

# The Friends of St John's, Keynsham – A briefing Paper

## The Charity

The Friends of St John's were founded in 1990 as The Bridges Society, a separate charity (charity no. 900401) with its own constitution to provide for the restoration upkeep and improvement of the fabric of the parish church and churchyard of St John the Baptist, Keynsham. Whilst linked with the Church it is a completely separate organisation.

The charity has over the years given thousands of pounds towards the upkeep and improvement of the Church and a list is provided in Appendix One.

## Why the Friends of St John's are so important

The Parish Church of St John the Baptist is arguably the most significant historical building still standing in the town of Keynsham. First built around 1270, it has been much altered over the years, for example it didn't acquire its current west tower (visible all over the town) until the 1650s. The building is full of fascinating artefacts from the last 700 years, and is fully described in the book *St John the Baptist, Keynsham* by Elizabeth White published in 2005.

As the largest historical building in continuous use for its original purpose in Keynsham it is a priceless part of the town's heritage. It is not the oldest historical artefact – the Roman mosaics in the library are much older; nor is it the largest building with a history – the former Fry's chocolate factory is much larger; nor is it the only historical building still in use – there are many houses around the town built centuries before today, but as a historical building the Church is quite unique.

It is firstly exceptional because of its **age**: most other large medieval buildings have gone. Keynsham Abbey built in 1170 was lost at the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. The parish church of St John survives.

Secondly it is unique because of its **character**: it has accumulated over the centuries memories connected with the unique history of Keynsham. It therefore stands as a kind of elder statesman watching the comings and goings of each new generation, collecting a little something from each one, quite unique in character.

Thirdly it is important as one of the largest **community spaces** in the town: with its excellent acoustics it is favourite venue for concerts. It is also put to community use for Remembrance Sunday, or on many other occasions such as when hosting the sadness of a funeral or the joy of a baptism or wedding.

Fourthly it is unique in having been a **place of prayer** for 700 years: and continues in regular daily use as the Anglican parish church of the town.

The building's upkeep is the responsibility of the church members who make up the St John's District Church Council, which is part of the Parish of Keynsham. This involves a mandatory professional inspection of the Church every five years by an architect, as is appropriate for a building listed as Grade II\*.

The buildings maintenance expenses are over £7,000 a year (see Appendix Two). This is not the cost of running the building for such things as heat and light – but this is the cost of simply keeping the building in a good state of repair. It is this latter cost to which the Friends of St John's specifically contribute.

## Membership of the Friends of St John's

Anyone can become a member of the Charity by paying the annual subscription (currently £20 per year). The main benefit for members is to be a contributor to the immensely worthwhile

preservation of a priceless historical building. The payment of the subscription also gives the member a say at the Annual General Meeting held on the Sunday afternoon nearest the 24<sup>th</sup> June.

The Friends of St John's are run by a committee consisting of members elected from the membership at the Annual Meeting. The total committee of twelve also includes the Team Rector and the two churchwardens.

### **The current situation**

The charity has for the last few years been going through a quiet phase, with no fundraising or social events organised since 2014. This is because over the last few years some of the founding members of the charity have retired after many years of service on the committee.

This means there is a particular opportunity at this moment for those interested in history and who care for the Keynsham's heritage to become involved in the Friends of St John's. The opportunity is not simply to become a member but to join the committee to become part of the team that is hoped will take the charity on to its new and exciting next phase; a phase, where the building which is situated within the heart of the community, can grow in the place it holds within the hearts of the community.

### **Finances**

The charity has currently just under £20,000 in the bank. It has an annual income of about £500, most of which is subscriptions from its 57 members and donations. It receives legacy gifts from time to time.

### **Development plans**

The charity is looking to develop activities that will:

1. Raise the profile of the Friends of St John's charity and its work in support of the fabric of the historic building
2. Raise money for the fabric of the Church
3. Offer members activities that are enjoyable and informative.

