

**B**uilding and restoration began in February of this year with S & L Restorations being the main contractor. I know that everyone on the HLF Project Team would like to pay tribute to the skills and sensitivity of the team of craftsmen from S & L Restorations and also to the other consultants who have made such a wonderful job of conserving our church.



By the time you read this newsletter we expect the church to have been handed back to the PCC. Over the next six months we will be delivering the final heritage related activities as our contribution to the project and the whole scheme will be completed by June 2018. We are also beginning now to plan how and when we should best celebrate that achievement.

Thanks are due to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the other ten charities and trusts who together with the generosity of so many members of the local community – who have given their time, support, expertise and in many cases individual donations to bring this project to a successful conclusion – we cannot thank them enough.

Listed below is a summary of the main repairs, restoration work and events accomplished between February and December of this year.

**Structural Repairs** – apart from the collapsing south chapel walls, other parts of the church needing attention were the Kemp Chapel, tower parapet, nave gable end, north



Extra work was also necessary to the Kemp Chapel walls, where the Victorian cement render was contributing to a major penetrating damp problem. The original plan had been to remove the cement and re-render the walls with lime mortar but, as you may be aware, many Gissing residents and members of the Friends/PCC felt that the exposed flint

# 2017

## A SPECIAL YEAR

porch and the rainwater dispersal system. A substantial amount of additional work, not foreseen at the development stage, had to be undertaken and we were fortunate that a sufficiently large contingency fund had been established within the bid which allowed all the necessary work to be done without curtailing any of the other urgent work. The east gable of the nave required additional rebuilding, the tower parapet proved to be in a far more dangerous state than was at first thought and an additional £3,800 was needed to erect scaffolding around the tower and further costs for work to rebuild and make the parapet safe again.



work was far preferable to an overall render, giving a more harmonious look to the church. Given this support, applications were made to the Diocese and South Norfolk Council (Conservation and Planning System) to see if we could keep the exposed flint work. Both organisations agreed that Gissing could





change the initial plan and keep the exposed flint work but to do so, the walls had to have restoration work done before the repointing could take place, at an extra cost of £6,300.

The restoration programme included a new drainage system, with additional guttering, new soakaways and tower catch pits to help minimise the problem of damp and as some residents will have seen the churchyard was full of trenches at one stage. The project archaeologist was on hand to report any interesting findings and apart from a small number of bones, which have been respectfully reburied in the churchyard, some ancient graves and the location of a likely entrance to the crypt was discovered.

The weather vane was also repaired and gilded and will be a very visual way of marking the 2017 restoration project.

Regular monthly inspections and site meetings were held with the architects and other professionals, with representatives from the Friends and PCC who came together to form a Project Team to manage the programme on behalf of the village.

Another aspect of the project was the improvement in the mains services to the church. This included an upgrade of the electricity supply, the preparation work for a water supply to the church, the installation of an effective and efficient heating system, and



an improved lighting scheme – part of which would enhance the wonderful angel roof. In addition to this, the Friends/PCC arranged for exterior lighting to be installed, including floodlighting for both safety reasons and for illuminating the church at festivals and events. Other aspects of the project have included improved pathways to the main entrances of



the church, and the installation of a roof alarm to protect the church (we hope) from thieves targeting the lead.

**Activities programme** – Alongside the improvements at the church, our project team are developing a series of activities to encourage greater understanding of the building's heritage and contents, as well as promoting greater community use, thereby attracting an increased numbers of visitors. Other 'products' of the activity part of the

project, some of which have already been delivered, include:

- development of a website, this is in progress ([www.fogchurch.org.uk](http://www.fogchurch.org.uk))
- provision of new guides to the church
- storyboards in the church
- new church signs and noticeboard
- 'hard hat' events
- a series of talks on the history of the church building and the village
- a series of musical events
- a detailed analysis of the angel roof
- publication of a history of the church
- the development of a conservation churchyard recognised by Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Norwich
- cleaning of the monuments
- a church micro geo-cache
- establishment of an angel trail – the Diocese is very interested in supporting us to develop a guide to angel churches in south Norfolk and Suffolk

**For the future** – We have not lost sight of our longer-term vision, which sets out imaginative plans to provide a toilet, and kitchenette, both of which would enable the church to be used for a far greater range of community activities, during the whole year. However, that will need to be the subject of future planning and fund raising once the current project is completed and we have caught our breath!!

