

# St John the Evangelist, Little Wilbraham

Recent work at St John's has been made necessary by general wear and tear requiring replacement stonework and the use of inappropriate materials by previous generations.

The parapet along the south elevation is made of clunch which, when exposed to the elements, absorbs water and is easily eroded. It had been noted over the past two decades that the parapet was being worn away from the inside and was reduced to a quarter of its original thickness in places. It was then seen that the inside of the south wall was becoming damp near the top and some of the lime wash was flaking off inside the church. About five or six years ago it was seen that the stone tracery on the south window closest to the porch was badly eroded and was even disintegrating in places. Closer inspection revealed that the window was sinking and it started to become bowed outwards about one third of the way up from the bottom.

The Victorians had rendered the south wall, which is quite right for a clunch wall, but they had used concrete rather than lime mortar. Concrete does not "breathe" like lime mortar, it forms a watertight seal. This meant that over the years the wall had been filling with water from the eroded parapet and this water could not escape except inside the church.

In 2020 Father Miles Pateman, then a curate in the benefice, undertook the monumental task of raising funds to effect repairs estimated to cost £120,000. Miles raised £95,000 in grants by the time that he left the benefice in early 2021 and we shall always be grateful for his work on the project. By June 2021 we had bridged the gap by public appeal and a number of substantial private donations and we were in a position to start work. The church was closed on July 11, 2021, and the team moved in. It was quickly discovered that the damage to the parapet was worse than we had dared to believe and that further stonework was required. Removing the lead gutter behind the parapet revealed that the wooden gutter beneath the lead was so rotten that handfuls of the timber could be picked up and water squeezed out.





The window was removed and shipped to the glazier's yard where it was painstakingly reassembled into new stone tracery. The south pitch of the outside of the roof on the south aisle needed to be re-covered with copper laid by a specialist coppersmith. The gutters were redesigned and built to meet modern standards and then relined with lead. In February 2022 the window was returned and the building was once more sealed. The internal and external scaffolding was removed and (after a thorough clean-up operation) the church reopened for services on Mothering Sunday, March 27, 2022.

The only task remaining is to re-render the stonework around the window with lime mortar, but this cannot be done until the chance of frost has passed.