

Progress Report for The Friends of Fotheringhay Church - January 2018

It was on Monday 25 April 2016 that contractors arrived at the site of Saint Mary's and All Saints' Church, Fotheringhay, to begin the work to establish a new drainage system externally and install toilets, create a kitchen servery and flower preparation facility, as part of the project to improve the facilities within the building.

The church now has new perforated collector land drains, complete with catch pits and inspection chambers constructed and a more effective drainage system, foul drain and trench arch installed. The work to provide universally accessible and unisex toilet facilities has been completed. The kitchen servery and flower preparation facilities have been installed and are fully operational.

It was on Monday 26 June 2017 that contractors arrived at the site of St Mary & All Saints Church, Fotheringhay, to begin the seventeen-month programme of restoration, involving the replacement of the four roofs, north and south aisle, nave and tower, the repair and cleaning of windows, the renewal of gutterings, rainwater goods and ironmongery and the renovation of masonry.

The most obvious aspect of the work undertaken to date to the casual observer has been the construction of a massive scaffolding and temporary roof structures covering the tower and nave. Once the scaffolding was of sufficient height contractors began the task of removing the tower roof, at which point it became clear that the concealed structural timbers had slowly disintegrated as time had been ticking away. The wall plates needed to be replaced and the spanning timbers needed to be reinforced with additive structural splices.

The contracts manager reported:

Severe rotten timbers to both wall plates, rafter supports, jack rafters and main boarding to the roof. Cast iron braces have corroded away, fixings have rusted and water ingress as a result of the final cutting away the lead sheeting, forcing a large hole ... allowing water to track along and over all metal work and timber substrate beams. Existing timber connections have failed due to rot.

Other points which are noteworthy include the following:

- a. It transpired that when the tower leadwork gutters were renewed in the late 1980s the contractors of the day did not identify the parlous state of the timbers and simply roofed over them. It was believed that the existence of new gutter leadwork on the tower indicated that the timbers would be structurally sound. Sadly, not so.
- b. Since the expensive scaffolding was already in place over the tower, members of the Standing Committee were advised rapidly to instruct repairs, which necessitated the installation of additional scaffolding, including a major 'crash-deck' structure and 'birdcage' construction inside the tower. This additional scaffolding had to be hauled up 140 feet and then lowered 60 feet through the roof opening and into the tower. When the new beams and wall plates have subsequently been installed the scaffolding then has to be lifted 60 feet inside the tower, out through the roof opening before then being lowered 140 feet down the outside of the building to the ground.
- c. Bespoke beams of fine grain European oak, selected for its strength, resilience and longevity, have now been hoisted up to the tower roof to replace 'the old', wearied by the ravages of time and climate, in the hope that 'the new' may serve their purpose for the next five hundred years, and installation has begun.
- d. An initial inspection of the nave roof carried out on Monday 22 January 2018 yielded very promising results with the sampled substrate woodwork described as in excellent condition.

Bill James