CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – THE FRIENDS AGM 27th September 2023

It has been a very busy and exciting year.

Fundraising events
Earlier in the Year - Concert in the Church - local singer Gregory Stewart gave a lovely operatic and popular concert

NGS Open Garden at the Chantry – plant stall and teas

Heritage Weekend – a National Charity provides organisational help. Elisabeth Barratt ran the two day event with a lot of help from many members of the Friends and people who live in Mere. The Church doors were thrown open, artefacts, flowers and documents were on display. The free guided tours of the Tower and the Parvis Room proved particularly popular in the light of the renewed interest created by the announcement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.

The Committee: I would like to draw the attention to the work done by each of the Committee this year –

Elisabeth Barratt- Secretary. Legal stuff Charity Commission. Keeping minutes of all our meetings, and generally providing help to each of the other members
Fiona Jukes – our treasurer – keeps our books – draws up our accounts and liaises with the Independent examiner.
Maggie Durkee – bookstall, galvanising everybody, coming up with good ideas, booking Carmen. She has brought precious local knowledge, and energy to everything we have done this year.
Mary Wilson – Membership Secretary until the springtime. I touched on our gratitude for her work in the Newsletter. She has digitised the database, kept in touch with people, and as a final act in office she conducted her survey of Members – which enabled people to tell us how they wanted to be involved with the Friends, and offer specific help.
Bill Price – The prime-mover behind the fundraising for the Pinnacles Appeal as it then was, he helped to develop The Tower stories and steer the application. He is .always on hand to offer wise counsel and practical help at events – manning the plant stall, coming up with new concert ideas, and recently helping us with recruitment process of the Administrator
Elaine Stallard If you were here at the launch party of the Tower Stories you will be aware of the principal role played by Elaine in our successful application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.– Huge amount of work - Thanks to her we have been granted just under £250,000 to restore the Pinnacles and clock, and start up the Tower Stories projects. I will say a few word about the actual project in a minute.

DJ Bett –David's professional experience has been invaluable as he has taken on the role of coordinating with the Fabric Committee of the PCC this year; He reports to the Committee on the progress of the architectural side of the restoration. Not only that but he is frequently to be seen as our barman, and bakes a mean Lemon Drizzle cake!

Alison Heard – was co-opted onto the Committee because of her experience in employment, lives locally, and has professional accountancy experience which will bring huge help to the Committee as we spend the NLHF's money! We have to maintain very tight control on how we satisfy the Lottery and do things correctly, and Alison has joined our Committee just in time!

Finally, Kit Stallard and Richard Wilson are members of the board by virtue of their office a Churchwardens of St Michaels. They are the link with the PCC and for their cheerful wisdom and the overview they bring to our work, I am grateful.

I hope you would wish to join me in thanking all of the people I have just mentioned! Thank you all!

The Tower Stories

We've had the launch party
Recruiting an administrator
People have expressed interest in involvement
Next few months are about starting to map out what projects will take place. Feasibility will be explored. Relationships within the community established. The Tower Stories is a framework which allows the people of Mere to develop their own programme of events and ultimately explore their own relationship with this building, its architecture history and future, so symbolically represented by its Tower. The Tower Stories will be our way to fulfil our two purposes (laid down by our Constitution) for generations to come. We have two purposes as an association; *(a) Preservation repair and maintenance of the fabric, furnishing of the Church of St Michael the Archangel, Mere, and to promote its use as a place of public worship AND (b) to promote the appreciation of the Church of St Michael as a building of architectural and historical interest.*

The Lottery Grant makes this possible.

The repair and refurbishment phase will begin in January. Scaffolding. Bear with us, especially if you live in Church Street! It takes a long time to put up, and a certain amount to take down.

Future events

Carmen. Here 7.30pm 24th November 2023. Put on by Pound arts. Tickets are being sold by our very own Bill Price, We make some money from the sale of tickets and will be giving refreshments in the hope of making some money from donations.

Carol Singing 20th December followed by mulled wine and mince pies. There will be a wet/ very cold weather contingency plan!

Refreshments at the Literary festival – 12th October

As well as events related to the Tower Stories; Tower Tours, Tower Sessions and the Tower Stories projects, other events in the cycle of activities and events in Mere

Governance
There is a huge amount of regulation of the Charity sector – we will continue our review and audit of our data protection, our internal financial controls, and a review of the guidance for fundraising by charities. To check what is relevant for us, and to make sure we are compliant with the regulation and using best practice. Additionally this year, we have the added responsibility of managing a large sum of publicly-accountable Lottery money.

Membership: If you are an annual member and would like to pay for next year's membership please see Mary. If you are a Life Member please let us know your email! Postage is getting very expensive, and we are trying to minimise the paper we use. We have a new privacy policy which explains how we use your contact details and other information (including what areas of help you are offering – cake baking – help at events etc). We only use your data for the activities of the Friends, most importantly to keep in touch with you.

Please let us know if you wish to amend or update or the details that are kept about you – including if you wish not to be contacted.

Finally, A plea –
Toys for the children's corner of St Michaels! Donate good quality, clean and quiet toys – there is a particular need for a small table chairs - please see Maggie Durkee if you might have something to offer.

Felicity Wilson
Chair