

ST MARY THE VIRGIN RIVERHEAD WITH DUNTON GREEN

ANNUAL CHURCHWARDENS REPORT – 2015/16

Every year tends to be a busy one for those of us who are tasked with the job of caring for the fabric of a church, especially when it involves a listed church which is endowed with all the irregularities and idiosyncrasies of such a one as ours. This year has been no exception, and indeed has been busier than most, with so many on-going projects to deal with, and mostly still in the pipeline.

Probably our most challenging to date has been the grant application we made to the Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund at the beginning of the year. Sadly all our hard work (especially by Robert McLintock, to whom we owe particular thanks) in submitting a very detailed bid, did not bear fruit. However, the Government has graciously allowed us another bite of the cherry, and our follow up bid has been registered. We will not hear if we have been successful until June, but we are hoping that we will reap some reward for our efforts this time, as the roof continues to leak, and despite constant vigilance and attention resists all attempts to make the building watertight. If we can obtain a grant for more extensive investigation and work this could make all the difference to the health and well being of the building. The Quinquennial Inspection of the church was due in October this year, but because of the need to submit our revised bid to the LPWRF, our Architect Chris Rayner obtained permission from the Diocese to bring the inspection forward, and it duly took place on 1st February. Chris has therefore been able to adjust the bid in light of the deterioration of the roof in the intervening period, and to stress the need for a means of safe access to the interior of the roof so that a thorough inspection can be carried out. We are sincerely hoping that all the hard work has not been in vain!

Our second knotty problem has been the question of the car park lights. The bollard style lights have been a problem almost since their inception. We could possibly have coped with the damage inflicted on them by cars (especially 4x4s) but when they were vandalised during the summer frivolities of marauding youths, we felt that we, and they, had had enough. Having rejected several alternatives we are currently awaiting a second estimate for a suitable replacement. When we have finally fixed on, and had approved, a replacement lighting system, we intend to undertake a thorough audit of the car park, revising and replacing notices and marking out car park places at church level. We are constantly dealing with unauthorised parking, and whilst we do not want to be seen as draconian and unfriendly to the community at large, we need to ensure that adequate and safe parking is available to church and hall users.

Whilst on the subject of lights, we also have to seriously contemplate a new lighting system for the inside of the church. Our existing lights are rapidly becoming beyond their sell by date, and we are aiming to replace them with a system which would not only provide improved illumination, but also be much cheaper to run. There are several alternatives on offer, and these will be presented to the PCC for their comments and consideration in due course, and we will then be able to take matters forward.

As already mentioned, we had to deal with a great deal of unruly behaviour and vandalism during the summer months. This was particularly prevalent in and around the Garden of Remembrance, and caused a great deal of anxiety and unpleasantness to our neighbours in Amherst Place. We were invited to attend meetings at the District Council Offices with the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer and the Police, and with the co-operation of the local P.S.O. it was brought under control. Perhaps the onset of wet and windy weather may have had something to do with it too! During that time we also had break-ins to the Hall, and minor damage and theft occurred. The police managed to apprehend a culprit who carelessly left a finger print behind but unfortunately he had probably already consumed the Fairtrade chocolate he had made off with. Anyway we didn't get it back!

The church is always, as you know, trying to make ends meet. There never seems to be enough money to meet all our many commitments. However, we have been offered some funds from an unlikely source, that source being Tesco's! We were approached by the Northwest Kent Countryside Partnership who wanted to put in a bid on our behalf so that we could possibly obtain a substantial amount of money through the Bags of Help scheme developed by Tesco. We have actually been granted one of three possible amounts (£12,000, £10,000 or £8,000) to be decided by a vote. When we

know the final amount the NWKCP team will work with Groundwork and ourselves to develop and improve the churchyard and Garden of Remembrance. Stand by for further details in due course!

Our new organ should be installed very soon, and we are all, of course, very much looking forward to its arrival. The old speakers presently housed in the organ loft will be re-sited to behind the old organ pipes, and four additional speakers will be installed on a shelf in the organ vestry next to the heating header tank. This will involve the construction of a custom built structure to house them. We have had the assistance and advice of our Architect and a Structural Engineer to ensure the structure is fit for purpose and that the speakers will be held securely and safely.

As well as the church and churchyard, things have also been going on in the Church Hall this year too. It took a long time for the floors to dry out after the flood resulting from vandalism last year, but a team of eager beavers set to, gave the hall a thorough cleaning and freshened up some of the paint work. The toilets were also tackled, and we think the removal of the partition in the small toilet has made a big improvement. You may also notice that the door now boasts a door bell, which means that groups can now lock the outside door and not leave late comers frustrated outside, unable to make themselves heard. This move has become necessary due to nuisance callers during classes etc. At least now the only nuisance they can cause is ringing and running!

The Churchwardens have, as usual, a great many people to thank for the tireless and valuable work they do to help ensure that St. Mary's is such a welcoming and thriving church community. First of all, as already mentioned, our grateful thanks go to Robert for all he does as a member of the Fabric Committee and in his efficient and imaginative managing of our Website. Thanks also to Margaret Nicholas, not only for all her hard work in her position as Administrator, but for all the "add on" duties she undertakes in all areas of the church. Thanks also to Geoff Holland for continuing to keep an eye on the clock, (making sure that it is correct to the nearest second!) Thank you to the Servers and the Sacristans who along with the Sidespersons, Intercessors, Readers, and Chalice Administrators, perform their duties efficiently and reverently before and during our services, and also to Bennet Smith for keeping the candles trim and burning brightly. Thank you to our choir, and especially to Janet, Daniel and Nick for their wonderful contribution to the music in the church. Thanks to the flower arrangers, who week by week and during festivals decorate our church so beautifully. Thanks also to those who help to keep the Garden of Remembrance such a special area, and those who ensure the bins are emptied regularly. A mundane task, but very necessary! Thanks to Rosemary McLintock for her work as Parish Disclosure Officer and to Zoe Bromwich as Parish Children's Representative. It's great to see such a thriving Sunday School, ably led by Nicola, Anne and Jo; Tots and Toddlers also continues to be popular. Thank you team for all your hard work. Thank you to Margaret Curtis and the Events Team, and to Bennet Smith and Anne Straight for their hard work organising the Traidcraft Stall, and to the Lunch Club cooks and helpers. We are grateful to the PCC, and to Stuart Wigley and Ronnie Todd for their continuing support. Our special thanks go to Martyn Berry and Doris Gosnold for their hard work and dedication to St. Mary's and to Audrey Bernardi who is leaving us after so many years of faithful service here in Riverhead. Thanks also to Peter Flynn for his continuing stand-in duties, so ably performed. Last but by no means least, a VERY BIG THANK YOU to Martin and Maggie for all they do. Martin for his tireless work in the cause of helping to make St. Mary's what it is today and will be in the future, and to Maggie for her huge contribution to life in the parish, and for looking after our Vicar so well!

The Churchwardens