

Rector's Letter 2023

The Annual Report for any organisation is always retrospective, it gives a backwards glance at what has been. Genesis 19.17 warns us with this injunction, "*Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere*". Well, that particular warning issued four thousand years ago was not well-heeded and, within just 9 verses, Lot's wife "*looked back and she became a pillar of salt*"!

Having said that, there is much in the 2022 Report from which we can usefully learn – as we move forward, and I commend the report for a closer reading and I add my grateful thanks for the many people who have helped to make so much happen at, in and through St Marylebone. It is always invidious to name names, but I particularly want to express my thanks to Maddie Messenger and Ella O'Brian two members of the Changing Lives' Activity Team for their work during their time with us and I wish them well in their new posts.

2022 was yet another year which was for the parish church, almost completely dominated by the Changing Lives' project. On 12th December, we achieved what is euphemistically called 'Practical Completion', a term which means the precise opposite of what it says for, on 12th December 2022, practically nothing was complete and, indeed, we are still waiting on completing a very long snagging list. What is more, we wait with bated breath to discover exactly how much the final invoices will be; something which we will probably not know until the middle of December.

However, we do now have a completely new slate and lead roof, with a restored and strengthened 19th century timber supporting structure; we have restored the world's largest single span fibrous plaster ceiling – and for these two works alone we have just been removed from Historic England's Buildings at Risk Register. We have restored the majority of the parish church's failing stonework and improved access. We have a new lift and a fine new staircase; a new kitchen, volunteer and staff room. We have improved the old Undercroft and the Crypt Hall; created a new east-west corridor. There is a new ventilation system and we have reinstated the early 19th century ventilation system too. We have transformed the Browning Room and the entrance lobbies; created a beautiful new east bank garden, planting an area that has been an eyesore since 1983. We have a brand-new heating system and what is, probably, the best-insulated ecclesiastical roof in Europe.

The list of achievements continues with the installation of the Marylebone in 100 Objects display case; the presentation and interpretation of coffin plates; the St Marylebone Family Tree, a new website, the Famous Faces Light Boxes in the spine corridor; a transformed suite of psychotherapy rooms. Historic music and cookery resources for schools have been created. The story of St Marylebone's historic tradespeople is being told through WC cubicle doors, no less, and we have filmed some of the people who make St Marylebone St Marylebone – and indeed, London, what it is today. Exciting and engaging new series of lectures, music, tours and trails have been produced, not to mention a new Scandal Mag, telling stories of St Marylebone's more infamous personalities. Time alone prevents me from listing all the good things that have been achieved through a world-wide pandemic and a time of international austerity and anxiety.

For the first time since 2019, the parish church had a fairly normal Advent and Christmas, welcoming an extra 10,000 people to our Carol Services, making *some* money for the PCC and a great deal of money for the national charities and institutions who sponsored these important events in their fund-raising calendars.

St Marylebone Parish Church does not exist for itself, it exists for others. It exists, primarily as a place of worship, that is, after all, what we are for, although sometimes it is hard to see that. St Marylebone Parish Church exists for the community to which it has given its name, for the schools named after it, for the hospitals to which it provides chaplaincy, to the students who graduate here, to the people who sleep rough on its stones and ventilation shafts. Thankfully, the list of reasons of why it matters that the parish church *is* here is not short of entries. Unfortunately, however, paying for the building and its upkeep and for the wages of those who work here appears not to be such a community activity or responsibility and that falls, unfairly, on the wallets of some of those who worship here. To them I am inordinately thankful.

Some of the cost of the Changing Lives Project was met by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (or rather the people playing the National Lottery), philanthropists, HM Government through the Cultural Recovery Fund and Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme VAT reclaims. £500,000.00 came from Westminster City Council through the allocation of Civic Infrastructure Levy, and additional funds have come from large and small grants, but the PCC has had to dig exceedingly deeply into its historic reserves to come up with the rest and, going forward, the need for realistic weekly and monthly giving will become evermore acute.

Thank you to those who do give generously and realistically from your resources to support the work of this parish church. And to those who do not give now, please, please help us. You really can't just leave it up to others. Please consider your giving carefully; please make provision in your will if you are not able to give generously now. Please talk to someone about your giving, not least to Ashely Nixon, about the ways in which you can support this place and the extraordinary work that is done on your behalf.

Trying to analyse and make sense of a parish church's finances is never easy, nor straightforward, so post-COVID and post the Construction Phase of Changing Lives, now is a good time to take a really close, forensic look at how we manage and report our finances and how our resources can best support our team of clergy and employees and the fabric of this building going forward.

I am very grateful to Matthew Knight, the former Chief Operating Officer of both Chelmsford and Southwark Cathedrals from the Cathedrals' and Major Parish Churches' Support Team, and to the Diocese of London's Finance and HR teams for agreeing to come alongside the PCC as it discerns a sustainable and affordable way forward – without too much looking back, without ossifying or becoming a pillar of salt by hankering after the perceived 'fleshpots' of pre-pandemic days.

Unfortunately, the projected rebuild of the Rieger organ, planned for late summer 2023, will not now take place until the early months of 2024, due to Rieger Orgelbau's order book. Thankfully, 75% of the costs of this work will be borne by the Royal Academy of Music, but the PCC will still need to find an amount not very far short of £50,000.00 to pay for its share. Other, much-needed works, in process or still to come, include the restoration of the south-east transept as an archive and study space, completing the unfinished works to the tower and cupola, replacing the sacristy steps and torchieres, rectifying outstanding issues with the Portico pavement and steps, and restoring the Reredos.

As many of you will know, we are rather hamstrung in our Monday to Friday use of the parish church by the 50-year legal arrangements still in place between the PCC and the Royal Academy of Music, something which gives the organ-playing students of RAM almost unlimited use of the parish church between 9 am and 6 pm every day of the week, at no cost to RAM, until 2037. However, with less than fifteen years of this posterous contract to run, RAM has asked us to begin to look at what a new contract might look at.

Similarly, another dreadfully one-sided contract will come to an end next year. This contract is with the partners of the Marylebone Health Centre, and the PCC is currently consulting surveyors and lawyers to draw up a new Licence under Faculty which will better-preserve the parish church's interests and set new conditions of occupation.

Still to resolve, is the outstanding question of the provision of housing for the Assistant Curate, for whom the PCC currently must rent accommodation.

New and exciting things are already emerging out of the long years of planning and construction; it has been great to see packed audiences for the new lecture series, people engaging with the art on show here in the Samworth Hall, the relaunch of professor Loosley's popular Marylebone-themed film series, an exciting music programme almost ready to launch, and so many other good and engaging activities being delivered or planned for. In Ginny Simmonds absence on Maternity Leave, from next month, we shall be in the safe and capable hands of Maddie messenger's replacement, Jessica Riley and her Changing Lives' Activity colleagues to take these things forward.

Last year, I ended my Rector's Letter with a challenge, that *together* we work out how we can share the love of Christ more effectively. That challenge still stands, but it has a rider, assumed previously, but maybe not

expressed clearly enough, and the rider is this: How can we not only *share* the love of Christ more effectively, but how can we *fund* it?

I started with a quotation from Genesis, the opening book of the Bible, I end with another, from Revelation, the final book of the Bible, "*Behold, I make all things new ... Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true ... "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my child".*" (Revelation 21.5-7)

The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Evans
Rector of St Marylebone with Holy Trinity, St Marylebone

24th May 2023