



Friends of St. John's  
Merrow

# ***FoStJ Newsletter***

## ***Summer 2021***



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## Chairman's message

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this Summer edition of the *Friends of St. John's* (FoStJ) Newsletter.

The last 18 months have been so difficult for all us but at last we seem to have a window of opportunity to restore a semblance of normal life, albeit cautiously. Not the best of timing to start our charitable organisation 'The Friends of St John the Evangelist Church Merrow,' or just 'FoStJ' to save a lot of typing!

During the lockdowns we were however able to develop an interesting website at [www.fostj.org](http://www.fostj.org) which has sought to provide information of interest with respect to the fabric of the church, its grounds and some of those people recorded on the memorials within the graveyard.

We are encouraged by the amazing initial support received from those of you that have taken out membership of our charity. [ [www.fostj.org/join/](http://www.fostj.org/join/) ]

Since last summer we had been trying to have a 'live' public launch for FoStJ but were thwarted at every turn by the unpredictability of lockdowns. Because of this we decided we couldn't wait any longer and engaged via the virtual world of Zoom on the 24<sup>th</sup> April when we had our launch and first fund raising event in the Church, namely the organ recital with the amazing organist Mark Shepherd, Director of music at Charterhouse, giving a virtuoso performance [[www.fostj.org/recital/](http://www.fostj.org/recital/)]. I am pleased to report that over £1,200 has been raised by the event ,to date, towards our target of £9,600 as a contribution to the renovation cost of the magnificent William Hill Organ itself. [ [www.fostj.org/organ/appeal/](http://www.fostj.org/organ/appeal/) ]

Finally we can at last plan more events inside the Church including musical events and the AGM...see the website for details as they become available. It is hoped that in due course the Church itself can be seen as a venue for the whole community

This Newsletter contains details of the major projects that were completed during 2020 that still require some funding to 'balance the books'. 2021 also brings the need to repair stonework and further funding. The completed and future projects are explained more fully below.

Chris Shorter

Chair FoStJ  
July 2021

*Please note that the views and comments herein are published without prejudice, being those of the writers and not necessarily those of the Friends of St. John's Merrow.*

*Data Protection Act. Members are reminded that names, addresses, telephone numbers and membership details are stored on computer files to assist with the management of the charity correspondence. We do not pass your details on to anyone else.*

## About FoStJ

The Friends of St John's (FoStJ) has been established for all those who are interested in becoming involved and supporting the essential restoration and preservation of the Grade II listed church building and its surrounding churchyard. This will help ensure the future of the church both as a place of worship and a village asset recognised for its charm and historical interest.

Individuals and any appropriate organisation are most welcome to become members. We encourage you to become a Friend of St John's and support our work by joining for a very modest annual fee/donation. [www.fostj.org/membership-payment/](http://www.fostj.org/membership-payment/)

You may have an interest in old buildings, local history or have experience in building restoration for example.

Funds are raised from subscriptions, donations and fund raising events organised by FoStJ to raise money for specific projects identified by the PCC and selected by the FoStJ Charity Trustees.

If you would like to know more please email [info@fostj.org](mailto:info@fostj.org) or download our [introductory pamphlet](#) and if you feel you would like to become involved please complete the form on the back and please send to the Parish Office at 222 Epsom Road, Merrow, Guildford, GU4 7AA .

## Work at St. John's in 2020

### St. John's *Hill* Organ History, Evolution & 2020 Restoration



**Remember you can sponsor a pipe to help with our fund raising: [www.fostj.org/organ/appeal/](http://www.fostj.org/organ/appeal/)**

**William Hill & Son** was one of the main organ builders in England during the 19th century. In 1916 Norman & Beard and William Hill & Sons merged because Dr. Arthur George Hill who had no male heirs to sustain his business. The merged company was bought by John Christie in 1923, and remained in the Christie family until the business was wound up in 1998.

Mavis Martin and Micky Clare are the principal organists at St. John's. Amazing to recount, Mavis began playing our organ when 15 years old, and recalls when the *wind* was hand pumped.....she still plays regularly today for services.

#### **Organ history:**

Before 1881, a barrel organ was used. This had to be taken outside the church to run through the tunes on the drum until the right one was found and then taken back inside to resume its part in the service. The pipe organ was given to the church in 1881 by Mrs. Joseph Thrupp, was originally located in the memorial chapel, but was moved to the gallery

at the west end of the nave in 1925. Until 1954 the organ was hand pumped, but it was then converted to electricity and moved to its present position in the chancel.

**1881** Hill – Original installation, organ cost estimate £300.

**1951** W.Hill & Son & Norman & Beard – Organ reconstructed. Position North chancel 'originally, main body was in chancel (N.S.) then removed to West end above the choir vestry; finally, in 1925, casework left at West end and console returned to chancel again'.

