

St Mary's Parish Church, Storrington

Fabric Officer Report to PCC, March 2016

Apologies for being unable to attend the meeting, but a long-standing invitation to a 60th birthday celebration in Vienna has got in the way.

A few weeks ago Gwen asked me to consider acting as Fabric Officer, and I was happy to agree, subject of course to the approval of the PCC. I have no formal architectural or building experience, though have always had an interest in the built environment. Although our main home is a 1980s semi, we also own an 18th century stone-built farmhouse in Normandy and a Victorian renovation project in Littlehampton. I also served for several years as a trustee of the Wey & Arun Canal Trust.

Recently, the need arose for somebody to coordinate an application for a roof repair grant, administered by the National Heritage Memorial Fund's Listed Places of Worship scheme, on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Our architect, Richard Andrews, had identified that the external repairs to the Northern roof met the criteria for this second round of funding – but there was very limited time available, as the application had to be in by midday on 26 February.

As a precursor to my formal appointment I agreed to put together the application, which consisted of an online form with numerous supporting documents. I am pleased to say that we managed to meet the deadline, and we await the announcement of the successful projects at the end of June. This could not have been achieved without the help and support of the Churchwardens, our Treasurer, our architect and, of course, the Rector.

Our architect's opinion was that we should seek grant funding for the most urgent work required, i.e. adding lead soakers at the roof slopes on either side of the gable, as this area presently has no soakers, putting it at risk of water ingress and further outbreaks of dry rot. Additionally, the east bays of the lead gutter need to be relaid with a new sole and other gutter timbers as necessary, using treated timber and new properly formed lead work. This is to replace gutter soles previously overlaid with plywood, creating steps which reduced the height of the steps and encouraged capillary action through the steps as well as increasing the risk of overflow if the gutters become blocked. Also, new lead work is needed to replace old cracked lead chute outlets, and roof tiles will need to be repaired or replaced.

These repairs are urgent and should be carried out in 2016; the criteria for the LPOW funding state that grants are only given for work which is urgently needed within the next two years.

Should our application prove successful, it may be worth considering that while the contractors, and scaffolding, are on site, further sections of guttering and roof tiles could be inspected and repaired, at our expense. Although this is not urgent it would help guard against future problems.

Costs for the urgent works have been estimated by Richard Andrews and Fowlers at £19,500 contractor's costs and £1,950 professional fees. Richard suggested we budget £2,000 contingency and £1,000 for inflation. With VAT (which is recoverable), the total project cost is £29,340. The grant application has made it clear that the corresponding work to the south roof and the internal remedial works to cure dry rot and treat the timbers have been paid for by ourselves with the help of an insurance claim and a grant from Sussex Historic Churches Trust. Therefore, we are asking the LPOW fund for a substantial contribution, i.e. £22,200, the remainder being covered through VAT recovery of £4,890 plus £2,250 from our own fundraising.

We hope and pray that our application is looked on with favour. I am away for seven weeks from 21 March on an extended holiday, and on return will be looking at future projects, including replacement guttering, soffits and bargeboards for Longland Avenue, and our Quinquennial Inspection which is due this year, but will be best carried out when the roof repairs are either at an advanced stage or completed.

Bill Thomson
March 2016