**Annual report to AGM, 9th December 2014**

1. **Heritage Lottery Fund Application**

The past year has been dominated by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application under the Grants for Places of Worship scheme. The first application was submitted in partnership with the Droxford Parochial Church Council (PCC) last November and a decision to reject it was made in March 2014. However the HLF Board encouraged us to re-apply with a modified programme of works. Unlike the first application we were able to take advice from English Heritage who reviewed the work programme, visited the church and made recommendations. Following their advice we re-submitted in May 2014 and the Droxford Church Community Hub and Heritage Project was given an award in September.

The Project has been awarded a first-round pass by the HLF. Development funding of £33,900 has also been awarded to help progress the partnership’s plans to apply for a full grant of £217,500 next year. The project aims to restore and develop the Church to become a living Community Hub and Heritage Centre in the centre of the Meon Valley. The application principally covers urgent structural repairs and restoration work, so that support the development of new facilities for a meeting area and Heritage Centre will be subject to successful future fund-raising.

The project was kicked off with a meeting with the HLF Grants Officer in October, and is managed by a joint PCC and FODC Project Management Team under the supervision of the PCC Standing Committee. Work is progressing with consultants according to the first round budget approved by the HLF, including Architectural, Engineering and environmental consultants.

An open meeting chaired by the Venerable Gavin Collins (Archdeacon of the Meon), was held on the 20th November 2014, to which all who are interested in the future of the Church in Droxford were invited. Presentations were made by the Project Management team comprising members of the PCC and the Friends Committee.

An further open meeting will be held in the spring of 2015, and again the local community in Droxford and the Meon Valley will be invited to participate. If successful in the second-round application to HLF, work on the Church could start in autumn 2015.

More information about the Project and the Project Management Team is available on the Noticeboard inside the Church and on our website [www.friendsofdroxfordchurch.org.uk](http://www.friendsofdroxfordchurch.org.uk/).

1. **Fundraising**

**The Principal fund-raising event was D-Day 70 in Droxford**

The Friends of Droxford Church (FODC) presented an Exhibition of events and memories about Droxford in June 1944, leading up to D-Day. The Exhibition was displayed in Droxford Church and focused on the visit of Winston Churchill to Droxford Station and his meetings while staying there for three days. In addition the Friends organised a Model Station and Railway track which carried visitors from the Square to the Church.

With the support of the D-day Museum and Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), we researched these events and displayed the results on 5 graphic panels, with a sixth reserved for the Droxford Junior School D-Day project, and these will remain on permanent display. A major focus of the research was to compile an Oral History of eyewitness accounts of the War, and particularly D-Day in Droxford and the Meon Valley. A DVD, ‘These are their Memories’, featuring 26 participants, was played in the church during the exhibition and has been highly acclaimed. Copies are available for purchase. Additional temporary exhibits featured the Meon Valley Railway, Churchill’s correspondence for the train, diaries and photographs of D-Day preparations in the Meon Valley and Portsmouth.

In the week before the Country fair two talks were arranged on the role of Droxford Station in the run-up to D-Day (by Ben Stoneham with Tim King, and Tony Williams), and a visit to Southwick house was also arranged. A 1940’s Tea dance was held in the Village Square on the Sunday after the Fair.

**Budget and Funds raised**

Our budget was based on total expenses of approximately £9,600, most of which was covered by grants, principally from the D-Day Museum (via HLF), and Hampshire County Council. Income from Ticket sales amounted to over £4,000, donations were over £3,000. Including other income, total funds retained by FODC are approximately £8,500. We are very grateful to all who have donated.

**Visitors**

Our largest one day event in Droxford is the annual Country Fair held on Saturday 7th June. This year we opened the Fair with a D-Day re-enactment, and estimate the number of visitors to the Fair at 3000, approximately double the normal number. The queue around the Exhibition in the church was almost continuous for four hours. Over 200 people attended our two talks in the Church in the week before; and 150 came to the Tea-dance in the Village Square. We estimate about 1,200 people visited the Church in the opening week.

The Exhibition was open for 8 hours a day from 29th May and the Church was rarely empty. The Church is on the Wayfarer’s Walk long-distance path and is a favourite stop for ramblers. Visitors include the Fareham Society, Alton Carers, and others from beyond Hampshire, and as far as Holland and the Falkland Islands, with many repeat visitors. We estimate a further 1,200 have visited the exhibition during the three summer months, for a total of 2,400.  There are many comments in the Church Visitors book – they tend to be one word, ‘superb’, very good’ etc.

**Significance**

Droxford D-Day 70 has demonstrated that there is a strong appetite in the local community for well researched and displayed Heritage. Each of our talks filled the Church to capacity with over 200 paying visitors, and the ongoing Exhibition has continued to draw new and diverse visitors into the Church. Voluntary contributions have been very significant both in time and money, and we are very grateful. This experience will be analysed and used to inform our Activity Plan in the next Phase of our Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funds to restore the fabric of the Church.

**Other Fund-Raising**

The Angelic Carols concert was held on the first Thursday in December in 2013 and 2014. Both events were very successful. The 2014 event was outstanding and the Church was full with 160 tickets sold, and a choir of 45. Support was received from the Portsmouth City Community Fund. St John’s College will be booked for next year.

1. **Faculties and Buildings**

In May the FODC funded the removal of the Choir pews and the dismantling of the organ (with special thanks to John Dryden-Brownlee), for which the PCC had obtained Faculties. This enabled the D-Day exhibition to take place in the space created and is was a first step in using the North Chapel and choir area more flexibly.

1. **Organisation**

We welcomed Peter O’Sullivan to the Friends Committee during the year and found his advice and links with Heritage and Education very useful, as well as his experience with the Meon Valley Saxons project. He is leaving the Committee due to other commitments and we thank him for his contribution.

John Symes, Chairman, Friends of Droxford Church

December 2014