Like the 'Forth Bridge', Gissing will need to continue fund raising into the future as the running costs for the church are likely to rise with the new heating and lighting schemes, ongoing maintenance of the building, annual maintenance charges for such things as the new roof alarm (£500 per annum just for this) and for any future improvements. Therefore, we still need your continued on-going help through your Friends' membership, donations, and support at our events.

Please do get in touch with any member of the HLF Project Team listed at the end of the newsletter if you wish for any more information.





## Friend's events

**W**ith the amount of work the Friends have had to undertake this year, in managing the church restoration project, they have not been able to run as many events as they have done in the past but here is a quick round up for the last year. Our sincere thanks go to all who led, participated, contributed, and/or supported these events during 2017.



■ **March** – Janet Sleep led a planting party to continue the development of a 'Snowdrop Trail' around the village. There will be a further planting party in spring 2018, and in the subsequent years, to complete the trail. Janet has also continued to hold Plant Heritage events during the year and has raised over £500 for the Friends contingency fund in the process.

■ **April** – We held the annual 'Gorgeous Gissing Litter Pick' – this is not a fund raiser but designed to be a community event. There was a good turnout of volunteers, great weather and everyone enjoyed cleaning up the area as well as the scrumptious tea provided by Dave Smith, Moira Walters, Judith Miller, Tracey Fordham and Joanne Lawes.

■ **April** – The Friends Annual General Meeting was held in the new Gissing Community Building whilst the church was under repair. It was at this meeting that Denise Scoggins stepped down as

PCC/Friends' Treasurer. Her support and hard work for the Friends over the past four years was very much appreciated by everyone concerned. Paul Wright was elected to become Friends' Treasurer at this meeting and we very much appreciate his taking on the role.

■ **June** – The Friends' Annual Summer Bar-B-Q was held at Keeper's Cottage by kind invitation again of Tony and Heidi Baxter. This is always a really enjoyable evening for everyone attending, and guests showed their appreciation with some very generous donations. Ed and Denise Scoggins helped Tony and Heidi prepare, run, and clear up after the party. Many thanks go once again to Clive Homer and Ellie Jennings who ran a very well supported bar all evening. Alex Hudson ran his ever popular 'Night at the Races', supported by Joe Cromley, and Stuart Dobson provided the all-important loos for that 'one pint too many'! Thanks to all who were involved with this event. From all this effort, the Bar-B-Q raised a fantastic £2000. This was our major fund-raising event for the Friends' contingency fund. We have found we certainly needed this with all the extra repair work required for the HLF project.

■ **June** – Some of the Friends took part in the Heart of Gissing 'Warts and All Open Gardens' – on a scorching hot day (30°+) and some gardens included a yard sale. Proceeds from one of these sales were split evenly between Heart and Friends, making £25 for each organisation.

■ **July** – The Friends had a stall at the Gissing Summer Fete organised by the Heart of Gissing. Sadly, the stormy weather meant that fewer people than expected turned out, but those who did brave the rain enjoyed the entertainment, stalls, and refreshments. Once again Pat Cattell donated her lovely pottery for sale in aid of the Friends. Many thanks to all who supported our stand. We raised roughly £30 on the day.

■ **August** – We held a very enjoyable talk entitled 'Meet the Bats of Gissing Church' given by Phil Parker, the bat surveyor for the church restoration project. Phil gave a most informative talk and had brought along some bats that were going to be released into the wild after a period of recuperation. It was especially good for the youngsters at the talk to 'get up



close and personal' with these fascinating creatures. Phil also managed to clarify the facts about bats which can only be to their and our advantage!! Sadly, when the audience went over to the church they could only hear them rather than see them (shy creatures!). I can assure you that they are there – for when a few of us were clearing up later they put on an amazing acrobatic show in the nave!! Claire Calton Moore provided a scrummy supper – thanks go to her and everyone who helped out on the evening. After expenses, the event raised just under £130.

Adult group taking part in a 'hard hat' visit to the top of the tower to see newly rebuilt parapet.



■ **November** – Thinking of Christmas, Avril Pierrsene has once again designed and printed a series of note cards and Christmas cards, and she has also developed some new ‘angel’ cards. Given the church has been closed to visitors, Fiona Turton held a couple of coffee mornings in aid of the Friends to sell the cards and people were able to have a catch up with Gissing friends. The card sales made a fantastic £106 for the Friends. Many thanks to Avril and to all who supported these two mornings. (The cards are currently still for sale direct from Fiona (01379 677811) if you would like to view them. It’s not too late – even if you only need them for next year!!)



cleaning and then decoration. The scaffolding around the porch was not scheduled to come down until the weekend of the Fayre so the difficult decision was probably for the best. The St Nicholas Fayre therefore had to re-focus this year on Arts and Crafts and refreshments in the Gissing Community Building.

