

Spire Restoration Blog

Our church was built in the mid 13th century and has been altered and enlarged over the subsequent centuries. It is a Grade II* listed building and deserves caring preservation, not only as a place of Christian worship but also part of our national heritage. Naturally, time has taken its toll and much work will need to be done in the future.



Peter Moyle -Restoration Project Manage

14th May 2014.

A committee (The Tower Committee) was created, and this evening was the inaugural meeting. The catalysts for taking this action were twofold. Firstly, the mandatory quinquennial report of May 2012 declared that the spire was in need of urgent work due to the deterioration of the cedar shingles that clad the spire. Secondly, the Tower Captain declared that the bell ringers were increasingly unhappy with sharing air space within the spire with pigeons (who have some rather unsavoury habits) whilst undertaking normal routine maintenance of our bells. The committee was led by Rev. Paul Prentice who has just taken over as Priest in Charge and comprised bell ringers, church wardens.

These photographs give some indication of the state of our spire.



9th July 2014.

The second meeting of the Tower Committee met to discuss the various activities that had been undertaken since the inaugural meeting. It had been identified at the earlier meeting that there were two essential preliminary activities to be undertaken before work could commence. Firstly permission (in the form of a Faculty) would be required from the Diocese of Rochester to allow us to proceed with any works of this nature. Secondly, it was abundantly clear that our church funds would not be able to meet the costs of repair and external funding would need to be sought. The meeting reviewed what progress had been made since the inaugural meeting. Thos Ford and Partners had been appointed as architects after a tender process, and approaches had been made to the Diocese and who supplied procedural notes on applying for a Faculty and access to the necessary forms. Thos Ford had supplied a list of potential funders and it was agreed that the committee would follow up on these.

27th August 2014.

The committee met again to review the fund granters that had been approached. It was clear that Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) would be the only organisation able to supply the level of funding required. Initial contact had been established with HLF and the necessary Guidance Notes downloaded from their web site. HLF were very helpful but the forms were daunting! In truth the committee were feeling frustrated that despite their best efforts there appeared to be no tangible progress. But now that our meetings were being conducted in a local hostelry so spirits were still high. Another really positive piece of news was that Rev Jane Winter, our new Curate, who had previous experience of running a project such as ours had joined our committee. (I also believe it was Jane's suggestion to change the venue for our meetings making her instantly the most popular member!). Work was continuing to gather all the information to support our application for Faculty.

The committee hard at work!



17th November 2014.

Some weeks ago it was realised that the complexity of the HLF forms and the technical nature of some of the questions had made it desirable to ask for the help of our appointed architect, Robert Davis of Thos Ford. As a result of this Peter Moyle and Robert Davis met with HLF in their Sloane Sq offices. That significantly increased our ability to prepare an acceptable First Round Application to HLF for funding. By now this work was at fever pitch as the deadline for submission was only a week away.

30th November.2014

It was agreed to submit our First Round Application. This was done with a little trepidation, but we knew that if hard work and prayer counted for anything it would be accepted.

17th March.2015

Great news! Our First round application has been accepted. Proof that prayer and hard work does pay. At last we can feel that progress is being made.

8th April 2015

The committee met to discuss the content of the HLF First round offer letter. The main topic was to agree how we should prioritise the "Activities" that we should undertake. We were already aware that a condition of HLF funding was that we should undertake "Activities" to promote an increased awareness of our heritage and engage with a wider audience. The exhaustive HLF documentation had already provided much guidance and so we decided to focus initially on the following (being aware that circumstances may cause us to change tack). Funding was split between Capital costs and Activity costs broadly suggesting that our architect would drive the capital side whilst the committee would take responsibility or Activities. We opted for

- Improved signage in the church
- Write and print a history of our church
- Create guided tours
- Create presentations
- Improve or replace our existing web site
- Create a state-of-the-art bell ring demonstrator and training facility.
- Enable the opening of our church for about 40 days of the year outside of our normal services.

Quite a challenge but would support our Christian outreach endeavours.

8th June 2015

Work is now focussing on our chosen Activities. The draft history is under way and from that we have created a truncated version that will be used as handouts at presentations and copies will be available in church. Work on designing the new signage and will include 2 pop up signs; one will be a timeline whilst the other will be a Welcome banner. Nigel, our Tower Captain, has researched the market and we now have plans for a very exciting addition to our bell ringing offering. Various events within the church were discussed including a Sunday afternoon concert. It was agreed that rather than try to update our current website we should have a new one created for us and Sallyanne, our present web editor, will lead this project.

