

St Mary's Church Polstead

Fabric, Goods and Ornaments Report for 2007-08

Building

St Mary's Church building is generally in good structural condition. Further review of the crack at the southwest corner of the nave, during plaster repair (see below), gave rise to no major immediate concern and the crack was filled. An expert inspection of the ceiling roof timbers, carried out during redecoration (see below), revealed deterioration in joints of the timber and masonry, particularly in the north aisle. This is being kept under close review.

Architectural advice

The PCC has continued to be advised on all significant repair and maintenance work, by Rod Shelton, whose helpful expert guidance is much appreciated.

Implementation of Quinquennial Report

Almost all the urgent and important projects, highlighted by Rod Shelton from the Quinquennial Report have been completed. Within the on-going projects, the PCC is giving priority to the review and implementation of safe access to the bell tower (see below).

Redecoration of the church

The long awaited redecoration of the church was carried out during the autumn, necessitating closure of the church from October until mid December. Full scaffolding was erected throughout the nave and aisles, which, in addition to allowing safe working, provided a useful opportunity to inspect areas at height, including the roof timbers, plaster surfaces and wall paintings.

All faulty areas of plaster were repaired and the walls were lime washed with "hint of ochre" tint. At the same time the iron work of the windows was cleaned and repainted and the windows were comprehensively cleaned. The overall effect on the internal look of the church has been magnificent. The PCC were impressed by the quality of the workmanship of the contractor Lathe and Lime (Richard Braybrooke) and by the care generally taken to protect the furnishings during the work and to leave the church in a clean condition.

The PCC is greatly indebted to Richard and Lucy Bartlett for generously financing the redecoration and so making it possible.

Wall paintings

During the redecoration an area of old paintwork and plaster in the north aisle became detached where the wall was still slightly damp from a blocked down pipe some years ago (since remedied). An area of post reformation wall decoration was revealed. Leading expert Tobit Curteis surveyed the impact of redecoration work and its possible impact on the already and newly exposed wall paintings and has provided an indicative estimate of further conservation work on the wall paintings, which the PCC will be following up in due course.

Re-ordering of the South aisle

Work proceeded on the reordering of the South aisle during the summer, in parallel with the required archaeological survey work by the Suffolk Archaeological Team. The main South aisle floor area was lime concreted, following the lifting of the timber platforms and removal of the area of modern concrete. During these operations, a void was revealed in the vicinity of the Charles Vincent tomb, which was subject to archaeological survey before the space was filled and bridged with concrete beams. Tiling was repositioned to provide an area around the intended Holy Table at the east end and the panelling on the South wall was removed, conserved and re-positioned to reveal the original window ledges, before redecoration. The PCC is immensely grateful to Jim Sephton for leading and carrying out much of this work.

The entire floor area of the South aisle was carpeted with a hard wearing neutral coloured wool carpet on felt underlay, financed by the collection at the late Pattie Ashworth's funeral. This completed the creation of a comfortable and flexible area that blends in well with the rest of the church building.

We are grateful to the Friends of Polstead Church for their financial support for the work in the South aisle and the advice on the wall paintings.

Churchyard

Churchyard wall

The stump of the recently felled beech tree was kindly removed by Toby Owles and the PCC has been advised that the footings of the wall should have settled sufficiently for full repair to be carried out during the coming summer. A specification for this work, which will require a faculty, has been prepared and a contractor is being identified.

Collapsed tomb

The PCC, advised by Rod Shelton and a structural engineer, has agreed that the repair of the Boutell tomb should be limited to bridging the vault with concrete beams and has gratefully accepted the offer by Jim Sephton to lead and undertake this work.

Path to South door

The resurfacing and enlargement of the approach path to the South door has had to wait its turn due to the number of priority maintenance projects that need to be carried out. It is hoped to progress this work once the necessary finance is available.

Extension of churchyard

During the summer of 2007 the County Archaeological Team carried out an exploratory dig of the area of the urgently needed extension of the churchyard, on the strip of adjacent land in the "Horsecroft" that has long belonged to the church. Their report revealed the existence of the possible remains of an early bronze age hill top defensive site and recommended that, if the PCC wished to go ahead with a planning application for change of use, the area should be the subject to an open area excavation to fully record the remains. The PCC wishes to go ahead and we are currently in correspondence with the planning authority before a formal planning application is submitted.

Maintenance

The Parish Council has once again kindly agreed to finance five cuts of the churchyard during 2008. The Bury St Edmunds Probation Service continues to carry out other maintenance and grass cutting to a very high standard, without charge. Both have agreed to a proposal from the Parish Council that the area of wild flowers should be subject to a conservation cutting regime in the early part of the year.

Goods and Ornaments

The church has been further enriched by the addition of a new oak Holy Table at the East end of the South aisle, made by Jim Sephton to a design he developed. The PCC is most grateful to Jim for his work on this beautifully crafted table; and to Barrie and Mandy Hall for generously financing the cost of the timber. We are also indebted to Jim for creating a handsome new oak railed reader's stand at the lectern.

In the South porch, David and Maureen Howard have most generously replaced the old bench with a fine new oak bench, made to fit the space. The old bench has been transferred to the North porch where it complements the even older bench ready to form part of the wayfarer's chapel.

Health and Safety

The PCC wishes to give priority to improving the safety of access to the bell tower. We are in touch with Direct Access Ltd of Ely, who recently provided safe access to the tower at Great Sampford church. A site meeting with their surveyor has had to be postponed and will now take place in early May.

Terrier and Inventory

The Terrier and Inventory is fully up to date and is open for inspection at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Jill Lowe
Bill Wigglesworth

Churchwardens

16 April 2008