

St Mary's Church: Project Apollo

On Monday January 3rd 2022, as planned and with the agreement of the Winchester diocese, the Parochial Church Council closed St Mary's Church for a major upgrade of the fabric of the building. Project Apollo: Repair, Rewire and Redecorate.

The church wiring was condemned as being unsafe in 2021 so the PCC was faced the luxury of no choice: We had to rewire the electrical system, or the church would have to close permanently.

We decided this was a great opportunity to invest in a series of much needed building improvements to ensure St Mary's church continues to be at the heart of Froyle's Christian and community life over the coming years.

We are undertaking a huge and delicate task on an eight-hundred-year-old building. It has taken many years of planning, fund raising and organising to get to this point. The schedule of works will take three months to complete which means we'll be able to open the doors again for Palm Sunday and Easter. This is our target, unforeseen technical challenges permitting... watch this space!

The first week of work was very intensive as the church had to be emptied of its precious and historically important contents. These were inspected, individually wrapped, catalogued, and removed by a specialist conservation team to safe and secure offsite storage.

The next stage has been to wrap and protect all of the items that are remaining in the church such as the pews and our magnificent organ.

As we go to press the scaffolding and temporary site lighting has just been installed. The church interior is now completely filled with a scaffold that will enable the specialist contractors to work safely on the ceiling and the walls. For the first time in decades we can get really close to the detail of how an ancient building was put together. It really is fascinating and remarkable, all done with simple hand tools, string and lots of skill. There are some real gems the craftsman of yesteryear left for us to enjoy.

The next stage will be for the decorative contractors to remove damaged and decayed paint and plasterwork, the electrical team will then start to install new vermin proof cabling and switches, after them the specialist lime plasterers will come and complete their lengthy task. The last stages of the project will see the final decorative finishes applied and the lighting experts install the new lighting system. The final job will be a deep clean of the nationally important, medieval stained-glass windows, and the other precious icons and objects as they are returned to the church.

Until the tasks are completed the church is officially a building site as there are many hazards within the building that need to be avoided and compliance with Health and Safety requirements is not optional. Sadly this means the church is closed completely to all visitors.

During this period of disruption we are keen to keep everyone as involved and informed as possible and here are three things we'll be doing:

1. A monthly update will be published in this fine magazine.
2. There are photographs of ongoing works on the outside of the church for you to enjoy.
3. I will be hosting occasional Friday morning visits at 11:00am as works allow. These will be limited to thirty minutes. Please contact me directly for further details at: nigelsouthern@mac.com

By Easter we hope our ancient rural parish church will once again be a sparkling gem for us all to appreciate and enjoy. We have many other significant projects in early development that we hope will make St Mary's even more attractive for the community to use. These projects will be covered in more detail in the next edition of this bulletin.

To continue to improve and maintain these facilities we need the community to support us along the way, so do come and get involved in our fund-raising events if you can. We'd also be really delighted to see you at some of the project Apollo celebrations we're planning for later in the year.

Nigel Southern and the PCC.