

ASK Friends AGM Report May 2025

Our Constitution states that the aim of ASK Friends is:

“The preservation and conservation of the Grade 1 Listed All Saints Church, Kenton for the public benefit by providing support to maintaining, preserving and improving the historic church building, it’s churchyard and its contents.”

I’d like to emphasize the words ‘*providing support*’. We share the task of maintaining and preserving the building with the PCC and the congregation. It is the PCC which ultimately has responsibility for decisions on repairs and spending.

Our Vice-Chair Rob Rand gives a huge amount of his time to building matters: getting quotations, liaising with contractors, overseeing works, and liaising with Rev Julia Hocking, the PCC and the DCC. It may seem that little has happened this year but there is much going on behind the scenes, thanks to Rob.

Let’s look at our achievements! The church is open to the public for 7 days a week and used for many different purposes besides worship, including the wonderful Easter Craft Fair and the concerts put on by Rachael and Richard. None of this seemed possible five years ago when the church had been closed for 18 months and was looking very neglected after plaster had fallen from the ceiling.

ASK Friends holds fundraising events to support the building needs and also to raise the profile of the church in the local community.

As you have heard, we have around £10,000 in our funds.

During the year we hosted 2 fund-raising Art History talks in the church by Dr Chris Davies. Three further informal art conversations are planned for May, June and July. We are most grateful to Chris who so generously gives his time to do this.

There have been two quizzes in November and March, and we thank Matthew Williams for acting as our brilliant quizmaster. Matthew has now stood down as quizmaster and the role will be shared jointly by Chris Britton and Laurence Foster when quizzes resume in the Autumn.

In July, a concert by the Ashburton Singers raised over £500 and was a wonderful occasion. The singers highlighted the need to improve the lighting in the church as it was difficult to read the music.

The Easter Craft Fayre, led jointly by the church, ASK Friends and the village craft group raised over £1000, of which ASK Friends received a half share.

We recognize that our fundraising enterprises raise small amounts and that, for major building works, we will need to apply for grants. If anyone has expertise in this, we would be pleased to receive your advice.

So, what is happening with the church building?

The September flood in 2023 damaged the South Aisle ceiling and caused water ingress on the South Wall adjacent to the ceiling fall. At the same time, an electrical wiring fault occurred in the vestry, not considered to be due to the flood. The electrical repair was completed in December 2023 but, despite significant correspondence with the loss adjusters, an agreement about the ceiling repair has not been reached. However, recent exchanges have been promising and it is hoped that the South Aisle will soon be reopened.

The blocked tower drainpipe, in risk of collapse, was resolved by West Access who abseiled down the tower to test and refix the pipe, clear the blockage and temporarily repair splits and holes in the upper lead section. This removed the danger of the pipe falling and the path was reopened.

Further work to remove all the plant growth on the tower, to repoint and replace the lead is necessary to complete a permanent repair costing c £6,000. ASK Friends has offered to provide 50% of the cost.

The 2024 quinquennial report identified a number of minor repairs to be completed within one year. These have been completed along with the roof/gutter cleaning at the end of April. After the quinquennial report, a hole developed in the storeroom floor, thought to be due to a flood down the North Aisle steps, due to a blocked drainpipe two years ago. At the same time, a soft patch was noted in the kitchen floor. These were repaired by local builder Kevin Alford and his team, at a cost of £1,690.

Last summer, the stained-glass windows were repaired as a result of the very successful Give to Go Green scheme. Funds were raised by both ASK Friends and the church and we thank you all for your contributions. The planned repairs have been completed. As the £5,000 target was exceeded (with the help of Gift Aid claimed) the remainder can be spent on more minor repair needs noticed during the planned work.

There are other building repairs, judged in the quinquennial to be necessary within the next five years. One of these is a crack in the crenelation above the porch. Estimates have been requested for this.

We are awaiting a date for the repositioning of the WWII memorial from the kitchen to the North wall. £200 has been received from Kenton Past and Present group plus some extra donations.

