



FRIENDS OF ST LEONARD'S CHURCH HYTHE

FEBRUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends (and potential new Friends),

Welcome to this **40th anniversary** edition of the Newsletter of the *Friends of St Leonard's Church, Hythe (FoSL)*, which includes a review of the past year's events (sadly not as planned!), an optimistic look ahead, reflections on the early days of the Friends organisation, committee and membership news, and some thoughts on new ways in which we can continue to raise funds to support the maintenance of our glorious church building and its contents.

Chairman's message

2020 – what a year!

No sooner had the Friends published a magnificent programme of musical events for the year than we were obliged to cancel it all, from music for Easter to Christmas Carols for All and everything in between.

Devastating for our fund-raising of course but small beer in the overall Covid pandemic. If you have lost a loved one to this awful disease, my most sincere condolences.

Another shock (to me at least) was the departure of Rev Andrew Sweeney who gave the Friends enormous support and was always quick to acknowledge our work. He approached his role as our President with enthusiasm and regularly attended Committee meetings and events. I hope he will find success and fulfilment in his next endeavours.

It is with delight and some relief I can report a recent newcomer to the Committee has undertaken to take over the role of Concert Manager, thus easing the burden on Brin Hughes and heralding the start of transition to the next generation of the Friends Management. I wish them well.

Finally, although our 2020 fund raising was severely curtailed, it was somewhat mitigated by two generous bequests, so, if you are thinking of writing or updating your will, please give a moment's thought to the work of the Friends helping to maintain the magnificent building of St Leonard's Church and its contents for the whole community of Hythe and beyond.

Terry Whybrow



Review of past year's events

Twelve months ago, the committee of the *Friends of St Leonard's Church* was about to launch its programme of concerts for 2020, another ambitious scheduling of music events, including several during the biennial Hythe Festival and the annual JAM on the Marsh Festival (which would have run in parallel in early July). This programme would have provided an eclectic mix including nine choral/song, eight solo/duo instrumental, three orchestral/chamber music and three jazz/big band/folk concerts – much to appeal to everyone's varied musical tastes.

As we now know (but could have not anticipated at the time), the coronavirus pandemic put paid to these plans: very sadly and regrettably all these concerts had to be cancelled. This meant a significant music loss to the town, but also loss of income for struggling professional musicians and a loss



of income to the church from sale of concert tickets and bar sales during concerts. One bright aspect of the past year was that we were delighted to be able to host a virtual version of the 2020 **JAM on the Marsh** festival, which was streamed from St Leonard's Church during August. Nine concerts were pre-recorded in the church – observing strict and rigorous social distancing and other health and safety guidelines – and included the world premiere of Paul Mealor's *Piano Concerto* with the London Mozart Players; The Gesualdo Six; and Onyx Brass performing British jazz for brass quintet. This venture was a great success and cemented the already strong links between the *Friends* and JAM. It was a joy for St Leonard's Church to host the recording sessions, which demonstrated the building's superb acoustics and revealed what a light and airy open space the nave, when cleared of furniture, offers for such events. It also resulted in a very useful venue hire fee, which covered the cost of refurbishing the wooden flooring in the nave.

Concerts during 2021

At the time of writing, it seems very unlikely that we will be able to resume regular concerts in St Leonard's Church before July 2021, and even that date must remain uncertain depending on the future course of Covid-19 and associated lockdowns and restrictions.

We hope very much to be able to host concerts in St Leonard's Church during the 2021 JAM on the Marsh Festival (8-18 July), whatever form it may take. 2021 will also be

the 40th anniversary year of the *Friends* organisation when we hope to be able to organise a suitable event to mark this milestone.



Early days of the Friends

Doug Amans (a generous benefactor of the Friends who died in November 2019) was elected in 1988 to the committee of the Friends, which was by then well established, and left the following (edited) recollections of the early days of the organisation.

"Frank Martin was a young army officer in the liberation of Europe, and when in Czechoslovakia (as it then was) met a young Czech girl named Asa. They married and came to England where Frank eventually became manager of NatWest in Hythe and involved also in the life of the town.

*In 1981 the idea of a friends [organisation] was born and Rev Canon Norman Woods (then Vicar of Hythe) asked Frank to form the **Friends of St Leonard's Church**. Frank was founder Secretary.*

The Friends were mainly concerned with raising money through concerts for the maintenance and improving the church for concerts. It was fortunate that Asa had contacts in Prague, and the music was enhanced by the visits of mainly Czech choirs of children and the brass section of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra when they were playing in London.

Under the Communist regime choirs were allowed to enter competitions in the UK, and – coming by coach to Dover – they were well placed to visit Hythe. As it was under the auspices of the Government, they paid all the costs. Asa arranged for members of St Leonard's Church to host the choir, and in the course of time many friendships were forged.

In addition, Frank made a lasting contact with Professor Neumann of the Guildhall School of Music, whose students were pleased to come here as part of their concert experience.

When Communism fell, all costs had to be borne by others, and this became a financial burden for the Friends.

I look back with great pleasure on the concerts by the Czech children. They were immaculate in their uniforms; they sang without any music, all by heart – something some of our choirs should note!

