

The Churchwarden's Annual Report presented to the Annual Parochial Church Council Meeting of the Blessed Church of St Mary the Virgin Wambrook, for the Year Ending December 2022.

Fabric Report

Following the repairs and re-furbishment's greatly assisted by funding awards from HM Government, (L.P.O.W II) and Historic England (H.E.) The fabric of the building is generally in good order. Minor issues are still ongoing where funding and 'permissions to proceed' are an issue. These are namely:- The interior décor, which will need to be addressed as soon as funds are available and final permission from the DAC. For the community toilet installation. We are confident that the latter item will be resolved in the coming reporting period.

Occasional ingress of water has been noted, having run down the inside face of the south facing wall of the Tower. Following investigation, we are confident that this is caused by extreme south westerly winds and very heavy rain combining to be blown through the open vented window on the upper south aspect of the Tower. If this increases in frequency, then remedial action will have to be addressed.

Following repairs, the organ has continued to work perfectly, with some organists commenting on how good it sounds since the repairs.

A desk lamp has been provided for the organist, thru private donation.

We were approached in early summer, by the 'National Bats In Churches' survey team who wished to carry out a survey in the Church. These surveys are carried out by, 'Bats In Churches' through a partnership with 'Natural England', the 'Church of England', the 'Bat Conservation Trust', the 'Churches Conservation Trust' and 'Historic England' funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Signs of a rare species of bat were discovered in the Church. It's scientific name is, 'Plecotus Austriacus', a grey long eared bat weighing a mere 10g. This discovery was mentioned in the 'Church Times' in November 2022.

Signs of rodent activity on one of the altar cloths was discovered and action was swiftly taken to combat the problem which appears to have been successful.

Precision photography of the archway between the Chancel and Nave was completed and no sign of any movement was detected. This is now the sixth year that this survey has been routinely undertaken.

The curtain rail inside the west door needs remedial action/repair to reduce through draughts when the heating is in use, in order to reduce energy costs. In turn, the west door is in need of attention, when funds allow.

Cleaning and Flower arrangements

I thank all those who have given their time, to carry out the regular cleaning and flower arranging in the Church during the past year and I sincerely hope they will continue to do so. Thanks must also be given to those who give their time drawing up the cleaning and flower rota. Their work is appreciated.

Attendance at Services

Attendance at regular services has diminished slightly. It is likely that there is still some hang back following the lifting of Covid restrictions. Attendance at notable Services has again dropped very slightly, but there is no obvious reason other than natural ebb and flow.

Service preparation

Thanks are due to the worshipping community, who attend the Church for service preparation and for stowing everything away after the service, including the reading of the first lesson. Again, their help is appreciated.

The Bells

The bells under the guidance of the Captain of the Tower, have not been regularly rung. This has been entirely due to the availability of ringers. Going forward it is hoped that the bells will ring out on a regular basis. Despite that, the bells were rung at some special Services, thanks to the good offices of the Captain of the Tower.

The Churchyard

Volunteer teams of mower and strimming operators, have continued to mow and trim the grass on a regular basis. The grass recovered through the hot summer and has stood up well during the winter thus far. Some re-wilding on the south aspect of the Churchyard was introduced, which in it's first year really was a success and will be a continuing feature. This years mowing teams were busy throughout the cutting season and the Churchyard is something we can be rightly proud of. The working party in October, completed the regular trimming and tidying up in preparation for the winter months. Remember that anyone can join in at any time and is actively welcomed. One of the oak posts on the main entrance gate has broken and will need replacement when funds, materiel and labour are available. Again, I thank, those who have given their time to these activities during the year, not forgetting those who set out the rota's and spreadsheets.

Advice has been sought on the best method for the disposal of the 'Yew Tree' and a decision is awaited.

Safeguarding

A replacement safeguarding policy was adopted by the Wambrook APCM in May 2021, for the safety of children and vulnerable adults alike. Our safeguarding officer Peter Stefanovic, is available within the 'Cloverleaf Parishes'. A copy of this policy can be downloaded from the Church website.

Health and Safety

A health and safety audit was carried out by a member of the PCC and myself. The latest version, will be available shortly as a download from the Church website.

The Clergy

Thanks as always are due to both the Rev Ann Kember and the Rev Georgina Vye and all members of the clergy, who have continued to bring new thinking, enthusiasm and vision to the Church, of which we are grateful.

The Future

Despite previous reports, a discussion has still not taken place, to encourage the greater use of the building and the matter of re-ordering of some of the internal fixtures and fittings to create community¹ space, needs to be re-visited. Delays in completing the community toilet project, despite the efforts of the team assigned to the project, have not helped but, as reported earlier. We are confident that this can be progressed during the forthcoming reporting period.

Whilst this may still be contentious in some circles, the wider community still need to decide, if they want or wish to ensure the long term viability of the building. With decreasing annual income, funds are being heavily squeezed by the increasing demands of mission, utility, repair and insurance costs. Exploring ways of reducing our carbon footprint and improving our revenue stream, is an option that could be addressed. Parochial fees again, are still the most significant financial burden at this time. With current financial trends and within the next few years, the building may not be financially viable and further discussions still need to take place, to ensure the long term future of the building, before it is too late. Identifying means to attract more people to the Church is the likely key to success, but with ever changing social attitudes, this will not be an easy task. Successful fundraising events took place during the Spring and Summer months, which helped to replenish much needed cash flow.

In conclusion

If I have omitted anyone or anything, it was not my intention and I offer my unreserved apologies and thank you all retrospectively.

Report end.

Graeme Pidgeon.

Churchwarden.

January 2023.

Reference:- The 'Community Survey' of 2014 ⁽¹⁾ can be read or downloaded from the Church website at www.wambrookparishchurch.com



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