

The Friends of St George's Church, Esher

For AGM Tuesday 21 April 2020

Report by Chairman

2019 – again a year with progress made and with changes on the horizon.

As is customary, the Church was open for visitors on Saturdays from April 6th to September 28th - under the supervision of twenty willing and knowledgeable guides working to a rota. Some 300 visitors were recorded, most of whom were looked after by our guides.

There were a number of events at the church during the year including tours, exhibitions, plays, recitals and concerts. And of course the regular Candlemas service at the end of January. All this resulted in over further 550 visitors.

And taking into account the estimated 1,500 footfalls for the annual residency of Cards for Good Causes, it has been another good year for visitors to our Church, nearly 2,400 in number.

The Friends now number thirty-six including joint memberships. Interest in joining the group is growing, slowly but surely.

Hire bookings are handled by The Churches Conservation Trust (TCCT) direct. The range of hirer activity this last year continues to be impressive– theatre and music groups, Probus and Arts Societies tours etc. This relatively new system is generally working well.

The year 2019 was TCCT's 50th anniversary year. We marked this in some style on Heritage Weekend in September with a very well-attended Saturday talk by Stephen Chater and guided tours of the Church and Churchyard. Stephen's talk was entitled Esher – Ships & Slavery. An unusual but most interesting subject, it offered differing perspectives on the issue of slavery as illustrated by the lives and careers of three individuals commemorated in the Church.

During the year TCCT launched their new strategy to encourage a higher profile and more intensive use of Churches in the community. To this end they established the post of Local Community Officer. For the South East, the newly appointed officer is Nick Watts. He's responsible for a bloc of 23 churches in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Nick is our point of contact with TCCT. This new arrangement is working well with good and regular contact, auguring well for co-operation on future initiatives.

At the turn of the year, TCCT set in train a consultation to obtain views on a proposed Conservation Grant Scheme. The Scheme seeks to involve Friends groups and the wider community in fund raising for maintenance and repair. TCCT match funding would be available to enable groups to undertake small scale repairs to their church as well as, presumably, conservation work. Fund raising would be a new activity for the Friends and there will be much discussion at Committee and within the group as to a feasible way forward.

As we approach the start of the guiding season, the coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis is weighing heavily upon us. In line with Government advice your committee has suspended all guiding activities for the first part of the season. It's hoped that conditions will permit a resumption later but there can be no certainty. Planned activities in the Church arranged through TCCT for this period are cancelled.

Subject to election, most present members of the Executive Committee are willing to continue and Clive Thompson who we co-opted during the year is standing for election – my thanks to them all for their continuing support.

Brian James (Chairman)