

The Friends of the City Churches ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS Review of the Year 2010-11

The Executive Committee is pleased to report once again another busy and successful year for the Friends. The elected members of the Executive Committee, all Trustees, have been fully occupied in consequence. The Committee meets monthly during the year (except in December). Following the invitation in last year's Annual Report to members to consider joining the Committee we were very pleased to receive an expression of interest from Tom Pearson, who was subsequently co-opted to the Committee to help us develop our membership and marketing strategy. He has already made an excellent contribution to our thinking, and will be standing for election to the Committee at the AGM. The invitation to members to join the Committee remains open: anyone who feels they can contribute to its work is asked to speak to one of the officers.

Joe Hughes will not be standing for re-election, after four years service on the Committee. We thank Joe for his contribution, and we are delighted to say that he will continue his work for the Friends in Watching and the distribution of "City Events".

The Committee has decided that the governance of the charity would be improved if we moved to a system of three year terms for EC members, as near as possible a third of the Committee being elected (or re-elected) each year. This requires an amendment to the Constitution, which will be tabled at the 2011 Annual General Meeting. The new system would then come into effect in 2012.

Membership

At 31 March 2011 there were 1153 members of the Friends, a net increase of 41 over the year. The Executive Committee's target of doubling the membership over the next four years has now become the remit of Tom Pearson, who is being assisted by a small group of EC members.

Administration

Karen Chester continues her sterling work as Office Administrator. We are most grateful to her for her loyalty and unfailing cheerfulness. Karen is normally in the office at St Magnus part-time on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday: when she is not there the answerphone takes messages on 0207-626-1555; this is regularly cleared.

Accommodation

We mentioned in last year's Annual Report that we would be considering our future office accommodation arrangements. This is still a live issue. We are not yet ready to come to a firm conclusion, but debate and enquiry continues.

Church Watching

During the year we started watching at St Andrew by the Wardrobe. This brought the number of watched churches to fifteen, enabling them to open when otherwise they might have to be closed. In the current year we are starting to watch at a sixteenth: the Dutch Church in Austin Friars, on one day a month. We have over a hundred watchers to staff our current rotas and we take this opportunity of thanking them most sincerely for their contribution and unfailing enthusiasm. Anyone who feels they could undertake this duty is very welcome to apply to join the group and we encourage them to do so. Please contact David Salter, who runs this part of our activity.

Programme of Events

Walks and other events. The City Churches Walks Day in the year under review was again based at St Mary Aldermary. The number of people taking part continued to decline. The Executive Committee has therefore decided to offer the Walks in a broader context of City-wide events. Details will be published on our web-site. In the year under review we took a closer hand in the arrangements for Open House weekend in the City in September, and this worked

out very well. This year we shall be repeating the experience, helping to ensure that as many churches as possible will be open, providing watchers where necessary, and arranging the services of City Guides for guided tours of a number of them. The Open House weekend this year will be on 17th and 18th September, and we expect most City churches to be open.

Throughout the year guided walks and other visits were again organised for members and their friends. Our thanks go to the volunteer guides who lead these, in particular Karen Chester, Tony Tucker and Paul Taylor. These events are greatly enjoyed by those who take part. They are so popular that they are always fully booked, and where the demand is particularly great we try and repeat the event after a short interval. The Chairman's day tour in September was again focused on Rochester, this time enjoying a guided tour of the Cathedral and an update on the work on Canons Row. A musical evening at St James Garlickhythe in January when we celebrated the Chairman's birthday was a great success.

Carol Service. The annual Carol Service was held at St Mary Abchurch in December. The church was full, and the atmosphere in the afternoon gloaming was magical. We all enjoyed the traditional mulled wine and plentitude of mince pies afterwards. It was a great opportunity to visit one of the churches which is not so easy to get into except on the day we watch there each week (Mondays).

Newsletters

Four newsletters were published during the year. There is still occasional difficulty with the postal service, but this was largely overcome by the generosity of one of our members who contributed the sum needed to send them round by First Class instead of Second Class post.

Merchandise

Sales of our limited range of merchandise (essentially mugs, ties, Tony Tucker's Guide, and Christmas cards) continued at a modest level. The 2010 Christmas card was a great success and produced a far healthier surplus than in recent years. In due course the merchandise range will be the subject of a review by Tom Pearson as part of the marketing strategy.

"City Events"

"City Events" remains very popular, both in paper form and through the special "City Events" website (<http://www.cityevents.co.uk>). The website also has details of watched churches, weekend services in the City, and events at churches just outside the City boundary.

Befriending the churches

The essence of the Befriending role is to become part of the individual church community with an earmark as a link to the Friends, so it is essentially low-key and long-term. Most churches now have befrienders appointed, but if anyone is interested in becoming a befriender please discuss with Melvyn Jeremiah, who oversees the scheme.

We kept in close touch with the Archdeacon's office throughout the year, and enjoyed a worthwhile exchange of views on matters affecting the churches. There have been some changes during the year, but much of the work that has been done will only bear fruit in the coming year. There are challenges in the City Corporation's intention to make the City a "seven-day-a-week" centre of activity for the general public including tourists, and we must be ready to respond positively. The many problems and opportunities presented by the staging of the Olympic Games in London in 2012 magnifies all this. We are ready to help and encourage in any way we can.

Finally I must record the sincere thanks of the FCC to the Bishop of London, the Archdeacon and the Area Dean, for yet another year of unfailing support and understanding. At the same time, my thanks go to all the volunteers who work so hard for the Friends, to whom any success we achieve is due.

Oliver Leigh Wood
Chairman
6th May 2011