

Friends of St Michael's Church Brent Knoll



NEWSLETTER No 2 September 2015

Welcome to the second newsletter from the Friends of St Michael's Church. We have just received our Quinquennial Report on the state of St Michael's Church and I have included the high (and low!) lights of this report. I have also included a brief explanation of our funding requirements. Following this I have included an appeal for voluntary help with maintaining the church and churchyard, news of past events and what we are doing in the future. Finally I have written a short article about a scheduled monument in the church yard to which Mike Smith drew my attention recently.

News

St Michael's Church – our Quinquennial Report

Every five years our churches are surveyed by the Diocesan architect in order to identify problems with the building that need attention. These problems are graded on a 3 point scale that determines the urgency of the remedies required over the next 5 years. Grade A issues require immediate attention, Grade B should be remedied within 18 months and Grade C within the 5 year period.

In general St Michael's is regarded to be in good condition. Immediate issues include a leaking heating pipe in the north aisle and temporary repairs to the lead roof in the tower and north aisle. These matters are in hand and have either been dealt with or will be dealt with soon. Most of the Grade B issues are relatively minor but will nevertheless involve expenditure in the region of £8-10,000. The two major problems involve replacing the lead roof in the tower (B) and the lead roof on the north side of the church. It is likely that these two projects together will cost in the region of £75,000

Future fund raising for St Michael's

As you may be aware the Parish of Three Saints divides its funds into two, Church Life that pays for the day to day running of Church activities and Heritage that pays for maintenance of the fabric and renovation of our church buildings. Each village church has its own Heritage account, and the Parish also bases its fundraising activities at village level. However, these village fundraising activities are not solely for the village churches. They have to be split between Church Life and Heritage, and, in general, fetes and fairs go to Church Life and other events raise money for Heritage. Currently in Brent Knoll we have a reasonably healthy balance in our Heritage account, but the Parish as a whole struggles to meet its commitments to fund Church Life. The main reason for this is that the Parish has to pay over £30,000 a year to the Diocese to fund our Parish priest. The Parish has taken active steps to ensure that its church members contribute a fair share to Church Life, but it is likely that we shall continue to struggle to pay our Parish share to the Diocese in the future.



As I have hinted our local Heritage fund is still reasonably well endowed. The separate Friends of St Michael's Church that existed prior to setting up our Parish based Friends organisation had substantial legacy funds and invested these in charity shares that yield a significant annual income. Together with the subscriptions that you, our Friends, are providing we currently have an income of about £2,000 per annum. We also have reserves in our current account. However, these reserves will not take us very far when we have to spend £75,000 on major roof repair and another £10,000 on minor building works.

How will we approach this funding gap? The answer has to lie in applications for grant funding. There are a number of bodies that provide funds for repairs to Grade 1 listed churches, and John Harper was very successful in tapping into these funds when the south facing nave roof was replaced in 2011. The Parish will have to repeat this exercise in the next year or two. When this happens there will, almost certainly, be a local appeal that is separate from our usual fundraising activities to ensure that we cover the costs of the necessary work and maintain our current capital.

Whatever we chose to do we will still be relying on voluntary effort to raise funds, and possibly to reduce the cost of maintaining St Michael's.....

In general our church is well supported by volunteer labour. We are fortunate to have a dedicated group of church and brass cleaners, and the support we get from our local flower arrangers is magnificent. For many years Sue Boss has organised an annual tidy up of St Michael's Churchyard. This event is well attended and much work gets done. We have also been lucky enough to have some dedicated individuals who devote significant time to doing small maintenance tasks around the church and its churchyard.

What we would like to do now is to expand our volunteer workforce to do some of the small jobs that have come up as a result of the Quinquennial Report. We are not necessarily looking for a regular commitment, although this would be welcome, but would like to hear from people who are prepared to help when we need assistance.

If anyone wishes to help us in this way I would be grateful if he or she could contact me (Ged Keele) at gerard.keele@btinternet.com - phone 769010 or Tony Gilbert at aandimgilbert@tiscali.co.uk - phone 760956.

Past events

Worlewind Band Concert - July 5th

What started out as an outdoor concert at Ivyclad Hall with cream teas on the lawn had to be contained within the confines of an indoor event at the Parish Hall. The forecast for the day of the concert was not good and we were forced to make a last minute switch. The thirty seven members of the band managed to squeeze into the main hall and the audience spilled over into the Nuttall room. We were provided with superb renditions of tunes that ranged from Michael Jackson and the Beatles to jazz classics by Duke Ellington. The cream teas were served "from the hatch" rather than a refreshment tent but this did not prevent the audience from enjoying the occasion. The Friends of St Michael's Church raised nearly £500. Thanks are due to the fundraising committee for organising the event, to those who helped us set up and the catering team that provided the refreshments.

August teas

On Sunday afternoons in August we opened the vestry and churchyard for teas, and over the Bank Holiday Sally Wingate also organised an Open Gardens event. During the month we raised £350 – a big thank you to all those who came and those who provided the teas.