2 July 2015

Signs of activity at last. A cherry picker was used to give our architect the means to inspect the outside of the spire to ensure we are not met with any unwelcome surprises when work begins, hopefully next spring.



10th August 2015

A tender document has been agreed with Rev. Paul Prentice, Peter, Chair of the Restoration Committee and Jane Winter to find a web designer. This, in essence, is our wish list. In house fund raising has started if somewhat slow. So Jackie Cook will lead our efforts to utilise some of our normal activities e.g. our Flower Festival, to stimulate fund raising. Nigel has undertaken the task to create a Power Point presentation that can support or presentations both in church and off site. Our first concert has been set for 25th October and is planned to have some light classical and well-known melodies.

5th September 2015

We have appointed ChurchEdit to undertake the development of our new web site, and it is anticipated that we will have a draft Home Page next month. Rev. Chris Stone a colleague of Rev. Jane, has been approached and agreed to undertake the training of our volunteer guides. We have commissioned a photo shoot of our church for next month. This will provide a library of photographs that we can call on for a wide variety of purposes including the initial population of the Gallery in the new website. Discussions continue on the viability of leaving our church open unattended on 40 days a year. Costs of CCTV cameras and security cabinets are a factor, and we are still looking at having volunteers man the church during these open days.

6 October 2015

Martin Stuchfield of the Monument and Brasses Society visited our church today. Martin is an authority on church brasses and is writing a book on Kentish church brasses and was keen to see our brasses. This was fortuitous as we have been exploring ways to make our brasses visible as the church was fully carpeted many years ago thus hiding them. Martin was extraordinarily helpful giving invaluable advice on how to clean and maintain brasses and will come back to undertake restoration on 3 brasses that needed work. Our brasses will soon be another attraction to our church.

9 November 2015

Another visible sign of our project! Our new signage has been delivered and is in place. More visible was our first concert held in October. The group, under Dave Silk included piano, guitar, double base, and a singer entertained us royally and helped to bolster our Restoration Fund. On the financial side, Colin (our Church Warden and Treasurer) received our first VAT reclaim under the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. We have hit a couple of late snags on our Second round HLF submission and our Faculty application but still hope to get both in on time by the end of the month.



11th December 2015

We have now submitted our Second Round Application! If this is successful we will be granted the balance of our claim (the major proportion) and will enable us to get cracking with instructing builders, scaffolders etc. so that we can at last fix our spire. That's the good news; the bad news is that we will have to wait until late February to know if we are successful. Oh what a test of patience.

4th February 2016

Great news!! Today we have been notified by HLF that our Second Round Application has been successful. A terrific result for all on the Restoration Committee. We are still having problems with our Faculty application but due only to procedural issues. We are in touch with the Chancellor and this will be resolved imminently. As we do not anticipate construction work commencing until April this will not be a showstopper.

20th February 2016

This morning I received the final approved Faculty. Fantastic! Discussion with our architect and builder are now in train to finalise timetable, cash flows etc. etc. We can now look forward to seeing the building work get under way.

17th March 2016

Today we have made our brasses available for viewing! Some years ago our church was carpeted throughout which was great for the comfort of the congregation but meant that the brasses remain totally out of sight. Such a shame! So we engaged Warren, a professional carpet fitter, to cut and whip inspection panels that can be easily removed for viewing and even brass rubbing later. Elsewhere in this website you can learn of our brasses but better than that why not come along and see them for yourself.

18th March 2016

As part of our ongoing restoration activities today we hosted a 1-day seminar called "Faith in Management" given by James Innerdale of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings. He was assisted by David Heath of SPAB and Paul Sharrock a partner in Thos Ford and Partners our architects. We had 30 attendees, and this turned out to be a brilliant course for Church Wardens and others involved in looking after old churches and other ancient buildings. Heartily recommended! Jane, our Curate and Rosemary from our congregation provided a handsome spread which was the "icing on the cake". This event also created some funds for our restoration work

The course covered all aspects of restoration from learning the history of ones church to identifying the causes if distress and then remedies and restoration. It included a tour of our own church to enable our attendees to see the contents of the lectures in a live environment. All the participants went home enthused and wiser (and well fed).



14th May 2016

At last, exactly on the second anniversary of the formation of the committee to run the Restoration Project and after 2 years of planning, fund raising, inspections, approvals etc., the scaffolders completed the erection of the scaffold. Work in earnest can now begin!