**1998** - Mixture II inserted on Great; action and compasses inserted; case details added.

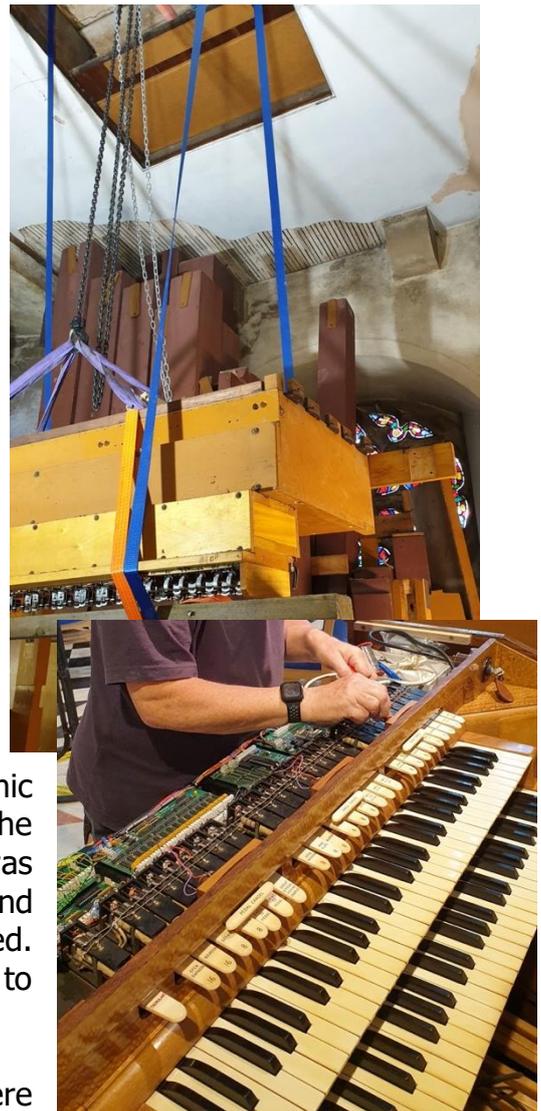
**2019/2020** – Since 1951, apart from routine annual tuning and the installation of a humidifier a few years ago, no significant work has been carried out on the organ for around 50 years, so understandably upon inspection various components were found to be at the end of their useful life.

During the course of 2018/19, deterioration of some components began to manifest themselves at regular intervals in the form of cyphers (continuous sounding of a note), rogue notes and intrusive humming noises. As these problems began to cause disruption at some services, the decision was made to call in some expertise to diagnose the cause of the problems.

Inspections were undertaken by both a respected organ builder and the Diocesan Organ Advisor. They were broadly in agreement as to the scope of urgent works required. Consideration was also given to replacing the organ with a high quality digital electronic organ, a solution adopted by numerous churches. The recommendation of the Diocesan Organ Advisor was that St. John's pipe organ was of such pedigree and quality that it should be retained and fully refurbished. St. John's PCC took this advice and went to tender to specialist reputable organ builders in March 2019.

Pipe Organ Services from Melton Mowbray were awarded the contract for the works, and commenced in January 2020. Of course. The COVID pandemic intervened, and completion of the work was delayed until Autumn 2020. The cost also increased a little to approximately £36,000 due to additional work that became apparent once the organ was stripped down.

The result of all the painstaking work carried out is that we now have our very special pipe organ back in near perfect condition and ready to be played for the enhancement of worship and the enjoyment of the whole community. The organ will actually sound better than it ever has before, since one of the major improvement tasks completed was to modify the



timber framework to allow the Swell Box and Soundboard to be lowered so that the sound is no longer partially blocked by the ceiling structure in the organ loft above the vestry. The images below show the hoisting effort from bell tower ringing chamber above and the work carried out to upgrade the console communication electronics and wiring.

### **Key organ metrics**

- 960 pipes.
- Pedals plus 2 manuals, a Great and a Swell.
- Stops & keys:
  - Pedals – 4 Stop actions.
  - Lower Manual (keyboard) Great – 8 stop actions.
  - Upper Manual (keyboard) Swell – 6 stop actions.
  - Total 18 stops.

