

St Matthew's, Harwell

Fabric Report 2023

Summary of work carried out to the Church in 2023

A special mention is due to all those who have given their time, either on a regular basis or occasional basis, to maintain and enhance our building. Thanks are also due to those members of the Church who give their time to ensure our buildings are kept clean and tidy, who ensure that they are maintained, decorated and generally in good order, who arrange flowers and who contribute generally to the upkeep of these buildings.

The Log Book of Church repairs has been maintained and is presented with this report. The Terrier, recording details of the Church buildings and land is held as subsection 1.2.2 of the Church's Maintenance and Operations Manual and is also presented, along with the Inventory of valuables. There is also a Log Book of repairs and maintenance for the Church Hall.

General repairs and maintenance to the fabric of the Church, the Church Hall and their surroundings have been carried out as and when necessary.

The PCC Buildings Committee continues to monitor implementation of recommendations from the Quinquennial Inspection carried out by the Church Architect in June 2021. It also maintains an Action List of all the small and larger tasks required for the good maintenance of the building.

Key items of work carried out in 2023 are as follows:

Electrical

The 5-Year full electrical inspection of the Church and Church Hall was carried out in November 2023. No remedial items are necessary for the Church Hall. There is one minor remedial item required in the Church. Some remaining remedial work from the 2018 inspection was carried out before the 2023 inspection.

Portable electrical appliances in the church and church hall have been tested, and two unsatisfactory cable extensions removed or repaired.

A failed element in the northeast chancel Linquartz heater was replaced, and a new 20W (equivalent 125W) LED bulb was fitted to the outside porch light.

External

Roofing

Broken and slipped red clay tiles on the roofs of the nave and transepts have been replaced. The gutters and downpipes have all been cleaned.

The Buildings Committee is continuing to investigate options for permanent wiring for the floodlights and improved security lighting on the church roof.

Other External Items

The lightning conduction system has been inspected and all joints cleaned and greased.

Three finial crosses on the Church roof, that had been broken for many years, have been replaced with new crosses with the aid of the legacy from the estate of Edwin Stringer. At the same time the other two intact crosses were inspected and the fixing of the one on the porch re-made. The other cross on the nave roof was found to be satisfactory.

While the scaffolding was in place for the work on the finial crosses, spalled stonework on the parapet between the nave and chancel was repaired by a replacement coping stone. Repairs were also made to the stonework around the east window and the iron crossbar was cleaned and re-painted.

Flooding of the lobby of the extension has occurred several times during 2023 when there has been exceptionally heavy rainfall. The problem is caused by water running under the extension door. Sandbags have provided some temporary protection. A wiping seal has now been fitted to the bottom of the extension door to help avoid flooding, and a temporary drainage channel dug from the paving to soak away to the nearby drain. A plan has been drawn up to re-lay the paving and provide a new drainage channel and this will be implemented after comments from the Church Architect.

Following the analysis carried out in 2022 of how energy costs could be reduced, cavity wall insulation (polymer beads) was injected into the external walls of the extension in January 2023.

The external window and door woodwork of the extension have been treated with Danish Oil.

The Parish Council cleared ivy and other growths from the churchyard wall along Church Lane and repaired the end of the wall at the Rectory boundary by the Rectory entrance.

Internal

In order to reduce energy costs, more use has been made of zoning the Church radiant heaters to restrict their coverage to parts of the church actually in use.

The chandelier was taken down, parts cleaned, and the chandelier re-mounted in March 2023, the first time this has been done since December 2018.

Rendering around the north side electrical sockets in the chancel has been repaired.

A new desktop computer and work top have been installed to replace the laptops previously used at the sound desk with the AV system. Since the Wi-Fi connection from the router in the Church Office to the AV system has often been unsatisfactory, an Ethernet cable has been laid to connect the router to the area by the sound desk.

Church Hall

The Hall has been used less than is ideal during 2023. Bookings during the course of the year have been managed by the Church Administrator. In the absence of a Hall Manager, maintenance has been carried out by the Buildings Committee and Churchwardens. We are grateful for all those who manage the Church Hall and help to keep it clean and tidy and in working order. There are a number of general repairs and grounds work that need to be carried out each year and the details of these can be found in the Log Book.

A Working Morning was organised in September to clean gutters, clean windows and cut the hedges. In preparation for the Winter the Hall heating system was re-programmed so that it would not be heating the Hall unnecessarily when the Hall is not in use.

Since an interest had been expressed in purchasing the Hall, a Working Group set up by the PCC to review the situation reported its findings in March 2023. The Group concluded that sale of the Hall offered no obvious way forward at that particular time and judged that many significant and unfavourable factors meant that this would not be the right time to be selling it. The Group also felt that some improvements could be made to the Hall facilities to counteract some of its perceived deficiencies, and that this might open up the possibility of other uses. In November the PCC agreed to set up a new Project Group to pick up from these conclusions, to map out a path for the future of the Hall, and to advise the PCC of the best options to follow in the short and longer terms. This Group started work in early 2024.

Work planned for 2024 on the Church and Church Hall includes:

- Continue to action recommendations from the 2021 Quinquennial Inspection and other tasks identified by the Buildings Committee;
- Continue to determine the future of the Church Hall;
- Implement flood prevention by the extension door;
- Re-paint all the rainwater goods and window bars;
- Make any necessary repairs, mainly re-pointing, to external masonry;
- Re-decorate the porch;
- Move the old clock mechanism from the extension to a new temporary home behind the east side of the organ, provided it does not interfere with servicing the organ;
- Investigate permanent wiring for the floodlight system and any additional lighting and other measures that would enhance church security;
- Install swift boxes in the bell chamber;
- To continue to look at improvements that could be made to the interior of the church to ensure that St. Matthew's continues to be a growing vibrant church for worship and a valued part of the local community;
- Keep utility costs under review.

Eliza Wheaton and Jane Woolley – Churchwardens

15 February 2024