

FRIENDS OF POLSTEAD CHURCH

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 7.30 p.m. on Friday 28th November 2008 at Polstead Village Hall

Welcome:

The Chairman, Bill Wigglesworth, welcomed all to the meeting and confirmed that they formed a quorum under the constitution.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from : Dr. Ronald Blythe, Henry and Victoria Engleheart. Bob and Jan Derbyshire, Rita Gillham. John and Doreen Gorrod, Barrie and Mandy Hall, Alan and Eileen Hands, Lionel and Pauline Hatch, Dick MacGregor, Stuart and Christine Miller, Michael and Mrs. Parry- Crooke, Erica Pomerans and Ken and Mrs. Sparkes.

Minutes of the AGM held on 30th November 2007

The minutes of the previous AGM had already been distributed to Friends and were unanimously approved and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Annual Report

The Chairman reported that during the past year the Friends had continued to gather good support from people with links to Polstead, even as far away as the Isle of Wight, London and Norwich; and it was hoped to attract support from more recent arrivals in the village. The Friends had spent the equivalent of the income for the year on grants to the PCC for maintenance and conservation.

The Independent Examiner David Culverwell had retired as Treasurer of Preston St Mary Friends and had handed over to Roger Huggett, who was also ready to act as Independent Examiner for Polstead Friends. Roger was an accomplished graphic designer (for the Beatles and now for Sir Paul McCartney) and photographer and he was very kindly helping to create a series of cards to be sold in aid of the Friends of Polstead church.

Bishop Richard of Bury St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, having retired, had stood down as Vice President. The Committee was in the process of looking for a replacement, preferably again someone senior in the Diocese.

Social activities, linked to the Friends conservation aims, but also usefully contributing to funds, had continued this year with a trip to St. Peter's Chapel at Bradwell on Sea, Maldon and Layer Marney Tower. The trip had been much enjoyed and made a profit of £90. Next year it was hoped to organise a trip to Ely and possibly Wicken Fen en route.

Alan Keeble had hoped to organise a clay pigeon shoot in aid of the Friends but this had had to be postponed until next year. He was meanwhile very kindly running raffles at his shoots this winter to raise funds for the Friends. The Engelhearts had again generously split their fundraising from foreign visitors to their gardens between Stoke-by-Nayland Church and Polstead Church – which they referred to as their favourite garden ornaments.

On-going publicity for the Friends included the brochure, on display in the church, which attracts and informs potential members; and the Polstead website which gives up to date information about the conservation of the Church and its surroundings.

Grants to the PCC had been for two main items. Firstly, the archaeological survey for the churchyard extension, which the Diocesan Archaeologist had decided needed investigation. Traces of Bronze Age occupation had been discovered, requiring expensive further investigation. It was hoped to phase the work, in order to spread the cost, once planning permission and a diocesan faculty had been obtained.

The second grant had been for the external plasterwork above the east wall of the nave and chancel.

Thanks to the much appreciated work of volunteers, the Boutell chamber tomb had been repaired without the need for a grant from the Friends.

Further work currently required at the church included the provision of safe access to the Tower, since the PCC had been advised that the existing ladder was in breach of the regulations. Work was also required on the north wall of the churchyard which had been de-stabilised by the felling of a dangerous beech tree (which may have contributed to the collapse of the tomb). The wall was technically Grade 1 listed, along with the church, and would therefore require repair to its old bricks, flint and mortar to full conservation standards by a qualified craftsman, whom it had taken time to identify. Finally, the PCC had had detailed advice that the roof timbers in the north and south aisles could be dangerous and would require early repair. This would be expensive and would be likely to be a major project.

The Chairman thanked the Friends for their support, the Committee for their help and Jane and Gale for providing the supper.

Treasurer's Report

Lea Blackham reported that this year the income had exceeded £8,000, which was slightly more than in previous years. A cheque from the Inland Revenue for £1,147 showed just how valuable the Gift Aid declarations were and those who are not on the scheme were urged to do so. The Friends spent around £8,000 in grants and the cash reserves amounted to £14,500.

There were no questions from the floor.

Election of Officers and Executive Committee

The honorary officers and the elected Committee all offered themselves for re-election and were accordingly re-elected en bloc on a proposal by Ann Lewis, seconded by Andrew Bardell (the vote was carried with none voting against).

The proposal for Roger Huggett to be Independent Examiner was unanimously carried.

Grants to PCC

The Chairman explained that the Committee took the view that, since the PCC did not have extensive reserves for the maintenance of the church fabric, the Friends should aim to build up a reserve to help to meet the cost of possibly unexpected and expensive repairs and maintenance in the future. For example, the precise status of the crack between the tower and the west wall remained uncertain and it appeared that substantial and as yet unquantified expenditure would be required on the side aisle timbers. While an unexpected major threat to the church building could be met by a special appeal at the time, the Committee felt that it would be prudent for the Friends to seek to put aside some 20% of income on an on-going basis to begin to build up an identified reserve.

The Chairman accordingly proposed the resolution that: "It should be the policy of the Committee of the Friends, in agreeing grants towards expenditure on maintenance and conservation projects by the PCC, to seek and to devote 20% of the Friends' annual income to building up a reserve to meet the cost of major, and possibly unexpected, projects in the future; until such time as the Committee considers that an adequate reserve has been created".

Sue Freeman asked what a reasonable proportion would be and Bill Wigglesworth said that the Committee felt that a sensible balance would be 20%. With the current projects that he had mentioned, some of which could be temporarily deferred if necessary, an income of £8,000 a year should be sufficient to support the maintenance and conservation of the Church, while putting 20% (£1,200 p.a.) to the reserve.

The proposal was seconded by Richard Davey, all voted in favour and the motion was

carried.

Future Events

The Chairman said that the Committee would very much welcome suggestions from members of the Friends for future events that would generate interest in the Friends, be enjoyable and perhaps add to funds.

General Business

Regarding the churchyard extension, Mr John Buck enquired if there would be room in the present churchyard for those who might pass on before the very slow progress on the planning permission came to fruition. The Chairman explained that recent changes in planning law had greatly complicated the process of obtaining planning permission for individuals and small organisations. As a result, the PCC had been advised to employ a local planning specialist to advise. The application was now being considered by the planning authority and the Chairman was hopeful that, provided this was successful and that all matters relating to ownership, a Diocesan faculty and an archaeological survey could be satisfactorily resolved, it should be possible to consecrate the extension during the summer.

If the existing area used for burials was exhausted before the extension was available, it would be possible to find burial spaces in the older part of the churchyard, but the PCC wished to avoid this if at all possible.

Any Other Business

The Rev. Michael Tillett thanked the Executive Committee on behalf of the PCC for all their support for St. Mary's Church, which he deemed to be the 'gem' of Suffolk.

The meeting closed at 8.20 p.m.