

ST MARY, BLETSOE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Fabric Annual Report 2020

The year 2019 – 2020 brought to a close the lengthy seven year period from conception to delivery for the restoration of the ruined chancel of St Mary's together with the installation of toilet and refreshment facilities. It required the services of two architects, the raising of over £300,000 through grants and donations, well over 60 applications for support of which 25 were successful and much goodwill from the local community and friends.

St Mary's has been extremely fortunate to benefit from a strong 'Friends' group which has taken the burden of the project management and fundraising. The particular specialist skills and contacts of the Friends of St Mary's Project Manager, David Baker, can never be underestimated in this, harnessing these abilities to a forty year desire to see the chancel back in use. There exists in the village archives, a letter from David to the then Rector back in the 1970s detailing the options for this work that finally came to pass, some 30 years after the formation of the Friends in 1988 and the beginning of what has been a nearly £500,000 programme of work to bring back the fabric of the church to the current status.

So, after some 20 months of off & on work by the chosen contractor, the chancel was rededicated at Harvest Festival 2019 by the Bishop of Bedford and 'handed back' to the worshipping church community for everyday use and the opportunity to develop it as a parochial and parish resource which will be the target once the COVID-19 hiatus is overcome.

The detail for this report can be seen in the evaluation submitted to the National Heritage Lottery Fund, just part of a suite of documents that organisation required. Further documentation is available. Of the other grants, special mention should be made of the Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust which not only provided two significant grants during the period of work but also gave a third donation from the funds it administers on behalf of Wren for new facilities.

It should be noted that not all obvious grant givers were as generous – the National Churches Trust twice declined to help from its own funds despite the obvious qualification of the scheme and also declined to offer help from the Luke Charity funds it administers for North Beds churches despite the connection to the village through the St John family.

Lord St John himself was, as always, a great supporter. And the same can be said for many local people, both inside and outside the church community who rose to the challenge. The Friends of St Mary's and St Mary's PCC and congregation are very grateful for all the generous support.