Ideas include:

- The development of an annual lecture relating to such subjects as the history of the church (in conjunction with the Keynsham and Saltford Local History Society) free to members of the Charity
- The development of social activities for members such as an annual tour to a place of interest e.g. Hereford Cathedral
- An annual concert in the Church free to members of the Charity
- Encouraging more visit by school groups to investigate the building
- The development of a website for the Friends of St John's
- The publication of new postcards of the church
- Regular articles on the history of the Church in the Parish Contact magazine and Keynsham Voice.

[Not forgetting the continuing willingness of some committee members to offer church tours on specific occasions; the upkeep of a display of church guide leaflets; and the offer for sale at £5 of the book about the Church by Elizabeth White: *John the Baptist, Keynsham.*]

## **Appendix One – The Contribution of the Friends of St John to the upkeep of the Church over the years**

Year	Project	Amount in £s
1991	Repairs to the West Door and the Vestry Door	432
1994	Repairs to the Bridges Memorials in the Chancel	3111
1995	Repairs to the Church Clock, and the installation of an Automatic Night Silencer	269
1997	Further work on the Clock	631
	St. John's Restoration Appeal, 1992 – 1997, "Friends" contribution	6219
1999	Repairs to 5 Hopper Windows	1045
2002	Renewal of 53 Pew Cushions, materials only, the work was carried out by our members	523
2004	Repairs to the Bridges Font and the Bridges Memorials	916
	Repairs to the George and Catherine Bridges Memorial	372
	Wooden Candle Holders	33
2005	Repairs to the purple Burse and Veil	240
2006	Publishing of "A History of St. John's Church" by Elizabeth White	935
2009	Work on the Bells and Ellacombe Chimes	3973
	Rewiring the Chandeliers	1197
	Restoration of the South Aisle and Parclose Screens	14783
2010	Repairs to a Chalice and a Ciborium	60
	Upgrading of the Church Heating System and Boiler Controls	1075
	Repairs to Stained Glass Windows	2388
2011	Replacement Flag of St. George to fly from the Tower	163
	Plaque to commemorate the restoration of the Church, 1992 – 1997	
	Repairs to the stonework on the north side of the Church	6000
2012	White Burse and Veil, white and purple Lectern Ribbons	435
	Repainting and regilding the face of the Tower Clock	645
2013	Further work on the Tower Clock	340
2014	Window repair	169
	Security barrier on the top of the Tower	300
	Repairs to Tower Staircase Windows	150
2015	Repairs to the Chancel Steps	2790
2016	Replacement of treads and risers on the Tower Staircase	2000
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£51,194</b>

## Appendix Two – The cost of maintaining the building over the last nine years. (These are not exceptional years)

Date	Project	Amount
2008	Repair to mediaeval south aisle screen Repairs to the Church bells	£14,783 £4,059
2011	Masonry repairs to the exterior of the Church including Architect's fees stage 1	£5,797
2012	Masonry repairs to the exterior of the Church including Architect's fees stages 1 & 2 Regilding and repainting the tower clock face	£15,403 £1,645
2013	Masonry repairs to the exterior of the Church including Architect's fees stage 2	£2,272
2014	Top of tower security barriers to allow tower tours Replacement of south aisle downpipe Replacement of tower stairs window glass Repair of floor and steps at the east end of the Church Architect's fees overseeing the above works	£1,655 £828 £432 £6,028 £1,352
2016	Painting of the downpipes and porch gate Church clock repairs Replacement of the tower stairs to the ringing chamber Architect's fees overseeing the above works and preparing for new soakaway works	£2,850 £1,275 £3,929 £470
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£62,778</b>
	<b>AVERAGE PER YEAR</b>	<b>£7,000</b>

The above does not include:

- Costs to improve the Church. e.g. the new dais was completed in 2014 and cost a total of £5,576 to build and carpet
- Costs for routine minor maintenance such as the annual lightening conductor check, autumn roof gutter clean and Spring spraying of weeds around the base of the church.
- Some of the costs mentioned in the contributions from the Friends of St John's, if they are of a minor nature.