

CASE STUDY

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, KINGSTON LISLE, DIOCESE OF OXFORD, COFE

www.kingstonlisle.net/church

Population: 225 (2011 census)

This 12th Century church, listed Grade II*, was put on Historic England's Heritage *At Risk* register in 2014 and the church and small congregation was faced with fundraising for a £400,000 restoration.

It was decided to tackle everything at once. Angus Saer, the churchwarden who led the project, says: "It was important to do everything as part of one project and for everyone to know that they wouldn't be asked for any further funds for at least 50 years."

Beginning with urgent repairs to the roof, timbers and walls, they re-rendered the exterior, put in new heating and lighting, conserved the 14th Century wall paintings, redecorated the interior, improved the seating and flooring, and restored the 15th-19th Century woodwork.

The urgent repairs eligible for an HLF grant under the GPOW programme came to £ 245k. Having applied once before and been rejected, they were awarded an HLF Stage 1 pass on 24th March 2014.

To find sources for further funding, Angus then went on to the Heritage Funding Directory website and applied to a total of 32 local and national grant providers. The project received 22 grants including from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Churches Trust, Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust and ChurchCare. Aside from these applications, robust community fundraising efforts raised £56k through donations and £24k from four concerts, two pub quizzes and sponsorship events. The 'Sponsor a Tile' initiative offered residents and others with connections to the church the opportunity of naming the 150 stone tiles on the porch roof for posterity. People wrote names, messages and memorials to loved ones, raising £2,000 and crucially involving the whole community. A 'Sponsor a Pipe' campaign for the new pipe organ raised £7,000.

In April 2015 the Stage 2 application was submitted and a grant of £144,400 was awarded in July 2015. Work started straight away and the repairs were completed at the end of January 2016.



The £14k conservation of the wall paintings fell outside the HLF funding and was carried out during and after the restoration works to the chancel. In addition, all the woodwork in the church (including the 15th Century pew ends which were of particular interest to Historic England) was cleaned and polished by a local specialist. The carpets were removed and the Victorian tiles were cleaned, greatly improving the acoustics of the church, which recently hosted its first concert in living memory.

Angus says he would sum up the keys to successful fundraising as:

- do your research;
- tell a story;
- sell it with soundbites;
- polish the commas;
- make a connection.

You can watch a webinar on this fundraising campaign that Angus Saer presented for Giving to Heritage on YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sF_1lluung

Angus also stresses the importance of publicity to keep everyone updated and involved, as well as encouraging project leaders to build the excitement and spread the word. During and since the restoration, articles have been written for the village website and newsletter, and for the A Church Near You website. The church featured in a Christmas publicity campaign for the National Churches Trust, which also asked Angus to speak on its behalf on BBC

Radio Oxford and to write an article for the Telegraph Online: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11933401/How-we-kept-a-tiny-rural-parish-church-alive.html.

St John the Baptist was reopened by the acting Bishop of Oxford at a special celebration service on 20th March 2016 (Palm Sunday). The church doesn't have toilets or kitchen facilities, though the PCC is thinking about how they could incorporate these.



The final stage of the restoration project is the installation of a new pipe organ. Including the 'Sponsor a Pipe' campaign, £30k has been raised for this. The PCC is now working with the diocesan organ advisor on either buying a second-hand organ or building one using parts from redundant organs in the area. Further grant applications will be made once the plans are finalised. The long-term aim is for the church to host recitals and choral concerts to encourage more visitors as well as to cover the annual maintenance costs of the new instrument.