

# The Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust

## Final Report from

### St Nicolas Church, Hail Weston Ref CHCT Registration No 22-07.

The Restoration Group of St Nicolas church, Hail Weston, is pleased to submit its final report to The Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust, following completion of Phases 1 and 2 of their project which was finally signed off by the building inspector on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

We are delighted to let you know the following information:

- **What we set out to achieve:** We managed to complete these two phases in full. These included providing disabled access into the building, the removal of the Victorian south porch, its renovation and re-erection over the north door (the main entrance into the church), and the building of a small extension on the footprint of the former south porch to house a disabled toilet, plus a small servery with oak cupboards in it, and a new path from the north to the south doors which is wheelchair-friendly. Everyone is delighted with it, and we are particularly thrilled that we took our time to make sure that the changes that we made to the building would be sympathetic to the Grade 2\* listed building. The nicest compliment that we have received to date is, "The extension looks as though it has always been here."
- **What have we learned?**
- Our biggest problem initially was getting all the funding together at the same time. We had to withdraw one funding application 3 times and re-submit it, to get all the money gathered up together.
- Being a small committee was extremely helpful as we all pulled together to make sure that things worked. We had our professional architect to project manage the work for us, and this was invaluable as none of us had the experience or knowledge to deal with the intricacies that inevitably turn up on a project of this nature. His input was invaluable, and one of the best decisions that we made.
- We kept an extremely tight control on our funding and spending – and were thrilled that the final cost was only just over the original quoted for the job. Thankfully, we continued to fundraise throughout the time between our original grant applications and the finished phases 1 and 2 of the project, so this enabled us to have sufficient funds to pay all our bills. Our fundraising continues as we now prepare for Phase 3.
- How keen our local community is on getting the church updated so that it will provide a large community space for the village to use throughout the week when it is not needed for church services. Not only has the Restoration Group been fund-raising to achieve this, but other local community groups and individuals have continued to fundraise for us, too. It is wonderful to receive so much local support – both in practical and financial terms as well as just 'cheering us on'.
- **How many people have been involved in the project?**  
Whilst we originally started with 9 members on the Restoration Group (several of whom had specialist knowledge on individual subjects), we now have 6 members for the actual delivery of Phases 1 and 2. Our Treasurer, Barry Jordan, has been with us for the whole of the 8 years that it took to deliver Phases 1 and 2, and he has just stepped down at the end of January 2024, having handed over to Veronica Bolton, our new Treasurer, once he had got all the annual accounts and Reports completed. In addition to the Restoration Group members, we have had numerous other people in the local community helping us with the project and fund-raising for us (and still doing so as we prepare for Phase 3).
- **The number of beneficiaries from our project?**  
There are just over 600 residents in Hail Weston and as the only public building large enough to host most village events and available for use by residents/groups/other local users throughout the week/weekend, the church is

used by numerous individuals 2,000+ times per year (2019: 2,382 visitors excluding general church services – last complete figures before church closed for Covid restrictions/restoration work).

However, since the completion of the disabled access, installation of the disabled toilet and the new servery, (December 2023), the increase in use has been noticeable. For example, usage between 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 is already up on previous years (534 individuals), and the monthly Village Coffee morning Group have already decided to make the church its new regular venue, rather than meeting in each other's homes. We have also had further fund-raising events in the church and an increase in attendance because we now have toilet facilities available. It has been particularly pleasing to see more children and several older people coming.

- **Final Project Cost for Phases 1 and 2**

Initially we worked out the cost of carrying out Phases 1 and 2 would be £179,213.04, which included 20% contingency funding. The actual final cost was £180,173.40. Thank you very much for the loan of £20,000, which helped our cash flow immensely, as well as for the grant funding. We have put money by to refund you.

Our archaeologist fees came to much more than initially anticipated as many more bones were discovered in the area where the new extension was to be erected and, on the advice of our archaeologist, and in discussion with our architect/project manager, the main funder for this particular area of the project and the Environment Agency, we decided to put a trench arch in for drainage, rather than try to continue to dig across the rest of the churchyard and connect to the main sewage system.

We also had to remove and reinter three cremation plots that had been put into the wrong place during an interregnum many years ago, in order to protect them, as they lay very close to where the building work would be going on. We contacted the families who, thankfully, were very understanding and supportive of what we were trying to achieve, and we paid all the expenses to have the ashes reinterred in another area of the churchyard, including the provision of new caskets for two of them.

- **Final Thoughts on the Project**

As this is our first experience of running a large project, it has been a very steep learning curve for the whole of the Restoration Group, with some worrying moments whilst we wondered what to do next, when various problems arose. We were extremely thankful that we had had the sense to employ Peter Slinger, our conservation architect, to manage the project for us, and we have learnt a lot from him and greatly benefitted from his advice and guidance. Thankfully he will still be there working with us, as we move on to the next Phase.

Perhaps our greatest satisfaction though has been to see the delight and pleasure that the local community has expressed about what we have achieved so far. Without exception, everyone is really pleased with the design of the extension and the fact that the church now has running water available inside, with the luxury of a properly fitted out servery, instead of having to go to an outside tap with the kettle and then having to wash up cups and plates in a plastic bowl, balanced across some of the church pews, on a folded-up table. The installation of the disabled toilet has also been a huge success, and we are already noticing more people wanting to use the building in the short time since these new facilities became available.

The project has really pulled the whole community together. We have received lots of help, support and encouragement from so many people, and can never thank them all enough. We even discovered that a couple of people were coming into the churchyard after most of the building work had been completed and were quietly beginning to tidy up around the graves. (I nicknamed them 'The Garden Angels' and they have now adopted the name and formed themselves into an official group with 14 members and are planning a full programme of churchyard garden restoration, which is very exciting)!

We are extremely grateful to The Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust for supporting our Phases 1 and 2 project. Without you, we would never have been able to get this project off the ground. The whole community is benefitting, and we are now well on the way towards making the church a proper community hub that is available for everyone to use and enjoy, throughout the week. Thank you so much for supporting us.

Anne-Marie Hamilton

Chairman

St Nicolas Church Restoration Group

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024