



St Mary's, Mundon
Report to Annual Parish Assembly

Introduction

St Mary's has been suffering from structural movement for years. Hundreds of years, in fact. The oak-framed skirt that wraps around the weather-boarded belltower was erected in the 1500s to steady the structure against the shifting earth. In the 1700s, the medieval chancel collapsed and was rebuilt by the Georgians.

St Mary's was rescued by our charity, Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC), in 1975. It is designated a Grade I listed building, meaning it is preserved for its "exceptional interest". There are 400,000 listed buildings in England - just 2.5% are Grade I listed, so St Mary's is very special indeed.

In 2009, we undertook a campaign of underpinning along the south north elevation. However, by 2018, it was clear that other parts of the building were moving - dramatically. In 2020, we installed a series of six monitors throughout the building. These digital devices are highly sensitive and enabled us to record precisely what was happening in the building over a period of 18 months. These devices were connected to an app, so we could see things in real time.

In July of 2021, Friends of Friendless Churches were invited to apply to the Treasury's Culture Recovery Fund for Major Repairs to deal with the structural movement.

We were that our application had been successful, and St Mary's was awarded £291,260.05. In total, the repairs will cost over £400,000. Friends of Friendless Churches need to fundraise the deficit.

Repair summary

The repairs comprise the design and installation of reinforced concrete underpinning with piled foundations and concrete ground beams.

In addition to structural repairs, we are undertaking internal plaster repairs, conserving the wall-paintings where needed, re-rendering external walls where old render has failed, installing new rainwater goods, and other minor repairs like brick replacement, repointing and window repairs.

70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ | office@friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk | 020 7236 3934

President The Most Honourable The Marquess of Salisbury KG KCVO PC DL
Chairman Roger Evans M.A.
Director Rachel Morley BEng

*Friends of Friendless Churches is a company limited by guarantee. Charity no.: 1113097; Company no.: 1119137;
Registered in England and Wales.*

Work completed to date

To date, we have completed the piling and underpinning. This enabled us to erect scaffolding internally and externally. Internally, cracks in the ceiling are currently being filled and loose areas pinned back. This will be limewashed.

As the underpinning required substantial excavation, we had an archaeologist keeping a watching brief. Dave Andrews, the archaeologist, reported two significant finds:

- During excavation of the chancel, a grave slab with indents for brasses was revealed. The brasses are long lost, but the indents show a vertical human figure, with a horizontal band below it which would have had an inscription. This is likely to date from the 15th-century.
- Dave Andrews has been Mundon's archaeologist for many years. Previously, he only found evidence to date the nave to the 14th century. However, upon removing the loose render on the south wall we found that the door is formed in Roman brick. A fragmentary window above the door was built of reused Roman tufa blocks. This workmanship points to the 12th century or an even earlier date.

Completion date

In line with the requirements of the funder, all works must achieve certified practical completion by 30 June 2022. We expect the site will be cleared and the church open again by mid-July.

In reality, without this huge grant from the Culture Recovery Fund, we would not have been able to afford this work. It would have taken years for our tiny charity to fundraise such a large amount. We probably would not have been able to undertake the works in such a comprehensive manner.

However, the grant was not without stress. Designing the structural intervention, specifying the works, obtaining listed building consent, obtaining building regulation approval, competitively tendering the contract, completing these complicated repairs in just ten months (we learned our application was successful in August 2021), whilst meeting the Treasury's routine monitoring and reporting requirements was challenging. My sincere thanks to the project team – especially John Minimas of Roger Mears Architects; Claudio Corallo of Clancy Consulting Engineers and Bakers of Danbury, our excellent contractors. Bakers have worked on St Mary's for decades, and their care for the church and pride in their work is plain to see.

FoFC and St Mary's

St Mary's is one of our best loved churches, and holds an important place in our charity's history. It is the second most visited English church we own. FoFC is a tiny charity of just one full-time and one part-time member of staff. We currently own 60 redundant churches, and take on more closed and threatened places of worship every year. Whilst we have had success with the short-lived Culture Recover Fund, we do not receive any regular funding, and we run our charity on membership subscriptions (£30pa), donations, legacies and minor grants from trusts and foundations. We rely on people visiting the places we've rescued and feeling inspired to become a member.

We are so grateful for the local support for St Mary's – in particular, my thanks to Christine McDonald, who has been St Mary's friend through thick and thin.