

Friends of St Matthew's Churchyard

Annual Report & Financial summary 2025

The churchyard as a whole.

It has been a relatively quiet year with our maintenance work continuing. We have held regular working parties on the third Sunday of the month and have averaged about 8 volunteers. Jobs have included litter and dog dropping clearance, keeping tidy all graves and responding to specific requests especially if the interested people live a distance away, keeping ivy under control, lifting the crowns of a few trees and making sure that pathways are clear and safe.

For all of this, thanks go to the dedicated group of folk who support us.

Carl has continued to keep the grass under control with additional help from volunteers during the grass growing season. The Council continues to do an excellent job in the closed churchyard area including close cutting around headstones and clearing ledger stones of cuttings. We had a nearly new rotary mower given to us by someone living in the area. It will augment the cutting equipment.

Visitors and research.

We continue to receive visitors throughout the year especially coinciding with the Anne Lister and Ann Walker events. Occasionally Dorothy or Ian host visitors at other times who are interested in viewing the churchyard graves and memorials in the tower. This interest always brings donations to our funds. We recognise that the tower part of the visit is important to some visitors so make an annual donation to Friends of Friendless Churches.

Dorothy and Ian both do research into people and places related to the churchyard and the parish. The resulting articles are stored on our website and publicised on social media. There can be no doubt that the knowledge of our immediate neighbourhood going back 200 years is better known than in many parishes.

The New Burial Ground.

Several years ago we took on the additional responsibility of looking after the area that is currently in use. During the summer, the Council has cut the grass nearest to the Till Carr entrance and our volunteers have ensured that the graves in this area are easily accessible and cared for. There has, I think, been an increase in relatives taking an active interest in those graves which lie close to the western wall which had previously been neglected.

Charitable fund raising.

The *In Search of Ann Walker* group again raised money online for the Brighthouse Central Foodbank as a continuation of an intention in Ann Walker's will to help the poor of the area. This year the total raised was, again, over £2,000.

Vandalism.

At an early stage, we did wonder if we would be hit by vandalism, but none has occurred until now. Three of our QR information posts were knocked out of their holes and damaged. These have been replaced by Mike and Ian P with more substantial posts set in concrete. More seriously three memorials have been damaged very recently. A Celtic cross has been hacked off as well as a decoratively carved cross post, perhaps to order. The table tomb by the TCL entrance was also pushed to the ground with its legs - called bottles - broken but nothing appears to have been taken. This has all been reported to the police.

The tower works

The restoration work is well on the way with the lantern and ball removed. There was serious damage found with deterioration of both the stonework and the iron clamps. All of this has been removed and templates created ready for new stone or restoration of stone to be done. After an expected delay due to the very wet weather, work is now underway in rebuilding.

Fortunately, the new internal stair metalwork and the new oak flooring can all be done in house so there should not be any delays. Most of the memorials are away for restoration.

The project was designed for 26 weeks, and, at this stage, we do not know if this will be achievable. Ideally, we would want completion for Easter weekend when we are hoping to welcome visitors for the Anne Lister weekend with the potential of raising funds.

The Friends have recently published a newsletter which features their work in Lightcliffe. It was filmed before Christmas but is still a fascinating insight into what they are doing.

<https://friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/news/heavy-lifting-at-lightcliffe/>

Once completed Friends of Friendless Churches hope to host a celebration.

Potential future financial costs

We cannot be certain what might occur in the coming year however there are two possible areas of expenditure.

The Grillo grass cutter has been kept going by Carl. At some stage it might not be repairable. A direct replacement would cost around £1500. However, as the really hard work for which it was essential is now done, we could consider a similar machine from a different manufacturer with a price around £600.

The three benches, despite being made of treated larch, are having to be repaired as they rot. I'm not sure if we could or should replace like with like but look for a more sustainable solution. A bench would cost in the range £350 to £500.

Succession planning.

We do need to find replacements for Mike and myself as vice-chair and chair.

Ian Philp, Chair. February 2026

Financial summary for 2025

We brought forward from the previous year £5,196 and had, at the 31st December 2025, £4,807 representing a loss on the year of £389. The accounts have been audited by Seb Crowther.

Income:

We had very few books to sell but received nearly £1000 in donations. These came from visitors received when the tower and churchyard were open, from Calderdale Heritage Walks for being part of ALBW, from a few but regular individuals and from 2 talks given by Ian. In addition, we again had a donation from Brighouse Rotary Club which we put towards equipment.

Expenditure:

We spent around £660 on grass cutting via Carl and including petrol which is much in line with recent years. We needed a new spotlight for use in the tower and we also bought a battery-operated small chainsaw to trim small branches. These cost, with a few extras, came to £180. Our website cost is only £48 which is relatively low.

We had 3 QR information posts destroyed by vandals and the new posts, code labels and concrete cost about £100.

The removal of 4 trees that had died of ash dieback cost £400.

In a way, the loss is accounted for by the cost of removing the trees which needed to be done for safety reasons.

Summary: we remain in a secure position. We normally make a donation to Friends of Friendless Churches as it is the combination of the tower and the churchyard that brings in some of the donations though some gifts are for the maintenance of the churchyard.

Ian Philp, Treasurer. January 2026