

**Christ Church
Shelton & Oxon**

**Quinquennial Inspection
Report**

March 2017



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CHRIST CHURCH, SHELTON & OXON 2017 QUINQUENNIAL REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Christ Church was built in 1854, to the designs of E. Haycock, in the 'Early English' style. It consists of a nave and chancel, with a vestry and organ chamber to the north and south of the chancel respectively, and a south porch to the nave. There is a bellcote tower on the west gable.
- 1.2 The church was originally built so that the people of Shelton and Oxon would be able to attend church services even when the River Severn was in full flood – as they would not have been able to reach the churches in Shrewsbury town centre. The population of the parish is rising as new houses are built, and is currently approximately 9,000.
- 1.3 The main body of the church has a seating capacity of about 150. The building is listed Grade II.

2.0 PREVIOUS REPORTS

- 2.1 The previous quinquennial report was written by Tim Ratcliffe in 2012, and the one before that by Rodney Bellamy in 2006. These were referred to during the preparation of this report.

3.0 CURRENT REPORT

- 3.1 This report is based on an inspection by Tim Ratcliffe in March 2017. The weather was cold and overcast, and there had been some rainfall in the preceding few days.
- 3.2 The inspection was visual and did not involve any opening up of hidden voids and is based on findings made from the ground and from a ladder. Any area of concern requiring further investigation is referred to in the appropriate section of this report. Obvious evidence of woodworm activity or rot is noted, but it is not possible to comment on the condition of every timber in the building.

4.0 WORK COMPLETED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

- 4.1 Since 2012, ongoing maintenance repairs have been carried out, including localised stone repairs and repainting of rainwater goods, and a new organ has been installed.

5.0 CONDITION REPORT

5.1 STRUCTURE

Internally, there are hairline cracks above and below north & south windows, noted in the previous reports, which are thought to mainly relate to thermal movement. Some of the cracks have slight bulging either side, which suggests they open and close seasonally. This can sometimes be caused by wetting and drying of the ground due to drainage problems, so it is important to ensure drainage gullies continue to be checked and cleared regularly.



The cracks above the western windows on the north side of the nave are slightly more pronounced. This is thought to have been caused by poor drainage, which has now been addressed.

Diagonal cracks in the plaster either side of the lancet windows at the east end indicate very slight outward of the north and south walls. The cracks are minor and are not an immediate cause for concern.

The 2006 report noted concerns about the structural condition of the top of the belfry, which has an eastwards lean on it. Since then, the masonry to the base of the belfry (above roof level) has been repointed and new flashings fitted. There are no signs of any cracking or movement since the work was carried out.

5.2 ROOF STRUCTURE

The nave roof takes the form of purlins and rafters supported by five large arched trusses. The rest of the roofs are supported by trussed rafters. All are in stained pine with stained pine boards over. There are no signs of any movement or other problems.

There have been concerns in the past about woodworm in some of the roof timbers, but there are no signs of current activity. Any future evidence of woodworm dust should be reported (most likely during the spring months).

5.3 ROOF COVERINGS & COPINGS

The roofs are covered in machine-made clay tiles, laid in the last 25 years. A couple of slipped tiles were re-fixed just before the inspection, and all are looking in sound condition.

Since the last report, open joints and loose kneeler stones on the vestry gable have been repointed. There are, however, still open joints below here and also between copings to chancel and organ chamber gables, which need to be repointed before water ingress causes damage.



The crosses on the tops of gables lean inwards slightly. This was noted in the previous reports (photos have been taken using a drone) and is not an immediate cause for concern. There is, however, cracking below the cross on the east end, which could indicate it is coming loose, and this should be checked and repaired when the copings are repointed.

The small hidden valleys where the vestry and organ chamber roofs meet the east wall of the nave were reasonably clear at the time of the inspection, and the internal plaster (in the loft space above the vestry) seems to be drying out.

5.4 RAINWATER DISPOSAL

The cast iron gutters and downpipes are basically in a sound condition, and have just been repainted. They should continue to be checked and cleared on a regular basis (at least annually).

The gullies below downpipes are a lot clearer than at the last inspection. It is important they continue to be cleared regularly (at least annually) to prevent drains blocking and feeding water into the bases of walls.

