

Brian's Sermon

Barbara our Vicar, asked if I would write a sermon about the failing high level gutters on the church. This I duly did and presented it on 26th February 2017. Since then, a few people have asked if the sermon could go in the church magazine:

As I look around I cannot help but admire our beautiful church which dates back to 1883. We have a wonderful pipe organ with most of its original pipework still in tact, which was installed in 1899. The tower, such a prominent feature, was added in 1910, complete with chiming clock and peal of eight bells. Our surroundings are light and bright. Even our pews are more comfortable than in many old churches, and we can all get in to worship without climbing steps.

Our predecessors have certainly done their bit during St Paul's 134 year history, to both maintain and improve the church and yet, I am pleased to say, the building retains much of the same Victorian grandeur, and layout as when it was built, and this partly accounts for its Grade II listed status.

The Victorians in their day were master craftsmen, engineers and architects but they were limited by today's standards in the materials that were available to them. They also had only a basic understanding of structural design and the strength of materials. However, this had the advantage of them over designing, just to be on the safe side, and making things 'big and strong' on the premise that if it looks like it won't fall down, it probably won't!

But not everything the Victorians did was good, they gave little consideration to accessibility for future maintenance, and paid scant regard to what we now understand as health and safety. Sadly, our Victorian church is succumbing to the

ravages of its 134 years and some 'Victorian chickens are now coming home to roost.'

15 months ago we had a Quinquennial Inspection of St Paul's and the church architect identified that the high level cast iron gutters were failing at their joints, and the downpipes also needed replacing at the same time. Not a big deal you may think, just as I initially did. But we are constrained by how we go about repairing our Grade II listed church. The Victorian's didn't consider how we might safely access the high level gutters to replace them. The upshot of all this is that the overall cost to replace the high level gutters and downpipes is in the order of £90,000. I personally needed convincing about the merits of this project, and the approach we had to adopt, and this is what Mark Pearce, our architect had to say...

"The downpipes are heavily corroded and cracked. As the joints to the high level gutters are failing, water is saturating the wall heads. In time, this will cause accelerated decay of the masonry, but the greater concern, is that the timber wall plates, trusses and rafters become saturated, decay and as a result a dry rot outbreak occurs. Should this happen, substantial structural repairs will become necessary along with reproofing, internal plaster repairs and rot treatment."

We applied to the government funded Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund last year for a grant, and whilst our application was recommended for an award, the programme was hugely oversubscribed and there were judged to be more deserving cases than ours.

The PCC then decided to seek a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. However, in September last year, a

significant amount of rain water came in through the high level clerestory windows above the south aisle. Inspection by a specialist identified that all 11 leaded high level windows had deteriorated to varying degrees, a combination of shot gun pellets, corroded metal and distorted panes. Not only would a scaffold be needed on the outside, but some sort of scaffolding would be needed on the inside as well. The cost of repairing the windows is a cool £70,000.

However, if the gutters and the windows were addressed at the same time and sharing the same scaffold, the estimated cost would only, I say only, be £130,000, saving £30,000 on the cost of two separate projects. This was the strategy which our PCC decided to pursue, still with the intention of seeking a Heritage Lottery Grant for roughly £100,000.

The Heritage Lottery Fund for Listed Places of Worship is by far and away the most onerous, demanding and complex grant application process I have come across. But then this is perhaps not surprising given they consider grant applications of between £10,000 and a quarter of a million pounds. Not only must we make a robust case for the money we are seeking, but we need to commit to undertaking a number of activities or projects which will attract 'more people,' and a 'wider range' of people to St Paul's, to visit and appreciate our heritage. In all honesty, we have been a bit bamboozled by the whole process and so we enlisted help from both the Diocese and our architect and held a workshop on the 4th February. This proved a great success, just what we needed, and so we followed it up with a second workshop on 18th February.

The workshops were attended by both PCC and non PCC members. What came out of the second workshop was a

consensus view as regards the three themes of heritage activity which St Paul's should commit to in pursuing a Heritage Lottery Grant. These activities are: to undertake a series of guided tours of both the church and the tower including the training of volunteer guides; to produce a guided tour leaflet and to hold a series of mini-heritage days, say quarterly, and of specific themes, based on the success of our annual Heritage Open Day. We now know what we have to do in order to make a grant application and deliver what is expected of us by the Heritage Lottery Fund if we are successful in our bid. However, it is a two stage application process which can easily take 18 months. In the future we will need volunteers with a diverse range of skills who are able to commit time and effort such as: a finance person, an archivist and may be an assistant, someone to deal with the full range of publicity, an IT person, or may be two for web site and digital media applications, someone to explore and develop partnerships, someone to speak to community groups and audiences with whom we don't normally engage and help in developing and delivering our heritage activities.

However, at this stage, we will not be implementing the heritage activities, but simply developing the ideas in sufficient detail, so as to be able to robustly answer the questions in the First Round Application.

The Heritage Lottery Fund does not serve to promote religion, only 'heritage.' However, any heritage activity which engages with new audiences and raises the profile of St Paul's, can only serve to aid our mission in spreading the word of Christ.

Our predecessors have done a fine job in looking after our beautiful church, but the

mantle is now with ourselves, and we have a responsibility for good stewardship of our church, handed down to us from members of several former congregations. St Paul's has a significant presence in the community of Sale and serves as a constant proclamation of the word of God. By maintaining St Paul's in good condition, we show to the wider community that the church and all it represents mean so much to us.

We are making a proclamation of God's love to all people, by providing a safe, clean and functional place for them to find fellowship, care and love.

The PCC is grateful for everyone's contribution to the cleaning, maintenance and beautifying of our church, but we now need help with this grant application, so if you feel you have the skills and time to devote, please have a word with me.

Please also be alert, you never know when God comes a-knocking ... asking you to get involved... as he has done with me.



"It's most kind of the church to donate these things but I wish they'd check there wasn't anything left inside, first!"

Postscript

I am pleased to report that a first round Heritage Lottery Fund Application (6,300 words) was submitted in May. I wish to record my thanks to everyone who assisted with this process namely Carole Shakeshaft, Michael Riley, Clive Robinson, Gary Lee, Kevin Drury, Rodney Hadwen, Yvonne Kerridge and Barbara Sharp.

However, refurbishment of the clerestory windows was left out of the application, despite them letting in water from time to time, because the windows weren't judged to be in such poor state to present either a structural or a health and safety hazard and inclusion of them risked compromising our bid for the gutters.

We are now seeking £85,700 from the HLF towards this project. This sum excludes VAT which we can claim back and the value of voluntary time needed by St Paul's Volunteers if the project receives approval. At this stage we have not offered a cash contribution from our limited reserves, nor have we committed to project fund raising or seeking contributions from other grant organisations. The result of our application is expected in September.

Brian Kerridge

