

The Great Stare Project - Progress Report November - 2016



Songs of Praise

Celebrating the near
completion of
Phase 1 of the
Project

Photograph ©Peter Chafer

On Sunday 20th November Nicholas, Bishop of Salisbury presided at a service of Songs of Praise for the near completion of Phase 1 of the project. Over 150 people attended the celebration. The retiring collection in aid of the Milton Abbey Heritage Trust amounted to nearly £600.

The works which were mainly funded by Viridor Landfill Credits and other generous donors aimed to make the Abbey and St Catherine's Chapel weather tight and included:

- repairs to the roof lead, gutters and down pipes;
- repair and cleaning of the windows in the Porch, North and South Aisles, North and South Transepts and the East window;
- fitting of window guards to the East window and the Hambro memorial window in the North Aisle;
- inspection and repairs to the vaulting of both the transepts (That in the South transept was found to be in a particularly poor state in places.);
- replacement of gulleys and drains with new sumps and pipes;
- creation of a new soak away for the west front drains with a remarkable improvement in the drainage outside the west door;
- installation of lighting and safety rail on the South transept walkway to the tower;
- installation of a new ladder in the corner between the North transept and the North aisle to provide a much safer and easier access to the North Aisle roof;
- repointing to various parts of both the Abbey and St Catherine's Chapel;
- lifting of the floor of the South transept and installation of a new substructure. The last part of the work will be the laying of the tiles in this area, many of which are having to be specially manufactured. At the time of writing these tiles had not yet been delivered.

All this work means that the Abbey and St Catherine's are now both weather tight and in a much better state of repair. The future phases of the project will improve the access and interpretation of the buildings and landscape to ensure that with an increase in the number of visitors this important heritage site will become self sustaining and secure for future generations.

The creation of the new soak away in front of the Abbey caused some excitement when the first test dig to determine if the ground was suitable disclosed a previously unknown area of graveyard. This was covered over again and a new area tested just a little further north which thankfully disclosed no remains. However laying the pipe work to the new soak away did uncover evidence of the foundations of the first columns of the nave but it is clear that the columns were never actually erected.

During the last month we have learnt that a number of carved cornices had been discovered in a carpenter's workshop in Bridport. The cornices had been ordered to complete the front of the organ case which has never been properly finished. The carpenter had been commissioned to make a new cornice for the front of the present case and the parts which were found in his workshop have been recovered and brought back to the Abbey. This prompted a search for the original organ case which, with its pipes, has now been found. There will no doubt be a move to marry the old and new to completely encase the organ and present a more attractive entrance to the building.

Most of the redundant pew frontals and other furniture which had been stored in the North has now been removed to the west end of the South aisle and will, when the South transept floor is completed be moved into the South transept and placed behind a temporary partition further into the transept than the current one. The vestry will also be temporarily relocated to the South transept. These moves will free both the North and South aisles to dry out prior to the work on their floors during the next phase of The Great Stare Project.

Approval is now being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund to recruit the project management team for the next phase of The Great Stare Project which is far more than just restoration of the Abbey. Once the team has been appointed it will be able to draw up the project execution plan for the remaining phases and apply for permission to execute its plan. Those phases cover the creation of car parks and access roads, a walkway between the Abbey and St Catherine's Chapel, improvements to walks within the woods and opening up some of Capability Brown's views.

It has been an exciting and busy time this year and we now have a hopefully short pause during which there will be much planning for the ongoing work. 2017 looks like being an even busier year.

A Happy Christmas and New Year to you all.