A note on renewing subscriptions

Most of you agreed to set up standing orders at your bank, which will mean that we won't need to contact you again for a subscription. Those who gave us a one off contribution will be approached again to see if you wish to continue as a Friend. We hope you will do so, ideally by setting up a standing order. If you have a computer it would also be helpful if you could supply us with an email address. This will enable us to save on printing costs and on time in distribution.

For your diary



Moonlighting with Beethoven on Saturday 24th October 7.30pm – a talk by Brian Freestone

For those who have enjoyed Brian's last two talks on the lives of Mozart and Elgar this is an evening not to be missed. He will be supported again by John Page who will provide the "sound track". Tickets £5 – please contact Ged Keele at gerard.keele@btinternet.com - phone 769010

St Michael's Christmas Fair on Saturday December 5th – 10am to 1pm

We shall be repeating the formula for last year's successful Christmas Fair. There will be commercial stalls and our own craft efforts will be on sale together with good quality items that have been donated and would be suitable for Christmas presents. We shall also be providing refreshments and hope to have some musical entertainment in the form of carol singing.

If you are at a loose end over the next couple of months and wish to spend time making small presents / Christmas decorations your contributions would be most welcome. Similarly any small items you have that are "surplus to requirements" would be most welcome. Ged Keele will be coordinating the Fair activities so please contact him if you wish to contribute. But above please come to the Church to enjoy the occasion.

Burns Night Supper – Saturday January 23rd at Brent Knoll Village Hall

Three years ago we ran a very successful Burns Night Supper at the Village Hall. Girls Wanna Have Fun have kindly offered to organise a repeat event next year and the planning for this has just started. We are most grateful for this assistance and look forward to the event. I can promise that, if it was anything like the last event, you will be in for a wonderful evening.

Thamesdown Ladies Choir – Saturday 21st May at St Michael's Church

We have hosted an event by this choir a few years ago and their concert was very well received. We have decided to repeat the event next May. We hope to include an appropriate event(s) in the church during the day to turn their visit into a celebration of spring.

St Michael's Church mugs



We have a number of mugs available for purchase that have been decorated with a picture of the church at a cost of £ 6.50. If you would like to order one please contact Rosemary Keele rosemary.keele@btinternet.com - phone 769010



A scheduled monument in our churchyard – the tomb of Edward Symes

Mike Smith drew my attention to this grade 2 scheduled monument recently. It is situated to the south of the vestry and is the chest tomb of Edward Symes and his wife Elizabeth. He died on 27th February 1781, but the inscription relating to the date of Elizabeth's death has been lost. He is named as Parish Surgeon. I thought it would be worth finding out something about the monument. What is a chest tomb? Who was Edward Symes and what was the role of a Parish Surgeon in the middle of the 18th century?



What is a chest tomb?

In the medieval period wealthy people were buried and had their memorials inside the parish church. Others were buried in unmarked graves in the churchyard. From the 17th century gravestones began to be erected over graves. If you were wealthy you could go one stage further and erect a chest tomb. These were also known as table tombs because of the flat surface on the top. This type of tomb became very fashionable amongst the wealthier classes in the 18th century, and, if you were very wealthy, your tomb could be decorated with carvings. Some very ornate examples of chest tombs can be found around Painswick in Gloucestershire.

What was the role of a Parish Surgeon in the 18th C and who was Edward Symes?

In order to answer the first question one needs to know something about the Elizabethan Poor Law and the state of medicine when Edward Symes was in practice. Around 1600 a number of Acts were passed that formalised a system for managing the problem of poverty. The poor were divided into three categories; the impotent poor, who couldn't work; the able-bodied poor, who could work; and the idle poor and vagrants. Taxes were to be levied locally within a parish and these supported the appointment of Overseers of the Poor. Those able to work were sent to a House of Industry and there were two types of relief for those who couldn't work. Indoor relief was provided in an alms house that was usually managed by a local benefactor or charity, and outdoor relief was provided to people living at home. The Overseers were appointed by a Vestry Committee. This consisted of local parishioners and was chaired by the parish vicar. Effectively this was the forerunner of the Parochial Church Council that we are familiar with today.

The general practitioners of the 18th C were apothecaries. The role of the apothecary had developed in the early 17th C as assistants to the physicians who prepared their medicines. Initially each physician had one apothecary and there were only 144 physicians in the country, mainly based in London. The number of apothecaries gradually increased and their popularity rose when they stayed in London during the plague of the 1660s (the physicians accompanied the Royal Court which moved to Oxford for the duration of this outbreak of the plague). In the 18th century they gained the right to practice on their own and their numbers expanded further. They acquired skills developed by the barber-surgeons in war to deal with injuries and took advantage of advances in midwifery which arose as a result of the introduction of obstetric forceps in France. As a result of these improvements in medical care it became common practice for Vestry Committees to use the services of a local apothecary who would be appointed as Parish Surgeon. As well as being paid a retainer he would be paid for attending women who were having difficult births and the poor who were receiving both indoor and outdoor relief.

So we know what Edward Symes did but we don't know where he lived. Did he live locally in South Brent, or in a nearby town such as Bridgwater? If anyone knows about his personal life I would be interested to know. Perhaps the local History Group could enlighten us?

