

Friends of St Michael's Church, Brent Knoll



NEWSLETTER No 4 May 2017

Welcome to the fourth newsletter from the Friends of St Michael's Church. I must start by apologising for not producing a newsletter in the autumn. I had hoped to give positive news about the implementation of RePitching Our Tent (RPOT). Unfortunately progress here has not been as fast as expected, and I felt that delaying the newsletter was the sensible course of action. I have therefore waited until the publishing of the Parish accounts before sending out a newsletter. Much of this Newsletter is taken up with a Statement of Account and some thoughts about fundraising. If you are not interested in this you can skip this and go on to the news of the Annual Meeting on Wed 28th June, and a short piece that I have written on church fonts.

Ged Keele, Co-ordinator, St Michael's Church Friends

St Michael's Church accounts for 2016

This year I am presenting two statements of account. The first is strictly related to the running costs of St Michael's (income and expenditure) and the second is statement of balances for January and December 2016. My reason for presenting the income and expenditure in this way is to concentrate on running costs of our church. The balances cover three accounts: the Parish Heritage and Santander St Michael's Trust bank accounts and Trust shares. In commenting on these balances I have mentioned the other major non-recurring costs that have come out of St Michael's overall Heritage account.

	Income	Expenditure
Donations	4,698	
Friends membership	926	
Interest on shares	496	
Fundraising	3,051	
Insurance		2,431
Heat and light		3,117
Maintenance and repairs		3,326
Other		546
Churchyard maintenance (paid by Brent Knoll PC)		(3,500)
TOTAL	9,171	12,920

The important points to note here are that income from donations has risen significantly since 2015. Halfway through last year I noted that our donations were running ahead of budget and I raised a query with Jim Hanmer, the TPoTS Treasurer. He confirmed that our donations were indeed running at a higher level and mentioned one donation of £250 that had come from a visitor from the USA! It is obviously very gratifying that St Michael's has been receiving more donations, and a big "thank you" must go to those who have donated. Nevertheless, it concerns me that this is likely to be unsustainable. It will, of course, also be important for us to sustain, and, I hope, improve our fundraising performance in 2017 (see comments below).

On the expenditure side the important points to note are the cost of heating and lighting of £3,117 (transferred to Heritage accounts in 2016) and the cost of churchyard maintenance (approx. £3,500). This is bracketed because St Michael's is in the very fortunate position of having this cost paid directly by Brent Knoll Parish Council.

From this table you can see that the annual cost of maintaining St Michael's is approximately £13k. What you can also see is that, **if the Brent Knoll PC contribution is taken out of the picture the deficit on running costs over the year was as little as £249 (see comments on fundraising below).**

BALANCES at 1/1/2016	BALANCES at 31/1/2016
TPoTS Bank - 9,593	TPoTS Bank - 8,761
Trust Shares - 27,331	Shares - 29,176
Trust Santander a/c – 3,517	Trust Santander a/c – 517
TOTAL 40,441	TOTAL 38,454

Overall there was a deficit of £3,832 on Heritage bank balances. This is largely accounted for by the fact that £2,760 was paid out on David Bolland's legacy and architect's plans for RPOT cost £847. However, the Parish now has the benefit of a superb new mobile altar and lectern, and the plans have contributed to the development of RPOT. The increase in value of shares has meant that the overall capital account stands £1,845 higher than last year. (For a full set of Parish accounts for 2016 visit the PCC page on the Parish Website at <http://www.theparishofthreesaints.org.uk/church-life/parochial-church-council/>)

RePitching Our Tent (RPOT) and the future

There were high hopes this time last year that RPOT would have produced a blueprint for the future of our Parish church buildings. Unfortunately the project manager resigned through ill health in the autumn and there have been difficulties coping with this set back. However, project management is now back on track and a business case is being prepared for submission to the Diocese that we hope will outline the case for the next stage of selecting the Preferred Option for the future. For those who wish to know more about the Project's progress please go to the Parish website (*****).

