

Friends of St Matthew's Churchyard

Annual Report & Financial summary 2024

Annual Report for 2024

It has been another successful year. The churchyard has been maintained to its customary high standards and comments received have been full of praise. As usual we have positive feedback from people coming to find family graves. Dorothy and I have responded to specific requests for information and visits. This is often recognised by donations.

All thanks to the group of volunteers who turn up regularly to tidy graves, cut grass, pick litter and dog poo and whatever else is needed. We are backed by the Council's Bereavement team who do an excellent job cutting the closed part of the churchyard for which they have a responsibility. They have also restored a number of headstones including a little angel and a family headstone, on request, for which a donation was given.

The tree and shrub planting in front of the replacement fencing has been successful. The combination of fence, shrubs and re-wilding has stopped people walking across that part of the churchyard.

The number of website articles has grown, primarily because of Dorothy's enthusiastic research. Sometimes we receive feedback and further useful information almost immediately. Other inquiries and information can come in years later. Our Facebook (and X formerly known as Twitter) presence is regularly updated and comments and 'likes' are always positive. Dorothy also circulates news and articles to the Friends.

The application for a faculty for a memorial in the footprint of the old church dedicated to Ann Walker and her aunts was approved. An appeal was launched, with the money needed being raised in less than 24 hours. A local stonemason, Jonathan Albutt, was then tasked with finding a suitable piece of Yorkshire stone. Once he had the stone back in his Elland workshop the engraving began. By mid-May the beautifully carved stone was ready for installing. It can now be viewed at any time, unlike the memorial brass plaque to Ann Walker, a niece and two nephews which has to remain in the tower. In September a large group of people, here for some of the Anne Lister Memorial events, gathered around this ledger stone to remember Ann Walker. Subsequently there have been good numbers visiting specifically to see it.

Our wooden Till Carr Lane noticeboard was a victim of the storms last winter. During the spring it was replaced. This was thanks to a generous gift of a new noticeboard minus posts/legs and a very kind donation from Brighouse Rotary for new posts. We now have noticeboard space to direct visitors to the information boards, the QR posts, the canes indicating where some of the real *Gentleman Jack* characters are buried and the path down which the many soldiers' headstones can be seen. During the year a memorial to a previously unknown soldier was spotted down this path. Unfortunately, our appeal to the CWGC for a headstone for Gunner Walter Wolfenden was not successful. He was thought to be fit enough to take up railway work when he was discharged. But then succumbed – as many did including others in his family – to what became known as 'Spanish' flu.

The group 'In Search of Ann Walker' has again had a successful appeal for donations towards the Brighthouse Central Foodbank raising over £2,500. The organisation does this as a continuation of a charity established in Ann Walker's will which itself followed on that of her grandfather, William Walker. His commitment can be seen on the Benefactors' Board in the tower.

Friends of Friendless Churches have plans for work inside and outside the tower during 2025. The cupola requires attention which will require scaffolding. The rendered east wall will be repainted and some pointing at the base made sound. Inside the intention is to make access to the upper levels (purely for maintenance, not visitors) and this will require a short set of stairs to connect the existing main steps to those which were originally used to get to the upper levels. Once done the two floors will be stabilised and we might get a photo of the original foundation stone dating back to 1529.

To gain this access, the benefactors' board will need to be moved. There is not enough width for it to be mounted horizontally so it will be positioned where the John & Mary Walker memorial stone is. The memorials, except the recently refurbished Ann Walker brass memorial, will be cleaned, stabilised and remounted. This will allow the John Walker junior base to be reunited with its Greek profile. The memorial to Rev Rich Sutcliffe will be placed above the door. This one is difficult to read and interpret. We have asked if the FoFC architect will advise on providing a small transcription and translation plaque alongside. (We have a good translation available.)

This will be the first major work on the tower since FoFC took responsibility for it 50 years ago. Listed building consent has been requested and granted. Once complete the tower will again be watertight. That will make our job easier, less sweeping out to do before visits.

We do need a vice-chair willing to consider taking over responsibility for the group in the future. I think this is called 'succession planning'.

Ian Philp, Chair.

January 2025.

Financial summary for 2024

We are in good financial health thanks in particular to a number of generous donations. At the end of the year, we have nearly £5,200 in the bank and have had an exceptional in-year surplus of £834. Seb Crowther has signed off our accounts and kindly offered to review them annually.

Income.

We had a one-off injection of funds when the money raised globally for the Ann Walker memorial exceeded the requirements. Fortunately, the American organiser had worded the appeal to allow any surplus to go to the maintenance of the churchyard. This brought us £1303.

We have continued to sell the book *In the Shadow of Lightcliffe's Old Tower*, only a few of which books remain, raising about £200 this year. Brighouse Rotary have again given us £200 which, this year, went to providing legs for the Till Carr Lane noticeboard. (the brand new board was given to us but hadn't got any supports.)

Tower openings bring in donations. Sometimes these are planned openings such as during the Anne Lister festival. We have also opened the tower in the summer months coinciding with working party afternoons. At other times, Dorothy or Ian, as keyholders, have opened up the tower, responding to specific requests, and welcomed individuals or groups. In total donations, as a direct result of opening the tower, have amounted to about £975.

The *Anne Lister Festival* provided a further donation of £409.

Expenditure.

We have our normal running costs which include labour, fuel, machinery replacement, maintenance and a small amount of additional expenses. This has come to about £1100 this year.

The tower does, of course, belong to the Friends of Friendless Churches. And so we make a donation to them as a proportion of our donations income as many visitors come to both tower and churchyard. This year, we've given £400.

Future funding.

We cannot expect to continue to benefit from donations at the level of recent years and may have to look again at ways to increase our income.

There are virtually no books left to sell.

Donations from the *Anne Lister Festival* are likely to be lower partly because of the way the festival is being organised and partly because there are likely to be fewer visitors who have not already been to the tower and churchyard.

We have been named as a beneficiary in an Australian will. However, the suspected person is relatively young.

Ian Philp, Treasurer

January 2025