



## Friends 'frustrated' by Church repair delays

***Hopes that work would soon begin on urgent repairs to St Edmund's Church have been dashed by news of unexpected delays in sourcing essential materials and long waits for specialist craftsmen.***

"Sadly, there is very little we can do about either of these. It's all quite frustrating," said Friends' Chairman Dr Alistair Irvine this week.

His disappointment was shared by Emeritus Warden Brian Mutch who has special responsibility for the fabric of all five churches in the Parish of the

Upper Skerne and is also Membership Secretary of the Friends.

He commented: "We have recently seen the completion of repairs to the corroded stonework walls of the East Gable and had high hopes that we could soon make a start on installing safety barriers on the church tower roof, replacing a rotting main beam in the ringing tower, repairing the church clock mechanism and refurbishing the two clock faces. However, for reasons beyond our control, we now face considerable delays before work can begin on any of these".

In the interim, the committee is pushing ahead with efforts to secure



permission from the church authorities and Heritage England to carry out repairs to the lych-gate which has been vandalised on several occasions by lead thieves.

*Editor's note: Brian's detailed report on conservation work at St Edmund's can be found on centre pages*

## Social programme - suggestions welcome

Our social programme had to be cancelled because of restrictions caused by the Coronavirus pandemic but we are hoping that we can soon bring back some visits - with luck, perhaps next year. In the longer term, we do have ideas for new venues but would like to hear from anyone with a suggestion for a day out within a reasonable travelling distance. Don't hesitate to forward your suggestions to any member of the committee

*(see list on back page)*

## Searching for a special gift someone will always value?

*Why not consider funding an annual  
membership of the Friends?*

You would not only be giving an unusual gift to a family member or friend but also helping to preserve an amazing historic building that will be admired and respected for generations to come.

What's more, as you will be well aware, it doesn't cost a fortune!

Individual annual membership is still just £25. Dual membership is £35

per annum and corporate membership £50.

We know how much the local community values St Edmund's. Our recent recruitment programme via Sedgefield News brought in 19 new members.

For more information, contact Brian or any member of the committee.

# As church conservation work faces further delays, 'we can be proud of what we have achieved', says Brian

**It's no secret that preserving a church as old as St Edmund's is always going to be a long and challenging exercise. That's why the Friends group was formed back in 1999 and members have since played such a key role in helping fund many essential conservation projects.**

**We can be proud of what we have achieved in our efforts to ensure that the church will still be standing for future generations. Despite various setbacks stemming from the Coronavirus outbreak, we have managed to make some progress - though not at the rate we originally hoped. And that situation is unlikely to improve for the foreseeable future.**

## Stonework

A major initiative to help repair many areas of corroded stonework on the exterior of St Edmund's, is progressing well. The timetable to start work on the East Gable water table was brought forward when a drone inspection revealed large open joints which required immediate attention.



*Before restoration*

We instructed the church architect to carry out a full assessment of various sections of external stonework and the church authorities gave us immediate permission to undertake remedial work.



## Porch entrance

One area in need of attention centres on the church entrance porch where both the internal and external stonework is corroding badly.

We are now in the process of seeking permission to carry out repairs which could result in the need to replace the wooden doors and framework. These would not only help to retain warmth but demonstrate that we are working to become an eco-church.



*After restoration*



## Clock restoration

There is progress, too, with our plans to put back a smile on the sad clock faces. Permission has been given to carry out the painting and re-gilding and to service and correct the chiming mechanism. However, since company specialists can only use abseiling techniques (which the company recommends and will save us £10,000 in scaffolding hire) from the start of April until the end of September and there is great demand for their services, we shall have to wait until next Spring before this work can begin.

## Church bells

A similar situation exists regarding the church bells. While ringing for the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral, we



discovered problems with two of the bells and since they had not been rung for 18 months owing to the virus, we had them examined by the Diocesan Churches Bell Inspector.

He discovered that various nuts were missing from the clappers (these strike the bell to make it ring) and while checking the old oak beams he found that one of them had started to rot in



the middle – hardly surprising since the beam dates back to 1707. The size of the replacement beam required is 17ft long by 9ins deep x 10ins wide

We arranged for the only company in the country that carries out work of this kind to assess the beam and its replacement and were not surprised when we were quoted £19,000.00. Yet again, due to their outstanding commitments, it will be at least 12 months before they can make a start. Till then, the bells will remain silent.

## Safety bars

On a brighter note, we have secured permission to install safety bars to the

castellations of the church tower so that long-awaited, income-generating tower trips could resume before too long.

It has been very difficult to source the bronze throughout the pandemic but this has now been resolved, and installation will take place very shortly.

## Lych-gate

While we wait, we have been seeking permission from the church authorities and Heritage England to effect repairs to the lych-gate which has been damaged on several occasions in the past four years by thieves. Lead has been stolen and roof tiles damaged. We have budgeted for the lych-gate to be re-roofed and the lead replaced with an alternative product. Because the lych-gate is a listed building, it will take time to get approval.

