

Friends of St Peter & St Paul, Seal Newsletter

Spring/ Summer 2014

SEAL CHURCH TOWER

Seal Church tower is visible from many places in the surrounding area. It is a much loved local landmark, added to the simpler Medieval building in the sixteenth century. Now it not only provides a place from which to fly our flags, but also houses the bells and the Victorian clock mechanism. A small door inside the church gives access to the tower rooms via a very narrow spiral staircase. Alas, this is unlit and has no handrails, so insurance rules mean we can't offer tower tours.

Records suggest that the tower was completed in 1529, just as the English Reformation was beginning to take hold. (The other significant event of 1529 was the start of the legal proceedings which led to the divorce of Henry VIII from Catherine of Aragon, which led eventually to the separation of the English church from the Church of Rome.)

Back in Seal, though, many ordinary people would be much more aware of the changes to their own local church as the tower rose on the skyline. I don't know what Tudor scaffolding looked like – presumably it was wooden – but later this year we'll get a chance to imagine that scene as more modern scaffolding goes up to provide access to some stonework on the tower which needs repair. It will take a few weeks, and we hope it will be underway by mid-September or October. It shouldn't affect services or events in church, but it will obviously be very noticeable, so I thought I'd let you know about it in advance.

While we're up there...

While the scaffolding is up it seemed like a good moment to refurbish the clock face, which is looking rather faded and worn, as the picture on the right shows. The letters and hands will be re-gilded (alas, nothing so simple as a quick dab of Dulux ...) and some other minor maintenance will be done. It has been on the "to do" list identified in quinquennial inspections for a while, but the cost of scaffolding just to do this made it unjustifiable on its own. This is the perfect moment, though, and if we miss this chance, who knows how many decades – or even centuries - it will be before scaffolding is needed again?



The stonework repairs and scaffolding (costing £18000) are being funded by a grant, but we need to raise the money for the clock refurbishment ourselves. Seal Village Association has kindly given us £1000, but that still leaves around **£2500** for us to find. We are hoping that local people who enjoy seeing the clock might want to contribute to this fund, and we will be appealing to them to help us out during the late spring and summer. If you'd like to contribute, please send whatever you can to the Treasurer, marking your donation "Clock Face"

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Other current projects

As well as the work on the tower and clock face, there are other repairs planned for this year too. We will be replacing the fence and kissing gate at the front of the church on either side of the lychgate. Seal Village Association and Seal Parish Council have kindly contributed very generously to this, and we hope that this work will be underway (and completed) very soon.

We are also aware that the wall between the churchyard and the field has collapsed in places during this winter's bad weather, and repairs are in hand. Fortunately that seems to have been the only damage the church sustained over the winter, other than a pane of glass falling out of the inner tower screen, which has now been repaired.

Next year we will need to have the organ cleaned and refurbished, at an estimated cost of £5250 to remove dust and dirt that have settled in the pipes. It is a big job – there are 560 pipes! – and will take several weeks. This is something that needs doing ever 20 years or so if the organ is to keep working.

LIVING STONES: Church features in context

Altars or tables...?

You might think that Seal has two altars, the high altar and the one in the Lady Chapel. In fact, neither is actually an altar at all. Technically speaking an altar must either be made of stone, or at least include some stone, (some have a slab of stone embedded in their wooden tops) while a table is made entirely of wood as both of ours are.

It might seem like a minor distinction to make, but the controversy between altar and table was once something which would have had Christians literally at one another's throats. Like many of the squabbles in the church this one dates back to the Reformation. It is rooted in the theological disputes which raged at the time about what the priest was doing when he celebrated Holy Communion. Was the bread and wine literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ, to re-present to God the sacrifice of Jesus' own life on the cross? Or was the bread and wine simply a memorial of the Last Supper which Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died, a meal which drew them together to remember him, but no more than that? Roman Catholics took the first view; Protestants took the second, and this determined what they called the piece of furniture they used. Sacrifices needed altars, like the stone altars of the Jewish Temple, on which animals had been offered. Meals needed tables. Whether you called it an altar or a table showed which side of the divide you were on. At Seal both our "altars" are in fact tables; there is no stone in them, which presumably reflects the theology of those who first installed them (I believe the Lady Chapel table is Jacobean).

Today views on Holy Communion tend to be much more nuanced, and Church of England liturgies offer considerable space for people to interpret Communion in a variety of ways. Theology, and the liturgy which reflects it, are not static; if they are to be living and useful they must change and develop over time. Indeed the Lady Chapel table at Seal is also used now at Christmas to display our Crib, and last year I transformed it into an Easter Sepulchre, something I plan to do again this year, so it is now not only helping us to ponder the significance of bread and wine, but also these central stories of Christian faith. Whether you call them altars or tables, these are essential, and very useful, pieces of furniture!

ORGANISING CHURCH REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

Churches need people!

Seal Church is a wonderfully peaceful place to be in during the week, and many people wander in for a moment of quiet reflection, or to enjoy the wealth of history within its walls.

But to maintain it as the haven it is takes an army of people who might be invisible to the lone visitor.

There are the Churchwardens, Treasurer and Parochial Church Council members who take responsibility for organising repairs and maintenance, spotting what needs to be done, finding the money to do it, and overseeing the work. There are the volunteer cleaners, who give up their time on a rota so complicated that I have no idea how it works, and the flower arrangers, Chris and Maggie, who make the church look beautiful, often popping in and out during the week to water flowers and remove faded ones. There are people who keep the porch tidy and the notices up to date, and others who straighten out the children's corner and keep it equipped.

Churches are always far more than just buildings, so spare a thought for that invisible army. If you'd like to join that army, please get in touch – we need all the help

Tiling completed!

The tiles which hundreds of you signed are now safely on the roof of the organ loft. They look a bit orange right now, but in time will weather down to blend in!

Thank you to all who signed a tile to raise the money to fund this essential work, and whose names are now up there for however long it is before the roof needs repairing again – hopefully a long time! Special thanks to Nicky Harvey who co-ordinated the fund-raising for this.



TO JOIN THE FRIENDS, contact the vicar, pick up a leaflet from the porch or go to the **Friends' Blog**:

<http://friendsofsealchurch.blogspot.co.uk>

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER April 13 -20

Palm Sunday

10am Procession and Communion
6.30pm Evensong (said, with hymns)

Mon, Tues, Wed

8pm Compline (Night Prayer – about 15 mins)

Maundy Thursday

8pm Communion & Tenebrae
(readings to take us into the darkness.)

Good Friday

10 am Messy Church
12 noon Reflective displays in church till 8pm

2.30 pm Good Friday service

8pm Compline

Holy Saturday

8pm Compline

Easter Sunday

10 am Holy Communion & Baptism
6.30pm Easter evening service