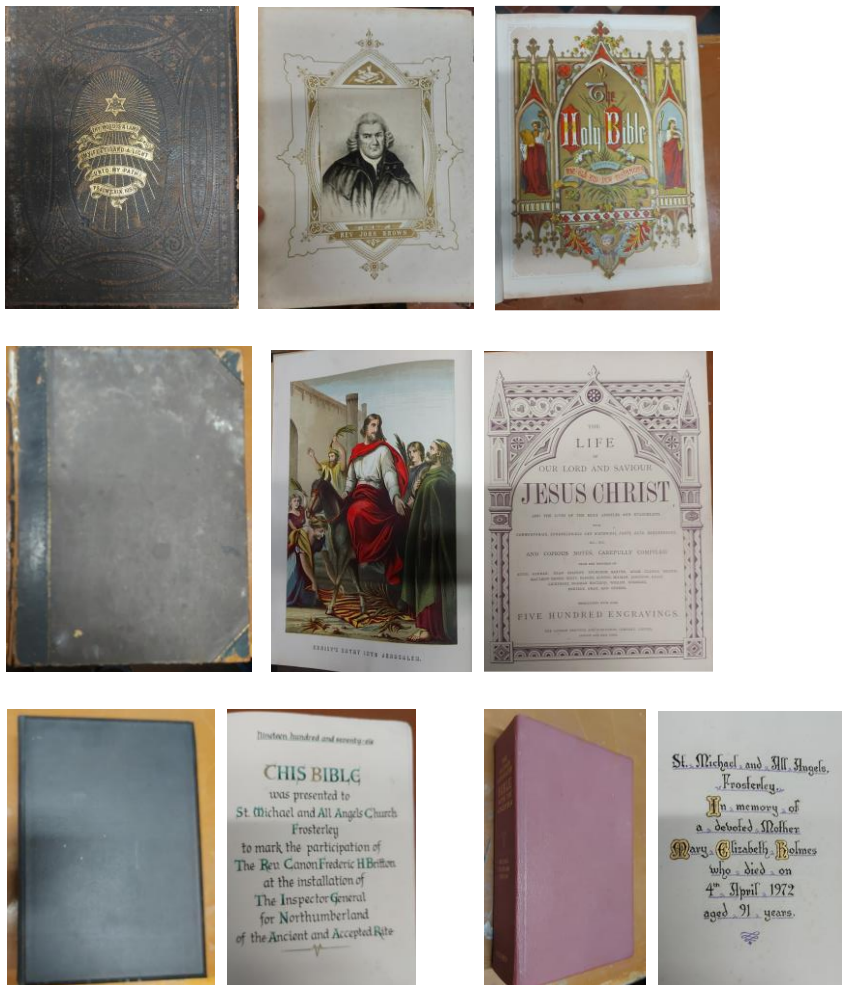
iii. **Statement of Significance and Needs - Other Contents to the Weardale Museum:**

Due to the impending disposal of the closed church for conversion to residential use, there is urgent need to secure the future of the following contents. As the Weardale Museum develops to create 'The Weardale Heritage Centre' they seek additional artefacts to further demonstrate and explain the Weardale story. Acting under the advice of their Design and Conservation Stone Mason Consultants, the museum is committed to conserving all acquisitions. The following items from St Michael's Church will initially be stored in their secure storage until the extension of the Museum into High House Chapel is completed. Once completed they will be displayed in the exhibition gallery in the Chapel. Their plan is to have an exhibition highlighting religion in Weardale and its links with peoples' working, social and domestic lives. As most of their current religious artefacts are linked to Methodism the items from Frosterley will broaden this 'story' and allow the Museum to tell a fuller tale of Dales people lives.

Royal British Legion Standards (x2) and Girl Guides Banner



Church Bibles and Illustrated Books: (8 in total – examples as follows:)



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Altar Cross and 2 no. altar candle holders; processional cross, Mothers Union Banner and Frosterley Mens's Society Records:



CBC Report: “altar cross with arms terminating in fleur de lys and a swept base standing on paw feet; brass with inset glass, probably contemporary with the altar, ie c1907 (see photo of reredos);”

“pair of altar candlesticks, each with a crenellated dripray, knopped shaft with five shaft rings and a pierced conical base on three round feet; brass, c1870, probably part of the original furnishings;”
 a processional cross with foliate arms, the figure of Christ crucified with a sunburst behind him; brass on an ebony rod, late C19.”



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Other contents – Priests’ Name board to the Frosterley Village Hall:



Priests’ Name board

CBC Report: “On the S wall of the ground floor stage of the tower: a vicars board recording in gilt lettering the last two chaplains of St Botolph’s and the incumbents of the parish of Frosterley from 1849; wooden board in a hardwood frame embellished with the arms of the diocese, c1950 with subsequent names added. CBC Report: “It is thought the village may originally have been named after St Botolph. The earliest reference to the place-name 'Frosterley' occurs in the Bolden Book of 1183 and then the Close Rolls of 1239, where it appears as Forsterlegh, meaning 'the forester's clearing'.”

“Low significance” but of importance to the parish.

This has gone to the Village Hall (institute Building) for continued public display in the village.

February 2024
Dan Spraggon
Church Buildings Support Officer
Durham Diocese