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## Chipping Ongar church pews dedicated to suffragette icon must move



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A TOP ecclesiastical judge will decide where two pews dedicated to Emmeline Pankurst, the leader of Britain's suffragette movement, can be moved to inside a Chipping Ongar church.

St Martin's rector, the Reverend Susan Cooper, and its church wardens had sought approval from the Church of England to move the Pankhurst Pews in order to create more room in the church.



relocation: Warden Dianne Stratton and the Rev Susan Cooper beside the pews at St Martin's (above)

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----- St martins Ongar

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vote struggle: The pews were dedicated to Emmeline Pankhurst after her death in 1928

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The pews, bought by Pankhurst's friend Kitty Marshall with £200 from her memorial fund, are currently positioned in the chancel, which the church council wants to use for a new altar.

The altar's current position means the person holding the service has their back to the congregation.

Carved with the initials EP, the benches were especially designed and built for the church following her death in 1928.

The Rev Cooper said by installing a new altar at the junction of the nave and chancel, more of the congregation would be able to see and hear the service more clearly.

She said: "We need to move the Pankhurst Pews somewhere else.

"You need permission to do anything in a church. We want to put down a new carpet and we need permission to change the colour.

"It's important that we keep to those strict rules to stop willy-nilly changes spoiling the church.

"It's sensible. It just takes a long time. People have to have a chance to object.

"We have made a couple of suggestions where the pews can go. We just have to wait for the Chancellor of the Diocese of Chelmsford to make a decision."

George Pulman QC, Chancellor of the Diocese of Chelmsford and a judge of the Consistory Court, said that Pankhurst worshipped at the church on a few occasions and that the pews were especially designed and built for the church in her honour.

In refusing permission for their permanent removal from the church, he said: "I conclude, firstly, that moving the Pankhurst Pews from their present position can be permitted.

"This is because such a move contributes to the worship and work of the church.

"Their historic context does not require these stalls to remain in their present position.

"It will, therefore, be necessary to find a place in the church where the stalls can be properly positioned.

"The place must be such that the pews are capable of being used for worship by congregation or by choir."

Kitty Marshall, who lived in Ongar and was a close friend and supporter of suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, was arrested several times and spent many weeks in Holloway prison in the 1910s.

She was once in trouble with the authorities for throwing a potato at the light above the front door of the then home secretary Winston Churchill.

She was also arrested for driving Mrs Pankhurst to 10 Downing Street and throwing stones at a window. A date for the decision has yet to be confirmed.

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