

the BIG 'OUR CHURCH' *Project*

Playing our part in the ongoing story of St. Mildred's



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In January 2016, Roger asked me to pop over to the vicarage one afternoon - I knew it was his day off, and wondered what this was all about! Roger asked me if I would project-manage the renovations works we now know as the BIG 'OUR CHURCH' Project, and I said "Yes"! I never thought that my skills as an engineering manager for large railway re-signalling schemes could be put to use at St Mildred's!

That was 13 months ago and, since then, many people have contributed their time, energy and enthusiasm to the project. Members of St Mildred's have painted walls, written post-it notes, filled out surveys, shared their thoughts, ideas and suggestions and, above all, prayed for the project. Of course, the project also needs to be paid for, and since launching the project in the Summer, a large amount of generous donations have been pledged to the project. We really are extremely grateful for every single donation.

The output of all of this hard work is a design pack consisting of 11 main sections:

Stage area: After many conversations about how we currently use the church, and what we want to use it for in the future, we have worked with our architects to design, and then refine, a plan for our new stage area. We have ensured that it will work for our Sunday services, concerts and other occasions, focusing particularly on accessibility. The stage area will be wood that is sympathetic to the remaining church woodwork, and has some special features including under-stage storage, hidden sockets, under floor heating and removable communion rails and kneelers.

Accessibility: The new stage area will be fully accessible via the new ramp on the right-hand side of the stage. This will be a shallow gradient, and be wide enough to also accommodate our grand piano if it is needed on the stage. The project is also installing a second ramp to the Lady Chapel itself, meaning that the stage and all congregational areas will be made fully accessible.

Choir Stalls: To allow the new stage area to be as flexible as possible, we will replace our current choir stalls with something that is lightweight, moveable and flexible. They will also be more comfortable for the choir, and accommodate the different height choristers we have. Integral lighting will allow the choir to be able to see in all situations provided by the new lighting system.

Church Colour Scheme: After lots of paint samples, many discussions and a lot of valuable comments, the colour choice has been narrowed down to light 'stone' walls, with darker sky blue ceiling. A final choice has been made that everyone should enjoy. As part of the decoration works, we will also be repairing damaged stone work.

Lady Chapel: The project's aim was always to make the Lady Chapel a very special and intimate area for Worship, and not just a continuation of the main Church. Working with the architects, we have produced a design that uses the traditional blue colours of Lady Chapels, made the cross more of a focal point, and allowed for the use of tapestries that can reflect the various church periods of the year.

Vicar's Vestry: The vestry has been re-ordered to provide a calm place of preparation for Sunday services by moving the serving team into the flower room, and to make a space that can be also used throughout the week for work, discussions and meetings.

Flower Vestry: The re-design of the flower vestry has incorporated a significant amount of new storage, removed all of the existing electrical equipment, and installed hot water and heating. Additionally, the existing toilet area has been cleared and expanded, allowing the serving team to use the room for their preparations and storage. Unused doors are blocked up, and the remaining recesses are used for either electrical equipment or additional storage.

Electrical Works: The project will be replacing the current old electrical wiring and bring the whole system up to modern safety standards. As part of this, we will move all electrical switch gear out of the Flower Vestry to a new location, and provide many more sockets around the church (we currently have circa seven power sockets in the main church building). We will also install the new cables for the Organ refurbishment, and extend the Fire Alarm System into the church. We will also be installing a computer network into the church to support the new lighting and sound systems, and installing architectural lighting to the outside of the building. A lit cross and notice board are included in the design for the Centre entrance at the side of the building.

Lighting: Initially, we took a lot of time to define the right lighting requirements for St Mildred's, which included visits to other churches. Our consultants have produced a design that is flexible enough to satisfy the many different uses of the church (including various services and concerts), is simple to operate and has extremely low running costs. The pendants will be removed to aid with the scheme's flexibility, and also to take the church back to the architect's original vision; emphasising the grandeur of this marvellous building.

Audio Visual: The audio system will be renewed as part of the project, resulting in greater intelligibility of the spoken word and a system suitable for our Sunday services, Café Church, and other events that use the Church. The hearing loop will also be improved, bringing it into line with modern recommendations. Additionally, we will replace the existing canvas screen with a motorised modern equivalent, and permanently install a projector which can be controlled from a number of locations around the church.

Organ: St Mildred's is very lucky to have two separate organs, but the west end organ especially now requires a major overhaul. This was installed in 1959, but it was not new when installed, and we have discovered that some parts of it date back to Victorian times. The east organ also needs a thorough clean and overhaul. Given the amount of dust the main project works will produce, the organ works will occur after the main project completes. The work is planned to consist of new replacement equipment, reducing the noise created by the blower, installing new transmission equipment between the two organs, and perhaps adding some new stops on the organ.

Matt Webb