23rd to 27th May 2016

Now we are really in business. On the morning of 23rd May the builders arrived and started work. By the weekend, the old shingles had been removed and the spire clad in roofing felt to ensure water proofing whilst the work continues. On Friday we were honoured with a flying visit from Jo Johnson, our MP, arranged by our Councillor Chris Pierce. The photograph shows (L to R) Rev Paul Prentice, Councillor Chris Pierce, Rev Jane Winter and Jo Johnson MP.



1st June 2016 to 28th June 2016

Once the shingles (or shakes as they are properly called) were removed, it was realised that the battens to which the shakes would be fixed, were in a very poor condition. These will now need to be replaced. Once that has been done, as planned, the timbers at the base of the spire will be extended beyond the walls of the tower so that rain will no longer flow from the spire onto the tower walls (a contributing factor to dampness in the church). Despite the need to replace the old battens, the project remains on course.

27 July 2016

Construction work is now fully underway. Stone masons are working on the upper tower and the carpenters are restructuring the base of the spire and fixing battens in preparation for fixing the new shakes. Last night, the bell ringers temporarily installed our new bell ringing and demonstration equipment in the body of the church in order to show it off at our Restoration Fun Day on Saturday 30th July. This is truly amazing and will be in demand from local bands of ringers. Once the work on the spire is completed it will be properly installed in the tower with CT cameras showing both the bells and the ringers in action.

30 July 2016

On Saturday, 30th July 2016, in the presence of The Worshipful Mayor of Bromley, Councillor Mr Ian Payne, we held our **Restoration Fun Day**. This was not primarily a fund-raising event although further donations were received to help us take our restoration work forward. The main thrust was to let people know and SEE just what was going on.

To that end we had a rolling Power Point presentation depicting how the Restoration Project was born and what its aims and aspirations are. A photo display compiled by ourselves and Thos Ford and Partners showing the progress that was being made on the construction.

Outside, there was a demonstration of roofing techniques by Peckham Roofers. This showed how the new shingles (or shakes as they are called) are fixed to the spire.

Our bells figured largely in the event with a display of our new bell ringing trainer/demonstration kit and this was completed by a quarter peal rung on our bells, lead by Nigel Pointer our Tower Captain.

Tony Lathey, who wrote a revised history of St Mary's was on hand to act as guide to the many new visitors. One of the attractions for the visitors was our brasses that have been covered by carpeting for many years but clever carpet work has enabled us to see them once again.

There were games for the children. Hoopla, Hook a Duck and Spin the Wheel (for our older children!) all under the watchful eye of Rev. Paul. There was also Face Painting by Ruth Pointer and songs from Bethany and Tamsin Pointer, Ruth and Nigel's daughters. Elaine Chapple gave craft lessons to young and old alike.

We also sold new shakes on which people could have their names etched in pyro pen. These will be fixed onto the spire so that the names will form a part of our heritage. Our Church Centre did a steady trade in refreshments, run by Bridget and the other members of the Social Committee.

The day was completed by a Latin and Ballroom dance demonstration by two couples from United Dance, one of the largest and most successful dance schools in the South.

The day was a huge success and there was something for everyone. Our community pulled together to put this show on and thanks are also due to the Heritage Lottery Fund who have partially funded the whole project.

8 September 2016

We are now confident that the structural work on our tower will be completed by the end of this month. Most of the masonry repairs have been completed, the new shakes are halfway up the spire, the clockfaces are now restored and fixed, the ladder into the spire is installed and the weathervane is ready to be added once the last shakes are installed. Our congregation and, I think, most of St Mary Cray cannot wait for the scaffold to be removed and see our spire in its new raiment,





7 October 2016

At last, the restoration work is complete! This week the last of the scaffold has been removed to reveal the church in its new mantle. The weathervane is in place and working well and all the new shakes have been fixed. The upper tower has received more renovation work that was envisaged as our architect has been working closely with the stone masons to maximise the benefit of the HLF funding.

The picture on the left shows the restored metal clock faces on the North and West sides of the tower and includes some of the restored stonework. The picture on the right depicts the restored slate clock face on the South side of the tower.





The following photo shows the whole church looking resplendent after all the efforts of so many people to bring this about.



Congratulations to everyone who gave so much of their time and resources to bring about this splendid result.

15th October 2016

A steeple dedication service was held lead by Archdeacon Paul Wright. It was a glorious sunny day as seemed to befit the occasion. The initial dedication was held outside and concluded in the church. This is the service conducted.

