

St. Mary's Church Lydiard Tregoze Conservation Project

The Friends of Lydiard Park have made a substantial financial pledge towards a project to preserve and protect the historic church of St. Mary's Lydiard Tregoze. The project which has been gathering momentum for several years is a major programme to repair and conserve one of England's finest small parish churches.

In 1620 the antiquarian John Aubrey described St. Mary's Church as 'exceeding all the churches in this countie' on account of its fine monuments to the St. John family. More recently Sir Simon Jenkins describing the contents of the south chapel declared 'were it to be removed lock stock and barrel to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London it would cause a national sensation'. Sadly though, as happens in ancient buildings over time, this beautiful and important church has fallen into disrepair. Some of the problems are not immediately obvious to the general visitor, others like the loss of historic painted plasterwork are only too apparent.

An appeal launch hosted by the Right Revd. Lee Rayfield Bishop of Swindon in May 2011 brought together interested parties and funders allowing the first stage of the project to be completed in 2013. This involved essential repairs to the roof and windows to make the building wind and water tight as well as emergency works to some of the medieval wall paintings. The work has allowed the church to be removed from English Heritage's Grade 1 Buildings At Risk Register and the ground is now prepared to restore the historic interiors.

In May 2014 the church applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for development funds to undertake further expert surveys and plans to support their 1million project. The Friends of Lydiard Park have pledged £100,000 towards the total costs. In the meantime the church continues to fundraise for vital match funding to support their bid to the HLF – the outcome of which will be known in September 2014.

A successful outcome will also mean that urgent works can begin in 2015 to preserve the wall paintings and painted reredos on the fragile east wall of the church where there are several layers of historic decoration representing different periods. By working on this wall conservators will be able to formulate a plan on how to tackle the rest of the buildings ancient wall paintings, ensuring that they harmonise.

Based on expert surveys the main project will also include conservation of the medieval glass with its lovely fragments of angels with banners, crowns and suns; repair of the glorious 17th Century monuments including the Golden Cavalier, dilapidated woodwork, rare James 1st screen, elaborate gilded altar rails and star spangled chancel ceiling. The project is also set to improve public access, re-open the hidden south porch and create a welcoming interpretation and activity area inside the west door. These works will provide valuable training opportunities for newly qualified and apprentice craftspeople to work alongside expert conservators as well as workshops and events for the public.

New interpretation inside the building will reveal the history and fascinating stories behind the people associated with it over the centuries, highlighting the connections between the church, house and historic landscape of Lydiard Park.

How You Can Help

If you would like to make a donation or pledge towards this exciting project please contact:

Hilary Gardner, Project Co-ordinator

St. Mary's Church Conservation Appeal,

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Please make cheques payable to St. Mary's Church Building Fund.