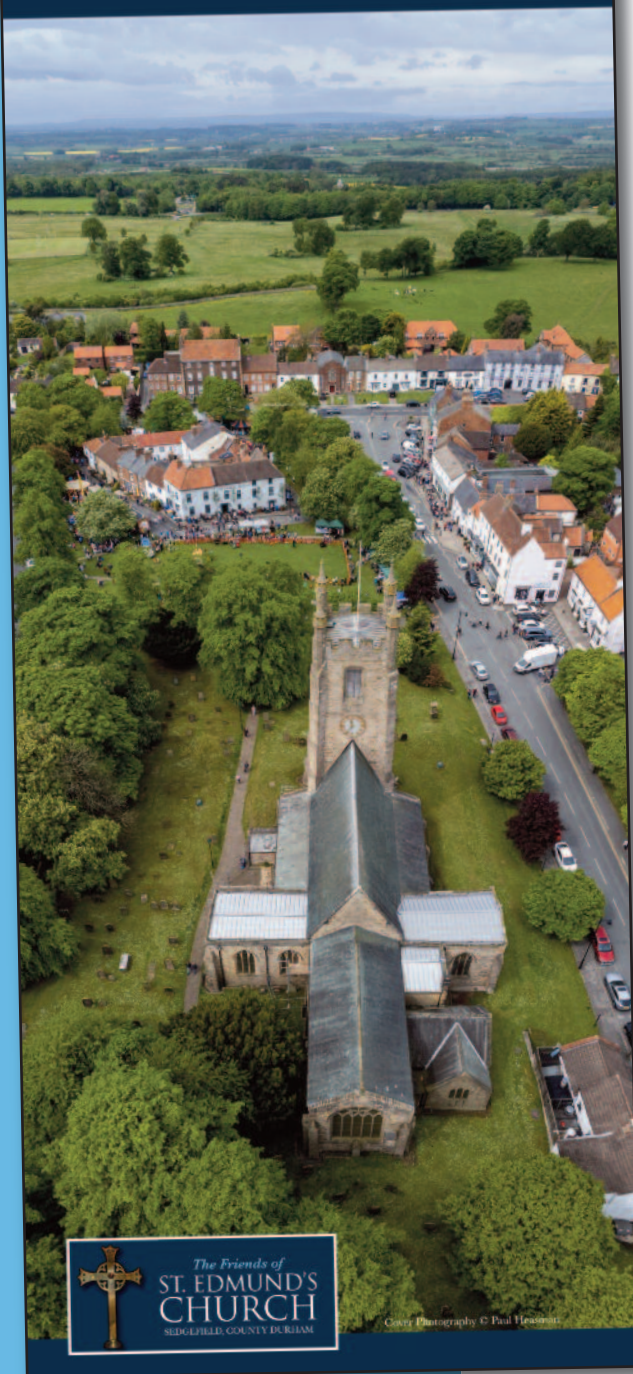
***A very sincere thank-you to all who continue to support the valuable work we do for our community. BM.***





SEDGEFIELD  
COUNTY DURHAM

# 2023 CALENDAR



## Friends' Calendar 2023 *is now on sale!*

*Six local photographers have their work featured in the 2023 calendar produced by the Friends.*

"We had multiple entries from a number of people this year and some of them were just too good to ignore", say judges.

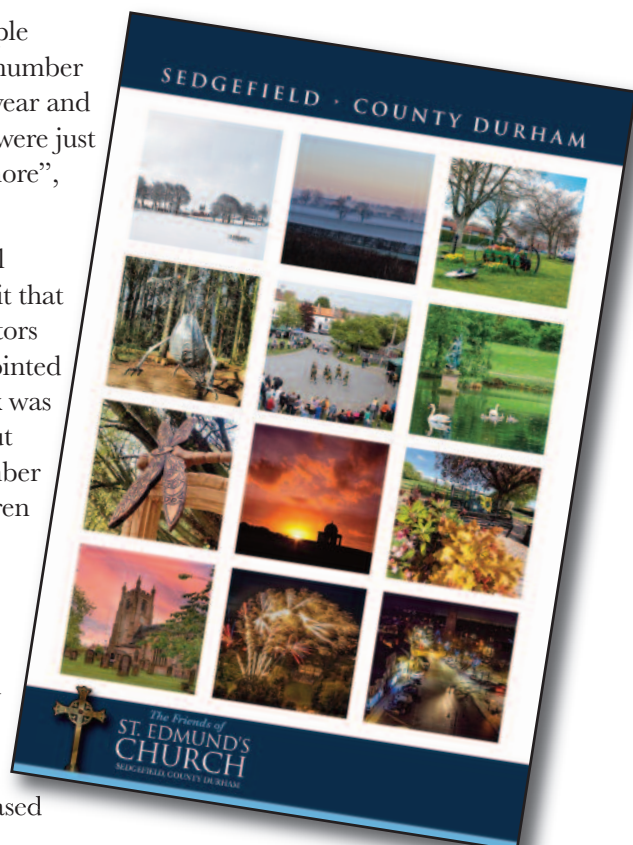
Selection panel members admit that some contributors will be disappointed that their work was not selected but say that a number featured children and it was not known if parental consent had been obtained to publish the images.

Despite increased materials and production costs, the price of the calendar will remain the same as in previous years - £8 plus 50p for anyone wanting a substantial protective envelope for safe posting.

Calendars can be pre-ordered from any member of the Friends' committee or

from Friends' membership secretary Brian Mutch on 01740 622302, via [b.mutch@btconnect.com](mailto:b.mutch@btconnect.com) or at 6 Hasledon Grove, Sedgefield.

For local people unable to purchase copies from traditional sources when they become available, Brian and his wife, Christine, will come to homes by arrangement and take payment via the group's hand-held card machine.



## Officers for the coming year

There were no changes in the elected officers for the coming year:

Still in post are:

Chairman: Alistair Irvine

Secretary: Alison Hodgson

Treasurers: Nigel and Lynda Clegg

Membership Secretary: Brian Mutch

Website manager: Christine Mutch

Design consultant: Kevan Stevens

Committee: Anne Eyley,

Jimmy Seymour, Kevan Stevens