Later this year we will be taking part in a second Give to Go Green fund-raising campaign over a six week period. The aim is to reduce the church's energy use.

Estimates have been obtained to replace the high-level lights with LEDs, modernize the heating control system and trial some heating mats in the pews.

We will be sending out more information later in the year but if anyone has good ideas about fun fundraising events, please speak to us. We need to raise another £5,000, to be match funded by the CofE.

The Churchyard

The churchyard is a work in progress. The team led by John Perkins and Cliff Tubb continues to manage the churchyard, keeping paths neat and tidy while allowing nature to thrive in other areas.

A huge amount of Goosegrass has been removed to prevent it from smothering other flowers.

Spring bulbs planted in Autumn 2023 failed to thrive. New team member Daisy Jones successfully applied for a grant to buy snowdrops and native bluebells, which were planted in Autumn. Disappointingly few came up.

Yellow Rattle which was so successful in 2024 has not reappeared this year.

Lavender plants put in by Mandy Hendley to the right of the porch did not do well. Mandy thinks the spot is too dry. Consideration is being given to what would be best to put in that corner.

On a more positive note, three small trees (Hawthorn, Rowan and Cherry) were planted in Autumn 2024 and are thriving.

The churchyard team is maintaining the Studd grave and has planted Sedum as ground cover to keep weeds at bay.

I would like to thank John, Cliff and every member of the team for their dedication to the constant upkeep of this lovely space.

The Swift project has not been forgotten. Swifts are currently nesting in the boxes in the church tower. A new cable has been put from the tower to the church room and a new TV purchased by the PCC. We still aim to be able to project pictures from the nests onto the church TV for people in the village to observe. A HiFi/WiFi expert has been to visit and identified exactly what is needed. We were not able to arrange this before David Day, the 'Swift Man' went travelling for 6 weeks. We will look at it again in September, once the swifts have flown.

All Saints Church remains a vital landmark in Kenton. Whatever our religious beliefs, it is vital that this church stands firm at the heart of our village. This is a long-held belief. In 1766, in the time of George III, the Parish Lands Trust was set up as a permanent endowment to provide support for the parishioners of Kenton to maintain the church building. The school pays rent to the Parish Lands Trust, which in turn gives the church the money to maintain the building. Since the school was flooded and has been relocated to the playing field, this support has ceased. Unless another tenant can be found for the school building, this source of income will be lost permanently.

If we do not continue to act, the church will fall down, as Britain's medieval castles and monasteries did centuries ago. As I said last year, a derelict ruin at the centre of our village is not a fun prospect.

As you will be aware, there is a new, enthusiastic, dynamic group working to raise funds to re-open The Dolphin as a pub and community hub. Kenton has many needs! However, let's ascribe to Abundance Theory – that there is enough for all!

Lastly, time for some thank yous:

Our committee is small. Huge thanks to Rob who has worked so hard this year. Also to Julia (Cox) who joined us as Treasurer last year and has diligently managed our finances. Also to David (Guthrie) who joined also the committee last year – he is a great asset with his pragmatic approach and ability to see all sides of an issue. Recently, Mandy Hendley stepped down from the committee and we thank her for her contribution to ASK Friends, particularly her energy, enthusiasm and hard work to make the Easter Craft Fayre happen.

We would love some new committee members. Could it be you? Come and join us!

Jane Perkins (Chair ASK Friends)

	Income	Expenditure	£
Bank Balance B/F 31/03/2024			£7513.54
Inc/Payments 24/25			
Membership	£285.00		
Donations	£170.64		
Events	£1,830.13	£284.83	
Other income	£71.00		
Admin expenses		£163.91	
Restricted Funds - Memorial	£434.92		
Restricted Funds - Churchyard	£160.00	£182.50	
Totals 2024/2025	£2,951.69	£631.24	£2,320.45
Bank balance as at 31/03/2025			£9833.99

Amount held in Restricted Funds

Churchyard	£327.54
Memorial	£434.92