

Annual Parochial Church Meeting - 24th April 2022

CHURCHWARDENS' FABRIC REPORT 2021

Once again the lockdowns due to the pandemic, allied to continued poor health for our Church Architect, Edward Sargent, ensured that no major work to the church took place in 2021. This was again unfortunate as the several areas that needed attention have been able to deteriorate further which will probably increase the eventual cost of repair.

Quinquennial Survey

This was undertaken by Karen Butti of Thomas Ford & Partners on Friday 4 June 2021 but the report was not received until September. One item was flagged as urgent on the day of the survey, that of the state of the Victorian wall between the old churchyard and the Tryhorn field. This had started to collapse and was unsafe so, at Ms Butti's, direction has been marked off with a hazard-tape barrier. At the time of writing, we are still awaiting the promised plan of works to enable the repairs to be commissioned but recent interaction with Edward Sargent, Church Architect, suggests this will be dealt with very soon.

Other urgent works identified as requiring attention within 12 months were given as

- Replacing a small pane of fractured glass in a vestry window
- Add a pull bar and full view mirror to the accessible WC
- Re-lay Memorial Garden paving

Strangely the poor condition of the spire was covered in the report but not listed under the Recommendations. However, the Standing Committee recognised that this work should be given priority if damage to the bells and tower fabric is to be avoided. Edward Sargent and Karen Butti are now working together on a plan of works for this and other aspects identified in the report. It is expected to launch a fundraising appeal for the spire later in 2022.

Church

Routine servicing of the organ, boiler and fire extinguishers took place in order to meet our statutory Health and Safety obligations, and electrical work on all the outstanding issues from last year's statutory five-year survey has now been completed.

After nearly 30 years the church boiler failed the annual inspection in June and, due to the age of the system, the service company were unable to find the spares required to repair it. It therefore had to be replaced so Barry Foale undertook some research to help the PCC to assess all the available options. Despite several attempts to get advice from the DAC, particularly in the area of using renewable energy sources in a 12th Century church, no guidance was forthcoming. Advice was therefore sought from the recommended specialist boiler company for Southwark Diocese and a new gas boiler was installed in September but with the ability to switch to new technologies as they become available.

The lightning conductor also failed the safety test this year, unexpectedly, so remedial works were required to bring it up to current standards.

An issue was identified with the church water supply in November. Although Thames Water testing found that it was safe to drink, it was very discoloured and foul smelling. Despite lengthy investigations by Thames Water Quality Team the cause has not been found but the water returned to apparently normal just before Christmas.

Well Hill Mission

As mentioned in the PCC report regular repairs and maintenance to the church and grounds were carried out by volunteers. No major work was necessary during the year.

Parish Room

The parish room is still being used on a regular basis by the charity 'Living On', albeit with gaps due to the pandemic. The charity paid for the electrical installation in the building to be improved during the course of the year.

Churchyard

The churchyard continues to be maintained by Ferns Gardens (Michael Pocock), with whom we have a contract, under which they provide a basic level of maintenance on a monthly scheduled basis. An additional trim of the Tryhorn Field was undertaken in the autumn so that it looked tidy during the winter months. The Churchyard Working Parties are now established on the first Saturday in the month and do a huge amount to keep the large area looking cared-for. In addition, members of the group have helped to clear gutters and gulleys and clean the Brass Crosby windows.

As detailed above, the Victorian wall by the Tryhorn is now unsafe and needs to be repaired or rebuilt urgently. Until the repair has been completed no work should be undertaken within 6 feet of the wall without the agreement of the Churchwardens.

The five-year survey and dead wood clearance of the Lime trees and Scots Pine on the drive took place in May. The cost of the survey was covered by Chelsfield Charities. No immediate problems were found but it was recommended that a potentially weak area on the Scots Pine be watched for any change. This was done, with no change spotted, but sadly Storm Eunice made a great change in that spot in February 2022 when the top section of the tree broke off. Fortunately no one was hurt and there was no damage to the church.

Following a recommendation by the Diocesan Tree Advisors the Yew tree outside the vestry door was pollarded by 3m in an attempt to prolong its life. A recurring problem over the last year has been large branches from trees from the British Gas site next to the East churchyard breaking off in high winds and falling on graves. It is very fortunate that no damage has been done to gravestones. The site manager is always very apologetic and prompt at getting their groundsmen to dispose of the branches.

There was a much higher footfall through the churchyard during lockdowns as people took their daily exercise. While we are glad that more people are seeing our beautiful church, and may hopefully venture in, one area of concern is the impact this increased traffic has had on the paths and grass. The churchwardens are looking at ways to improve footpaths and remind users of the official routes. Another problem has been the increased litter, which the working parties have kindly helped deal with, but we are still looking for a volunteer to take over regular emptying of the bins.

Another area of difficulty is the increase in grave decorations that are in breach of the Churchyard Regulations. It is very difficult to 'police' this area without appearing insensitive to grieving relatives. The Diocese have been planning to release revised Regulations for the last five years but they have not yet appeared. It is difficult to insist the current ones, which are 40 years old, are enforced if an element under dispute is then found not to be an issue in the new ones.

The owner of Court Lodge was affected by several attempted break-ins during the lockdowns, with the perpetrators gaining access from the church car park and churchyard. Mrs Needham has since replaced and increased the height of fences and installed other measures to try to improve security. She also paid for the rebuild of the top of the wall alongside the path leading to the porch.

A plaque is being commissioned for the oak tree planted in the Tryhorn to commemorate the long service in and to the Parish by Leslie Virgo. Another oak tree has just been planted in the Tryhorn which will be blessed on Jubilee weekend in honour of HM The Queen.

Philippa Rooke & Paul Gosling