

Annual Fabric Report 2025

All Saints Church, Hethel



Towards the end of 2024, along with its own fund-raising and receipt of donations and bequests, the PCC had enough offers of grants from trusts to instruct the architect to go ahead with essential tower restoration. In the early months of 2025, further applications for funding were successful, allowing parallel restoration of the 16th century bell. Scaffolding was erected in January so that bat consultant Jane Harris could check for hibernating bats. At least one was found, halting the project until 1.4.25.

The rest of this report could be filled with lament over how slow progress has been on the tower work, how intransigent the builders have been and how much time has been expended on chasing them. For example, PCC Minutes of the 29.9.26 meeting, almost six months after commencement, reported “some small progress” and that the architect had asked Hoggs the builders repeatedly for estimates for small variations without success. This latter information was eventually received and the PCC felt that there was sufficient grant ‘headroom’ in December to authorise the repairs to the tower roof, the grille in the gable at the east end of the nave and lifting slabs to enable full restoration of the electrical cable that failed in the mausoleum in late 2024.

By mid-autumn, we were warning the architect and builder of the likelihood that the Listed Places of Worship VAT reclaim scheme was likely to be nearing its end or running out of money and urging rapid completion of the project. To little effect, although, once the builders paid Higby’s, the bell hangers, for their work, the bell was returned and rehung just before Christmas. The ground-stage ladder was not, however, ordered, which will lead to further delay and costs in 2026. The quality of Hoggs’ work is not in doubt, but it would be impossible to recommend their service to another church on their showing in Hethel.

Despite this backdrop, it was wonderful to have the bell in service just before Christmas, when it was rung to the evident delight of local people, churchgoers and not, alike.

The air-source heat pumps continue to work reliably and effectively. They were not serviced in 2025 because of delays resulting from Seckers cancelling appointments due to ill-health or coming ill-equipped. Rather than service in late autumn and given the low usage rate, it seemed best to organise for spring 2026 and save a year’s fee.

Paul Riches performed his usual good service in February, tidying the insides and tops of the hedges. The east ditch was dry enough to allow him to access the far side in order to cut it back. The hedge is thus thinner, making it possible to trim the full width of the top from the churchyard.

The PCC were concerned about Ash trees on the eastern boundary of the churchyard showing signs of Ash dieback disease and thus at risk of falling without warning. On a personal recommendation Messrs Plantscape of East Carleton assessed and recommended selective pruning of dead or dying limbs, which they subsequently performed. It is worth noting that the Parish Council have now limited the grant to the church for maintaining the churchyard to £400pa. Whilst we are grateful for this support, the cost of the

tree work and Mr Riches hedge cutting was approximately twice this, which is clearly an unsustainable situation. Given that the churchyard, its graves, wildflowers, benches and cut swathe are much more a village amenity than solely for the church, we hope that there may be some flexibility if public safety concerns necessitate more tree work.

The annual Wymondham Nature Group cut of the churchyard took place in early September (huge thanks as ever to Anne Edwards and her team, and to the Grays for dealing with the dragged-off herbage). As usual, the roadside and top of the hedge are kept tidy by the passing tractor; the church is very grateful that no charge is ever made for this service.

Last year, the process to extinguish the footpath through the churchyard was initiated by Peter and Cathy Nicholls of King John's Thorn (behind the church). This was concluded in 2025, with the official route now from the road down the track that leads to Hethel Old Thorn, with a new kissing gate into the field. There is no longer a Public Footpath through the churchyard itself (though OS Maps, including online, will take time to catch up).

During the year, our insurers (Ecclesiastical) visited to assess risk and premium. It was pleasing that nothing of great significance was found, the premium reduced slightly and just a couple of injunctions made. The first was to get rid of the gas fires and bottles (subsequently disposed of via eBay); the PCC was also advised that, if we expect the policy to cover theft of metal, it is essential to have any external metal forensically marked with smart water. This remains to be done. Useful confirmation was received that 'official' PAT testing is not legally required; annual visual scrutiny is sufficient.

The three-year 'long term undertaking' with Ecclesiastical expired in the autumn. Premiums and cover arrangements were sought from comparative insurers showing that the offer from Ecclesiastical was the best. It was also noted that Ecclesiastical's not-for-profit status and their generosity to churches, including All Saints, was a factor in their favour. It was also decided to stick with 100% cover.

The 2025 Quinquennial Inspection Report was received in June, as if to emphasise the 'Forth Bridge' nature of church maintenance. Matters requiring the most urgent attention are scattered minor roof repairs and painting the beam under the mausoleum floor. It was pleasing that the architect began the Executive Summary with "The church and churchyard are well cared for and a credit to those involved in looking after the church." We know, too, from verbal comments and our visitors book, that the simple beauty of this well-kept place is noticed and much appreciated by 'the congregation that we don't see'. The church is, of course, the living stones, the people of God. Nevertheless, the building is a sacred place – some say 'thin' – and a precious repository of faith where God is near and prayer easier.

Peter Nicholls, 25.3.25
de facto Fabric Officer