Frank also arranged visits by Prague University students, staying one month each year with Rotary Clubs throughout the UK. They came through Dover to the Stade Court Hotel for coffee, and their hosts collected them. The students were persistent in wanting us to visit them, and so Frank and Asa arranged a trip to Prague for the Friends in 1995, when 26 went. In 1997 I took over and had a coach of 49 Rotarians and Friends, including those who had hosted. In 2001 two coaches of Friends, Rotarians and wives from many Rotary Clubs in Kent visited Prague, where Czech students were our hosts. The visit ended with a memorable evening boat ride with supper on the River Vistula.”

Berkeley Hill adds the following few observations about the early days.

“Jack Webb did much of the spadework in setting up the Friends, including by collecting constitutions of similar organisations that had been set up to support fund-raising for the fabric of historic churches. The FoSL has always reflected inputs from many people. Jack had been churchwarden.

At an early stage, I as a committee member of the Friends and on the PCC initiated the move that the FoSL should be the umbrella organisation for all music and related events taking place in the church that were outside the normal Sunday services (for which I was responsible). This was to regularise a situation of relative chaos in which the Martins were putting on events linked to Czechoslovak music and folk dancing, and concerts were being arranged by several other groups, including organ concerts by Charles Beckwith, the church itself (with a link to Trinity College of Music), and outside bodies. This had brought date clashes and

unnecessary conflict. From then on FoSL acted as regulator and coordinator, a role it has played successfully ever since.

Later Canon Brian Barnes, when vicar, supported the proposal (when Gill Roffey was secretary) that a yearly brochure should be produced to a high standard (I think the first was for 2006). This encouraged planning and a move away from short-termism, with an improvement in publicity and consistency of concert quality.”



Friends archives

Brin has accumulated a certain amount of Friends archive material such as concert posters and programmes, Newsletters and minutes of AGMs and committee meetings, but there are many gaps in information about the earlier years of the organisation. If any of our older readers in particular may still hold such material (including any photographs) in their lofts, attics, old filing cabinets or even in suitcases under beds, please do contact him so that he can arrange to borrow items for copying or permanent retention in our files. We look forward to receiving the results of your clear-outs!

Advance concert information and tickets

Once concerts organised by the *Friends of St Leonard's Church* resume again, advance information will be sent by email to all who have provided contact details for this purpose; they will also receive information about other concerts in the local area. If you would like your email address to be added to this ‘Friends of Music’ database, please contact Brin on 01303 264470 or email: brin.hughes@btinternet.com.

Information about forthcoming concerts can also be found on the Friends website at www.friendsofleonardshythe.org.uk where it will be possible to book tickets for selected concerts online.



Committee news

The *Friends* Annual General Meeting took place on 9 March 2020 when Terry Whybrow was re-elected as our Chairman, Jean Wood as Secretary and Graham Johnson as Treasurer. Other members elected or re-elected to serve on the Committee were Dr Berkeley Hill, Brinley Hughes (Concert Manager), Marilyn Johnson (Membership Secretary), Jim Bryant, Tina Neaves, Roger Parker, Roger Taylor, Diana Ward and Rosie Vale. Rev Andrew Sweeney continued to be a very supportive President of the Friends organisation until his departure from Hythe at the end of November.

Annual General Meeting 2021

Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and uncertainty as to when lockdown restrictions will be eased, the Annual General Meeting of *Friends of St Leonard's Church* is postponed until **Monday 13 September 2021 at 6.00pm.**

Detailed arrangements will be provided nearer the date.



Membership

The appeal of *Friends of St Leonard's Church* is to everyone who cares for the beauty and traditions of our church building, whether or not they are resident in Hythe. You can become an Annual Member or Life Member by completing an application form available (in normal circumstances) at the back of the church (or downloadable from the Friends' website).



Supporting St Leonard's Church

The Parish Church of St Leonard has been a fine, elegant and impressive landmark in Hythe for more than a thousand years. The main building dates from Norman times but has seen many additions, enlargements and improvements over the centuries. We welcome countless visitors each year who appreciate its architecture, history, features and traditions.



The principle function of the *Friends of St Leonard's Church* organisation is to raise funds to assist the PCC in its care, restoration, preservation, repair and improvement of the Parish Church and its fabric, fittings, organs, pianos, monuments and stained glass. This is achieved through membership subscriptions, donations and the proceeds from concerts. The latter source has dried up for the time being, which make the Friends increasingly dependent on the generosity of its supporters.

The committee of *Friends of St Leonard's Church* is looking for new ways to raise money since the revenue from concerts alone is not sufficient to maintain the edifice in good condition. We are asking members to consider giving money on a regular basis in order to ensure that the stonework, windows, fixtures and fittings are kept in good condition and to improve the accessibility of the building to all who wish to visit it for interest or to attend services, concerts and other events.

If you are able to support this valuable work, please fill in the form enclosed and return it to: The Treasurer, Friends of St Leonard's Church, Overfalls, 10 Station Road, Hythe CT21 5PN.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who have already committed to monthly giving, along with all those who have made donations during the past year. 2020 has been a difficult year for fund-raising and these monies have been a significant and very welcome contribution.

(Newsletter editor: Brin Hughes – 01303 264470)