

St. Mary's Riverhead with Dunton Green

Annual Churchwardens' Report – 2017

Looking back to the report we gave last year reminds us that many of the problems and challenges we were facing then are still with us today. However, we have made some progress with the old chestnuts, and have even managed to start some new ones!

We didn't succeed in getting any money from the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund after our second bid last year. However, we have drawn up a schedule of necessary repairs and improvements based on our last Quinquennial Report, and are slowly (with the hope now of help from some volunteers) getting to grips with them. Some of these repairs can be funded from our Building Repairs Fund, but we may need some additional monies eventually. We may have to apply for some funding, or even attempt to fund raise ourselves.

At least one knotty problem is nearing completion at last. After a protracted and frustrating period of waiting for planning permission, the faculty has at last been approved and the new pillar light should be installed in the car park in the not too distant future. It's been a long haul but we are almost there. Some new notices have been installed in the car park, and we are planning to replace the out-of-date notices regarding unauthorised parking. It is gratifying to note however, that although the parking in Shoreham Lane has become problematic since charges have been imposed in the Harvester car park, we have had no significant encroachment on the Church Car Park. Long may it last! The PCC did write to Sevenoaks District Council about the Shoreham Lane parking but their reply indicated that it would be a long time before they could deal with it! Let's hope there isn't an accident in the meantime.

With regard to installing a new lighting system in the church, this has not fared so well, We are always hopeful that we can eventually find a way to replace the present outmoded lights with a more cost effective and efficient alternative. It is just proving very difficult to find one.

The grant we obtained from Tesco's Bags of Help Scheme is being put to good use, and the tree work, general tidying of hedges, planting of wild flower plugs, etc. is proving very beneficial. One secondary but important additional benefit has been the involvement of the local children from Amherst School in the planting of the wild flower plugs and the making and installation of bird boxes. They have really enjoyed the experience, and are also hoping to hold a coffee morning next term in the church hall, which they will organise and host themselves. The proceeds will go to a charity of our choice. A win-win situation.

Another important and successful project this year has been the installation of our new organ, and it is gratifying to know that the old Copeman Hart organ has found a new home, and having been extensively renovated, performed in a celebratory concert at Walthamstow Hall School in March. Once again, a secondary additional benefit is that the proceeds from the concert came to St. Mary's. Another win-win!

No sooner has one faculty been granted but another one raises its head. The step up from the nave to the chancel is proving a problem for some members of the congregation, so we are currently obtaining quotations from local ironworkers for suitable handrails to be installed, and will then submit a Statement of Need to the diocese for their consideration. If they agree we can then apply for the necessary faculty.

We are also still investigating the possibility of converting the organ loft so that more use can be made of the useful space it provides. Our Architect Chris Rayner is currently looking at the question of the construction of some sort of sound proofing screen for the aperture above the balcony so that the room can be used during services without disrupting proceedings in the church. If this problem can be addressed we will attempt to work out the possible costs involved in turning the whole of the "above stairs" part of the church into a presentable, safe and comfortable area. We will then present these to the PCC for their consideration. If this project is approved we will, of course, eventually have to apply for yet another faculty. Onwards and upwards!

In the hall, the PCC decided that after more than 15 years the kitchen could do with an overhaul, so during the August holidays the units were ripped out and replaced, and at the same time a fast dishwasher, a constant hot-water supply, a coffee maker and a heated plate drawer were installed. This should make catering much easier, particularly with the Lent Lunch and at Easter with the Passover Supper and Easter Breakfast. At the same time a new floor was installed in the kitchen. Kathryn Woodward undertook regular cleaning of the hall this year and also managed the hall bookings. We are very grateful to her and to Margaret Nicholas for their efficient work in looking after the hall.

As always, the Churchwardens are very grateful to the many people who work often unseen behind the scenes. When the appeal was made recently for volunteers to assist us, many new people came forward, so our thanks go to them. At the same time, we are sure that many others felt it unnecessary to return the form as they were already doing so much for the church. Their work is gratefully acknowledged. There are too many to name here (you know who you are), but I will make an exception with Robert McLintock who continued his valuable work with the Fabric Committee and was especially useful in monitoring and testing the lightning conductor this year, and in helping with the planning application for the new car park light.

We also extend a very big thank you to Martin and Maggie for everything they do to make the life of the parish so vibrant and fulfilling.

The Churchwardens
March 2017