In “The National Pipe Organ Register” you’ll find St. John’s 1881 Hill Organ <https://www.npor.org.uk/NPORView.html?RI=N13810>

### **Summary of the main 2020 works**

Item	Description
<b>Controls and electrical upgrades</b>	<p><b>To improve reliability (the neural network of the instrument):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install new electronic transmission system between console and the organ loft.</li> <li>• Replace original cotton insulated low voltage cables with safer materials to a modern specification.</li> <li>• Replace pneumatic actuators on the Swell Trompette chest with direct acting magnetic devices to improve reliability.</li> </ul>
<b>Reconfiguration</b>	<p><b>To improve the sound of the organ:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconstruct organ framework to lower the Swell Box and Soundboard as close as possible to the Great Organ level. Move the Swell Trompette Chest to the front of the Swell Box with the Swell Soundboard behind it.</li> <li>• Alter wind trunks as necessary to suit the new positions.</li> </ul>
<b>Pipes</b>	<p><b>Cleaning and repair:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All pipes inspected and repaired generally in the workshop, but where too large to remove treated in-situ.</li> <li>• Clean, repair and round out in the body all metal flues.</li> <li>• Clean all wooden pipes and check for soundness, filling any splits with hot glue. Remove caps where possible to enable sharp edges to be removed and clean out flues and feet. Check stopping in feet for soundness. Re-fit stoppers replace denatured leather and grease as appropriate.</li> <li>• Take apart and clean reed pipes. Cut out any broken or fatigued pieces and solder in new pieces of malleable metal. Check and true shallot faces and fit new wedges to replace any loose or broken ones. Replace all existing tinned tuning slides with new.</li> <li>• On completion place each rank upon the voicing machine to check the speech and tonal regulation of the pipes.</li> </ul>
<b>Wind System</b>	<p><b>The heart and lungs of the instrument:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up bellows and thoroughly clean internally and externally. Check leather-work and patch any leaks with sheepskin.</li> <li>• Take apart wind control valves and fit with new blinds, tapes and wires</li> <li>• Clean all flanges and plates. Check and re-bed as required to ensure wind-tightness.</li> </ul>
<b>General work</b>	<p><b>Dismantling, cleaning and repairing virtually every moving and static part:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-felting, repair and replace leatherwork.</li> </ul>

Item	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean and polish stop tabs, adjust movements and clean contacts.</li> <li>• Take apart pedal board, clean and re-felt frame. Sand and re-polish pedal sticks. Dismantle, clean keys, key contacts and wiper plate surfaces. Clean, replace compressed felts and baizes.</li> <li>• Clean, refurbish and repair Soundboards, Pallets, Rack-boards &amp; Stays.</li> <li>• Refurbish Underactions, including airtightness and operation.</li> </ul>

A history of our William Hill Organ and a recording of the celebratory recital can be found via the FoStJ website. [www.fostj.org/organ/](http://www.fostj.org/organ/)

## Bell Ringing at St John's, Merrow

In 2007 a new band of bell ringers was formed at St John's. Since then, the band has evolved and progressed with support from the Leatherhead District of which we are a part.

Bell ringing involves coordination and a sense of rhythm, it is fun, sociable and good for mind and body. Our band consists of people of all ages, from all walks of life, some are members of the church congregation and others are not.

As well as ringing the bells at St John's we are able to ring the bells at other churches, usually including a pub lunch..... Some of us have even rung at Guildford Cathedral!



Visitors to the Tower are always welcome. To find out more please contact our Tower Captain Jane, 07765 620017 or [Farquharson@ntlworld.com](mailto:Farquharson@ntlworld.com)

For the past 120 years, the bells of St John's church have been at the heart of Merrow village life. A new band of bell ringers was formed in 1897 when the present peal of six bells was commissioned to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, replacing the original 17th century bells which had fallen into disrepair.



Research carried out by current Merrow Band members Linda Elliott and Lynn Boniface includes a collection of extracts from ringing journals and books of the time illustrating the story of ringing at Merrow, from the early years at the turn of the last century to the present day. The complete document is available from Tower Captain, Jane Farquharson e-mail [farquharson@ntlworld.com](mailto:farquharson@ntlworld.com) .



[A Quick history of the Merrow Bells.](#)

Merrow's original bells were made by Richard Eldridge, a bell founder at Wokingham and Chertsey from 1593 to 1622. The present ring of six bells were given by the parishioners to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, replacing original bells dating from as early as the 16th century.

### The Ringing Room

The Ringing Room contains the bell ropes with their brightly coloured sallies, and a set of handbells. It also houses the clock, which was built into the north wall in 1843, and has given remarkable service ever since. A single striking hammer strikes on the tenor bell on the hour only. The hammer was originally fixed to the treble bell, which proved too weak in sound to be heard far away.

On the west wall is a plaque stating that the bells were re-hung in 1946 to remember Seaton George Legge Eustace, Churchwarden 1929-44, and to thank God that in his latter years his household suffered no harm from the attacks of the enemy.