■ **December** – The Spice Boys had a stall in the church porch, at the Christmas Carol Service on December 10th where the carolers were able to buy the wonderful festive preserves, jams, marmalade (Spanish sunshine in a jar), pickles, chutneys, cakes, bakes, Florentines, and those amazing brownies!

Make space in the larder!! Other stalls offered Christmas cards, and plants – including Dierama (Angel’s Fishing Rods). An amazing £858 was raised overall, well done!

■ **December** – Regrettably, the proposed Angel Festival in the church, planned by Heart of Gissing as part of the St Nicholas Fayre, had to be cancelled as the handover of the church building simply could not be guaranteed in time to allow for major

■ **New Year’s Eve** – If you are in Gissing at this time the Friends, as usual, will be ringing the church bells at midnight to welcome in the New Year. You are sure to get a tot of whisky to keep out the cold!! Please do come and join us.



## Church cleaning

WITH the church repairs work, the cleaning rota was obviously cancelled whilst the builders were on site but given that the building was handed over in December, the Friends invited people to join a team of volunteers to do a deep clean to bring the church back in use. Very many thanks go to all who helped with this important task.

We will also need to resume the cleaning rota for January 2018 to December 2018. I know that the PCC would be very grateful for any help they can have to make sure the church is always welcoming to visitors and residents alike. A new rota is being developed for next year and if you think you could help, please get in touch with Fiona.

## Linda Steel

THIS newsletter would not be complete without highlighting the huge contribution that Linda Steel gave to both the PCC and the Friends over many years, latterly as Treasurer of both groups. Linda, along with Bob, got involved in so many village events and activities and their input is an example of what makes this village so special. Linda’s support was very important in the formation of the Friends of Gissing Church and we know that she will be greatly missed by many people in Gissing and beyond. We are very grateful for all the contributions she, (along with Bob), made in Gissing over the years.

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### Friends Steering Group

- Heidi Baxter
- Tony Baxter
- Richard Coombes
- Joe Cromley
- Howard Dyke
- George Hammond
- Judith Miller
- John Nash
- Milla Nash
- Ed Scoggins
- Janet Sleep
- Michael Tarry
- Fiona Turton
- Moira Walters
- Clive Willett
- Paul Wright

### HLF Project Team

- Richard Coombes
- Joe Cromley
- George Hammond
- Eddie Scoggins
- Fiona Turton
- Paul Wright

## Membership renewal

THE FRIENDS have been going for six years now and it is always lovely to be able to welcome new members. If you have joined this year, then thank you for helping us to keep the momentum going and if you are a long-standing member then your continuing commitment is so very much appreciated.

It really is the case that without the support of Friends’ members, and those who donate or support in other ways, it would simply be impossible to keep paying the bills to maintain the church and its grounds. Without the generosity of our supporters we could not have raised the contingency funds that we so badly needed (as it turned out) for part of the restoration project. Being able to show community involvement in this way helped to raise awareness of the plight of St Mary’s and we are confident that it contributed towards us receiving the much-needed grant aid.

We hope to be able to count on everyone’s continuing membership in 2018. If you have any queries about membership, setting up a standing order or gift aid agreements, then please do contact Paul Wright on 01379 674183.

### How you make a difference

There are three immediate ways in which your support is being used to assist the church.

- The Friends can continue covering the annual costs of the church insurance, churchyard maintenance, the annual servicing of the electrics supply and the church organ, from a regular income. In future there will be increased running costs for the new lighting and heating system as well as the annual maintenance for the roof alarm which is to be installed.
- We also need to build a fund to cover unexpected day-to-day repairs that are bound to occur, and for which one cannot plan.
- Finally, we will have to develop a new contingency fund to help realise the longer-term vision of installing a toilet and kitchenette amongst other things. In order to attract grants in future we will need to demonstrate that our plans have support from the wider community and the PCC/Friends members.

We hope you have found this newsletter informative, please get in touch if you would like any further information over the coming year. Wishing you and your family a very Merry Christmas and sending all good wishes for 2018.