Since 2012, the drain at the northwest corner has been uncovered and the downpipe connected into it, with a feeder pipe to a water butt. The butt isn't level and the valve on the feeder pipe doesn't always work. This needs to be corrected, by levelling the butt and possibly replacing the valve, so water doesn't overflow into the ground. It is also worth considering reconfiguring the bottom of the downpipe so it feeds over a grille into the gully (the same as the others) rather than feeding any debris direct into the drain.



5.5 EXTERNAL WALLS

The majority of the masonry around the church is in a sound condition. As noted in section 5.3, however, there are a few open joints in the north gable wall of the vestry that still need repointing, as well as the gable copings to the chancel and organ chamber.

Stonework on the west end also has a few open joints that it would be best to repoint/fill, to prevent water ingress or erosion. The previous report noted cracking in some of the hood mould stones over the two lancet windows on this end. These stones have been replaced and the hood moulds are now in a good condition.



As noted in previous reports, the 'Good Shepherd' carved statue in the west gable end has suffered some erosion, and the surface is shaling. It would be worth accessing this, when carrying out work on the west end masonry (or clock), to assess its condition and removing loose skins. Some further repair or conservation work may be advisable, depending what is found.

5.6 WINDOWS & DOORS

Several of the windows have been fitted with metal grilles as external protection. The grilles to the east end are cut to fit into the lancet window openings, whereas others are just fitted across the face of the masonry, which makes them more obtrusive and less secure.

The three stained-glass lancet windows to the east end are sound. The chancel also has three diamond leaded plain glazed windows. The western window on the south side is slightly loose and needs re-fixing.

The two lights in the vestry (north transept) east window have a number of defects. As well as hairline cracks and rusting ironwork, noted in the previous report, one has been smashed and wired glass fitted inside. This is reasonable as a temporary repair, but the window needs re-leading, and the metalwork needs rubbing down and painting. One this has been done, more substantial protection should be fitted outside.



There are two lancet windows in the south transept organ/boiler room with rusting hoppers and slight gaps around them, which would benefit from minor repair.

The nave windows are generally sound apart from some rusting iron opening hoppers. These should be eased and repainted.

The main entrance door is in sound condition (Faculty permission has just been given to move this to the outer opening of the porch). There is an external door on the east side of the organ chamber, similar in design to the main door. It had two circular holes cut in it, in the past, which have been filled.

The other external door, to the vestry, has been fitted with a metal plate to make it more secure. This door is in reasonable condition, but there is some rot in the base of the door frame, which needs repairing.



5.7 INTERNAL CEILINGS, WALLS & FLOORS

Ceilings

The ceilings are boarded pine, stained dark brown, and all appear sound from floor level.

Walls

The internal walls are painted plaster. Peeling paint at high level on the south side of the chancel arch, in the north east corner of the chancel, and at the west end was noted in previous reports. This seems to relate to open joints in coping stones above. Some have been pointed since the last report, but further pointing is recommended (noted in 5.3).

Damp noted in the last report, in the west wall in the small attic above the north vestry, has dried out. The hidden valley gutter should continue to be checked and cleared, to ensure this wall remains dry.

Damp at low level in the vestry north wall, also appears to have dried out since the last report. The drain should continue to be checked and cleared to ensure this wall remains dry.

Floors

A fitted carpet covers the west end of the nave and central aisle, so it was not possible to inspect the condition of the floor here. The pew platforms either side seem sound. Decorative tiles in the choir area of the chancel are sound, but there is carpet beyond the communion rail.

5.8 FIXTURES & FITTINGS

The pews, pulpit and other furnishings generally date from the 19th century and are in a good condition. The west end of the nave has been fitted with modern stained pine storage cupboards, with kitchen facilities, which are in sound condition.

The stone font and pulpit are sound. There are wall monuments, which were checked for stability and no problems noted. Later additions include the oak reader's desk, dating from 1893, and an oak chancel rail and chairs dating from 1947. No problems or defects were noted.

In the last few months, a new organ has been installed, within the existing organ surround, which has been adjusted to accommodate it.

The clock is housed internally in boxing at the west end, with the clock face on the outside of the west gable, just above the Good Shepherd sculpture. This is now quite weathered and it would be worth painting and gilding the dial and hands when work is carried out to the masonry.



5.9 HEATING, ELECTRICS & ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Heating is provided by a mixture of high level infra-red heaters (which appear sound, but were not inspected in detail) and low level radiators. The joints to a couple of radiators had recently been leaking but had just been repaired. Hot water is supplied by a modern gas fired boiler (less than 10 years old), located behind the organ.