With slower than expected progress on RPOT it is not surprising that there has been no news on the vexed issue of church closure. However, there has been some discussion in the RPOT Working Group on closure, and what has become clear is that the process of closure is significantly more complex than people thought initially. The Diocese is bound by statute to follow a set of procedures that will involve consultation with the local community and this consultation is likely to take a significant time, possibly years. In the interim the church should remain open, and part of the community. My view is that it is more important for Friends to concentrate on the financial issue of supporting the running costs of maintaining St Michael's rather than worry about closure (see my comments on fundraising below).

Fundraising

This year has been notable for the contribution that Girls Wanna Have Fun has made to our fundraising. In January they organised a very successful Burns Night celebration and in October an equally successful Race Night. Both raised around £1200 and this was split with the Parish, so the Heritage Fund benefited by £1200, a very significant contribution.

Other events have not raised nearly so much but the Thamesdown Ladies Choir gave a splendid performance in St Michael's during May, and Brian Freestone continued his series on composers with Swanning around with Tchaikovsky in October. Our presence at the Brent Knoll fete (cake / plant stalls and providing teas) raised over £500 but August teas were less successful. Nevertheless these teas are an important social event as has been proved at Easter. Finally our Christmas Fair repeated the success of 2015 despite the fact that the failure of the St Michael's boiler meant that we had to switch the event to Brent Knoll School during the week before the event.

Whatever has been done in the past there will continue to be a need to raise significant sums of money through regular fundraising, donations and Friends' subscriptions. The Parish policy is that local communities should raise the funds to support maintenance of the Parish churches. As I mentioned in the Statement of Accounts our Heritage account was almost in balance in 2016. However, last year was an exceptional year for donations and fundraising. It will not be easy to repeat. However, one local factor could help us. The Brent Knoll Parish Hall will be paying off its loan on the Jubilee Room extension at the end of 2017. This *should* mean that there will be less pressure for the Parish Hall to organise fundraising events, and there *could* be more opportunities for other organisations to take on events in the annual Brent Knoll fundraising calendar. I would suggest that Friends should try to position themselves to seize this opportunity in 2018.

Our Annual Meeting

This year the main focus for our Annual Meeting will be Church Heritage and the theme will be:

Looking at your local church

All the churches in our Parish have interesting features and I would like us to concentrate on these buildings rather than worry about finance. Last year a party from the Quantocks National Trust Group visited the Parish and I was involved in showing them round St Michael's and St Mary's in East Brent. I found this an interesting exercise in presentation. I also realised that, whilst it may not be a major money spinner, there are opportunities for raising modest amounts from presenting our churches to visitors.

There may also be opportunities to raise funds through talks to local organisations, and this is something that I would like to be able to do in the future. I shall need feedback from a live audience if I am going to make a success of this approach, so I shall be "road testing" a talk that could be used in the future. I look forward to feedback on the talk, which will concentrate on our Christian Heritage and how this is has led to the rich variety of Parish churches spread around the country.

Please put Wednesday 28th June 7.00 pm in your diary. I will circulate a more formal note nearer the time.

Fonts

A font is a receptacle for baptismal water, and is normally made of stone. In the early church these were large basins, set below ground level, and the candidate was submerged in baptismal water (*submersion*). It was not until the early Middle Ages that fonts were raised above floor level. Infant baptism became the norm and *affusion* (the pouring of holy water over the head) became general practice. In the early Christian Church Baptism was considered to be one of the most important of the Seven Sacraments, emphasising entry into the Christian Life and the purging of sin. Every medieval church possessed its font which was symbolically located near the entrance, at the western end of the nave. In England and Wales most surviving fonts were intended for infant baptism and are shallow and raised on pedestals or plinths to a convenient height. At baptism the priest came into close personal contact with every family in his parish and the font was therefore an important symbol of the pastoral authority of the parish church. It was for this reason that in so many churches the ancient font has survived, even in those churches that have lost all other traces of their medieval origins. So, the age of the font is often a very effective guide to the age of the church.

Looking at our three local churches in the parish we find that the oldest is in St Christopher's, Lympsham, which has a round Norman font that dates from the mid to late twelfth century. Note the zigzag pattern around the base.



St Michael's font is also old, possibly dating from the 13th century. It has an attractive quatrefoil shape.



St Mary's in East Brent has a medieval style font that is a Victorian copy of the ancient damaged font at Rowberrow, said to have come originally from East Brent.



So it is worth looking at the fonts in our local parish churches.....