Introduction and opening prayer

Almighty God, we gather here today to give thanks for the restoration of our Church Tower. We remember all the hard work and dedication of the restoration committee and the support of this congregation here at St Mary's. May our Church be instrumental in bringing the love of God to this community here in our local community. Amen.

Acclamation

How awesome is this place.
This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.

I saw a ladder which rested on the ground
with its top reaching to heaven,
and the angels of God were going up and down it.
This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.

You will see greater things than this.
You will see heaven wide open,
and God's angels ascending and descending upon the
Son of Man.
This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.

You are the temple of the living God,
and the Spirit of God dwells in you.
The temple of God is holy, and you are that temple.
This is none other than the house of God,
and this is the gateway of heaven.

Collect
Almighty God,
to whose glory we offer this service of dedication
we praise you for the many blessings
you have given to those who worship you here:
and we pray that all who seek you in this place may find you,
and, being filled with the Holy Spirit,
may become a living temple acceptable to you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Reading: Psalm 84.

Short Address

Intercession
The risen Christ is here in the midst of us.
We bring our prayers to him as Lord of the Church.

For the Church universal,
of which these buildings are a visible symbol,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For the congregation of St Mary's
as we remember your promise
that when two or three are gathered in your name
you are there in the midst of them,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For this place, that we may be still and know that you are God,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For the pardon of our sins when we fall short of your glory,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For the fulfilling of our desires and petitions as you see
best for us,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For your blessings in the past and for a vision for the future,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For the faith of those who have gone before us
and for grace to persevere like them,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For the benefactors of this place who have died in the
peace of Christ and are at rest,
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

For our Church, for all who worship here, and for the people of St Mary Cray.
Lord, receive our thanks and prayer.

O God, from living stones
you prepare an everlasting dwelling-place for your majesty.
Grant that in the power of the Holy Spirit
those who serve you here
may always be kept within your presence.
This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Blessing
Christ, whose glory is in the heavens,
fill this house and illuminate your hearts;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen

9 November 2016

And so the project to restore our spire is complete apart from completing the paperwork and finalising the finances. But that is not the end. The Restoration Committee are meeting on Monday evening and high on the agenda is "What shall we tackle next". **Watch this space!**

24 January 2017

Last night the Restoration Committee met for the first time this year. The main topic was "What shall we tackle next?". Several suggestions were discussed as we know that there are lots of areas that need attention. However, our next quinquennial inspection is due in May and so it was agreed that we should simply concentrate on maintenance issues pending the outcome of QI. At the meeting Peter Moyle confirmed his **intention to stand down as Chairman with effect from the end of April.**

April 2017

Fantastic news! Following the completion of the Restoration Project and the relatively clean bill of health from the Quinquennial Inspection, St Mary's Church will now be removed from the English Heritage at Risk Register. As the restoration of the spire had been completed it was decided to stand down the Restoration committee because its declared objects had been achieved. Nevertheless, the project had overachieved financially, and funds remained at our disposal to carry on the work of restoration, albeit in small stages. To that end, under the direction of our new Church Warden, Terry McCartney (in truth he was returning to the role!), redecoration of the Lady Chapel (Hodsoll Chapel) was undertaken. This did include some restoration to the plaster work, and the results were splendid.

June 2017

This was a relatively quiet month given over, largely, to regular maintenance. However the main lighting was upgraded to modern LED bulbs, which are not only more economical but give more light; a very welcome improvement.

July 2017

At last our beautiful bells were made to look a lot smarter as the bell frame was painted. It is all too easy to overlook this work, the bells and frame being out of sight, but it is crucial and cannot be neglected for too long. This was somewhat overdue but could not have been done until the spire had been made pigeon and weatherproof. A significant benefit is that we have a smiling band of ringers (particularly our Steeple Keeper!)

August to October 2017

A major piece of restoration was undertaken to the plaster on the West wall during these three months. This area was, in places, worse than the Lady Chapel had been and was a large area that need considerable effort, again under the guidance of our Church Warden (who was also the labourer on the project!). The work has now been completed and with the improvements to the Lady Chapel and the lighting, the whole inside of our church is looking so much brighter.

Postscript.

And so this story of the restoration of St Mary's steeple ends, including the use of the residual funds from the HLF grant. A success that owes everything to the efforts of the whole family of our church pulling together as one. Of course the restoration at St Mary's continues; a never-ending task when we worship in a church that is nearly 800 years old.