There are four fire extinguishers in the church, two water ones, by the south door and in the vestry, and two carbon dioxide ones by the organ and boiler (the powder extinguisher noted in the last report has been removed on the advice of Ecclesiastical Insurance).

There is no lightning conductor to the church.

The last NICEIC electrical inspection was carried out in April 2014, and given a satisfactory rating, so the next one is due in 2019.

The internal lighting system is a mixture of pendant lights to the nave and spotlights to the chancel and is sufficient to illuminate the interior.

5.11 CHURCHYARD & BOUNDARY WALLS

The churchyard is open for burials and the interment of ashes. There are a number of memorial benches and pathways through and around the churchyard and it is a well-used thoroughfare between the houses on the north side of the church, the hall and the road.

Paths on the south and west sides are tarmac, and the rest are concrete slabs. The pathway running parallel to the church on the north side has vertical slabs either side which are leaning and protruding, but seem firmly fixed. It is important to ensure there are no trip hazards or uneven surfaces on these paths and that leaves are removed to prevent them becoming a slip hazard.

It is understood gravestones are checked, at least annually, for basic stability. Two crosses were found to be loose and laid flat during the inspection. Other stones have been laid flat over the last few years. Although this is the safest thing to do in the short term, it is worth considering either re-fixing or moving some stones, as it will become increasingly difficult to cut the grass around so many horizontal slabs.

There are numerous small trees in and around the churchyard. An assessment of these was not attempted as part of the inspection, but no particular problems were noted. A basic visual check should be carried out annually and after strong winds.

The southern boundary is a stone wall, which is generally in sound condition, although a few open joints were noted that would benefit from repointing. The eastern boundary is a mixture of post & wire fencing and timber panels, shared with the neighbouring garden. The northern boundary is formed by a mixture of picket fencing and mature box hedges which are kept trimmed.

Part of the boundary to the west is shared with the adjacent hall. At the northern end there is wire fencing and a wall that are in poor condition. The fence needs repairing and wall repointing, but it isn't clear if this is the PCC's responsibility, and it is possible the adjoining field will be built on in the near future.



5.12 ACCESS

There is parking available across the road in the pub car park, and roadside parking on the housing estate on the north side of the church. There are no official designated disabled parking bays. There are several access routes through the churchyard, all used regularly by the local community. All are fairly level.

There are two tarmac pathways from the road on the south side to the principle entrance at the south porch. There are five steps on the path from the gate directly facing the porch, and a sloping path from the western gate with no steps.

There are three steps into the south porch, with grab rails to both sides to aid access. Although there is a ramp available, the steps are a significant barrier to wheelchair access, and thought is currently been given to the possibility of forming a new entrance, with level access, on the north side.



Once inside the church, there is level access throughout the nave, with a step up onto pew platforms. The central aisle has been gently ramped up into the chancel allowing level access to the communion rail.

Large print copies of all sheets and books are available for the visually impaired and a loop system has been installed for the hearing impaired.

6.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 URGENT WORK & MAINTENANCE ISSUES

- Check and clear gutters and downpipes (annually)
- Clear the hidden valleys to transept roofs (annually)
- Check and clear all drainage gullies (annually)
- Check condition of gravestones and trees (annually)
- Check & clear paths (at least annually)
- Level the water-butt and ensure it doesn't overflow

6.2 WORK RECOMMENDED WITHIN 1 YEAR

- Re-point copings to the chancel and organ chamber gables
- Check and re-fix the gable cross on the east end
- Re-point open joints to the vestry north gable wall
- Repair bottom of vestry door frame

6.3 WORK RECOMMENDED WITHIN 2 YEARS

- Re-point open joints to the west end
- Check condition of statue on west end, and repair as necessary
- Paint and gild the clock face on the west end
- Re-lead the vestry east window and fit better protection
- Carry out localised repairs to other windows and repaint ferramenta

6.4 WORK RECOMMENDED WITHIN 5 YEARS

- Reconfigure downpipe at n.w. corner to feed into a gully
- Repair or replace fencing to northern part of west boundary
- Consider re-fixing or moving some gravestones that are laid flat

6.5 ITEMS TO BE INSPECTED BY SPECIALISTS (aide memoir)

- Electrics (to be inspected every 5 years by an electrician – due 2019)
- Fire extinguishers – to be inspected annually
- Boiler
- Clock