St John's bells range in weight from the treble (bell 1) - the lightest with the highest note - to the tenor (bell 6) - the heaviest at over 13 cwt. Ton vs Tonne - You may recall there are 20 cwt per ton (2,240 lb) and 1000kg per tonne (2,204.6 lb).



Bell	Weight		Diameter		Note	Date	Founder
	cwt-qtr-lbs	kg	inches	cm			
<b>1</b>	5-3-1	305	27.75	70.5	D	1898	Mears & Stainbank
<b>2</b>	6-2-24	330	30.50	77.5	C	1898	Mears & Stainbank
<b>3</b>	7-2-18	380	32.38	82.2	Bb	1898	Mears & Stainbank
<b>4</b>	8-2-21	430	34.63	88.0	A	1898	Mears & Stainbank
<b>5</b>	10-1-6	533	36.75	93.3	G	1898	Mears & Stainbank
<b>6</b>	13-1-23	684	43.75	111.1	F	1898	Mears & Stainbank

### Renovation, repairs & fund raising 1977-2020

The bells were re-hung in a new frame and refurbished with metal headstocks in 1977 and renovated again in 2016, including replacement of the ropes. Most recently, essential ringing room refurbishment, together external and internal sound attenuation work was carried out in 2020 around the COVID restrictions. The cost of this work was £11,000, £3,500 was provided from the ringing guild Bell Restoration Fund, leaving £7,500 for the Parish to fund.

## FoStJ 2021 Plans

### Repairing the original stone work at St John's Merrow.

One of the priorities in maintaining the fabric of the church at present is the repair and restoration of the attractive Victorian stonework that surrounds the upper parts of the bell tower at the West end of the church.

During the extensive rebuilding that took place under the direction of the famous Architect RC Hussey in the 1880's, the stone work in the upper parts of the bell tower was reinforced with iron bars with the intention of stabilizing the more delicate detailed quatrefoils and openings.

Over the decades these bars rust and then expand, spalling and cracking some parts the stone masonry. This requires specialist remedial work to stabilise these very attractive features of the building to ensure they can be enjoyed by future generations.

To this end the PCC has been granted a faculty, which is in effect *listed building planning permission* from The Diocese of Guildford, to carry out these works. The works will require scaffolding and specialist stone masons to replace old iron bars with stainless steel and repair the areas of natural stone to match the existing original design. It is anticipated that this work will be carried out by Ansty and Stone who are local specialists in the conservation and restoration of churches in and around The Guildford Diocese. Chris Ansty, Director, won an award in 2008 for his work in the restoration of the Lovelace Mausoleum in East Horsley.

This will cost several thousands of pounds and is a project that The Friends of St Johns will be supporting in 2021.

Peter Tappin, Trustee FoStJ  
July 2021

### Other news

#### Churchyard Re-wilding update:

Hopefully many will have seen the new "*Re-wilding*" signs around the churchyard and the lovely illustrated poster on the notice board explaining what we are doing at St Johns. We have Jane Stevenson and David Hunt to thank for these and we are hoping to now erect several more of the posters at the key entry points to the churchyard to further help to explain what is going on. Jane is now also involved with the wider *Eco Church* initiative and it's great to have another enthusiastic, knowledgeable and creative source of inspiration.

Now that the unmown areas of wildflowers and chalkland grasses are growing and the grass paths more clearly visible we can start to see how the project is evolving. Most exciting in mid-July was discovering three beautiful Pyramid Orchids which to my knowledge have never been seen before under the old mowing regime, one particularly fine example is beside the small path from Trodds Lane on the North side. Other wildflowers include varieties of Vetch both yellow and the taller purple tufted variety and Oxeye daisies which produced a wonderful display in June and July. The areas sown with a special chalkland flower and grass mix have frustratingly yet to show significant germination so we will have to review this for next year when the anticipation is to have greater variety and colour including cornflowers and poppies in our midst. Another idea is to plant more Spring bulbs this Autumn.

I meet with Karen, who carries out our mowing every 2 weeks at this time of year, to review the paths and mown areas and have met with several people who have graves that they visit to discuss refinements to what we are doing.  
Peter Tappin. July 2021

## **Friends of St. Johns Committee**

FoStJ is registered Charity No. 1189324. The committee comprises the following Officers and Members:

**Chair** – Chris Shorter

**Secretary** – Gordon Farquharson

**Treasurer** - Mark Butcher

**Membership Secretary** – Linda Elliott

**Committee members** – Mark Stuart-Bourne & Robert Avis

If you're interested in volunteering your support of FoStJ's ambitions, please contact Chris or Gordon. [chairman@fostj.org](mailto:chairman@fostj.org) & [secretary@fostj.org](mailto:secretary@fostj.org)