



Friends of St George and St Mary's, Church Gresley

NEWSLETTER No 1. July 2023

A New Team

On 15th May a small group visited St Wilfrid's Church Barrow on Trent to talk to two ladies who had led a project to repair and reorder their church and equip it for both worship and community use. The tenacity and vision that we discovered stirred a determination that we could do the same for St George's. St Wilfrid's is a Knights Hospitaller Church, one of only two to survive in the country, and the way they had set out a heritage trail and displays in their building was wonderful. The interior is stunning, a real inspiration and well worth a visit.

We met afterwards by the cars, and decided we would form a working party to pick up the threads of previous groundwork and push forward bids for grants and funding to reopen the Parish Church. So the 'Friends of St George and St Mary's' was born.

Closure of the Church and its aftermath

At the end of 2017, St George and St Mary's church building was declared unsafe for use. A leaking roof, the juddering passage of heavy lorries on nearby roads, and increasingly severe weather had speeded deterioration to the fabric. It has been estimated that 50 years worth of damage happened in just 15 years. The result was crumbling plaster work inside, and outside loose, falling masonry. At the insistence of insurers the church was closed for public safety and surrounded by exclusion fences. An in-depth survey of the stonework and roof revealed that the cost of repair, at that time, would be in the region of £500,000. Now that cost has escalated due to time and inflation to nearer £750,000.

Where can we hope to find such a sum of money?

Despite the popular idea that the Church of England is rich, its investments only meet 20% of the total running costs of the CofE. In addition they pay substantial pensions and support many local projects around the nation. The remaining 80% of running costs is met by local church members through their giving and fund raising.



The finances of Gresley Parish Church simply cannot pay for these repairs. As it is they have to find over £5800 per year for a closed church! So we will need to seek major grants from Lottery Funding and other sources, and raise funds in many other ways. Three applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund have already been turned down. Although there was some positive feedback this is a demoralising experience. It takes enormous effort to put a bid together, and a rejection feels like a slap in the face. So in order to brace ourselves for another attempt, we needed to know if we would have local support. It is an uphill climb and we couldn't contemplate doing it with a headwind of local discouragement.

Encouraging local response

The Festival of Leisure on 24th/25th June was our unofficial launch. It was a scramble to be ready in time, but we staffed a stand with large banner, a questionnaire and a petition over the two days. We were overwhelmed by the positive response to our project. 479 signatures on our petition, and 143 completed questionnaires. As well, 93 people completed the questionnaire online. We had many encouraging conversations as people shared their past involvement with the church and said how glad they were to see things begin to move.

So what is the next step?

We will probably have to take some smaller steps before embarking on a major grant bid again. One of the first things is that we need £2000 to update the survey on the building's interior, because it has been closed for over five years and been damp and unheated all that time. We are already raising funds for this and with your help hope to reach that target soon.



How you can help

If you have not already done so, please complete our questionnaire and petition. They slightly overlap but fulfil different functions. The questionnaire is to ask your views on creative ways of using the church building in between its use for services. Also please share our news on your social media to spread awareness of what is happening. And if you have skills or experience that you think could help us, or know of someone who could help, please message our team via the Facebook page or email (see below).

We hope to have a method of direct giving to the project very soon.

How to contact The Friends of St George and St Mary's

Facebook Page: Friends of St George and St Mary's

Email: friendsofstgeorgeandstmarys@gmail.com

The following QR code links straight to the project questionnaire.

