

Report on the Annual General Meeting 2017

held in the Church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, Wilton on Saturday 18th March 2017. *By Clare Miles*

Annual General Meeting

Martin Knight, Chairman, extended a welcome to Sarah Troughton, Lord-Lieutenant of Wiltshire and President of the Friends of Wiltshire Churches, and to the fifty Members present.

The President thanked Martin and the members of his committee for all their work throughout the year which contributes so much towards the maintenance and repair of Wiltshire's churches. She also welcomed Jane Angelini and said how much she was looking forward to her lecture.

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 19th March 2016 were approved.

In his report the Chairman thanked Neil Skelton, Committee Member, and members of the Church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas for their part in the arrangements for the day's meeting. David Evans was unable to attend; he was thanked for his on-going work as Secretary and for recently distributing the Annual Report for 2016. Producing the Annual Report has been generously undertaken for many years by Luke Hughes, Committee Member, and his company. This contribution was gratefully acknowledged.

Reviewing the past year, the Chairman commented on the activity of the Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust whereby 30 churches had been awarded grants for maintenance, improvements or conservation projects. Particular grants had been supplemented through a beneficial partnership with the National Churches Trust which offered match-funding up to the value of £10,000 each year. He stressed that the Trust would welcome more applications from churches and chapels.

For last year's events, thanks were due to the leaders of four well-attended Church tours and especially to Vice President, Madeleine, Countess of Bessborough, for very kindly hosting, once again, the annual summer party at Roche Court; September's event preceded by Evensong at Farleigh Church was particularly popular.

Charles Graham, Wiltshire Coordinator of the annual fund-raising event, 'Ride and Stride', had described in the Annual Report the brave efforts of participants who toured around churches in poor weather. Via the support of their sponsors they raised nearly £44,000 which, with the addition of Gift Aid, would be at the disposal of the Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust.

Looking to the programme of events for 2017, four tours of churches were planned with itineraries occasionally extending their reach over the county border, as has happened in the past. The Miracle Theatre of Cornwall will present the play, 'The Third Policeman' by Flann O'Brien on Friday 14th July, at Ogbourne Maizey. Thanks to Marion Gordon-Finlayson the profits from this show will be donated to the Wiltshire

Historic Churches Trust. Members would be fully notified of these events and of the date and venue for the 2017 Summer Party.

Peter Smith, Treasurer of the Wiltshire Churches Trust, presented his statement of the Friends of Wiltshire Churches' income and expenditure for 11 months, 1st April 2016 to 28th February 2017, showing a balance of £23,400. A net profit of £4,000 had resulted from the Summer Party. Income from membership fees, events, and the sale of Christmas cards and Brian Woodruffe's book, 'The Parish Churches of Wiltshire', had remained steady. Income from donations in 2016 was reduced from the previous year's result which had had the benefit of an exceptional gift. He reported that in the year to date Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust grants paid to churches totalled £49,350. Outstanding grants yet to be claimed, totalled £94,700.

The provisional date of the next Annual General Meeting was set as Saturday 17th March 2018.

The Chairman then formally closed the Annual General Meeting.

Since the annual lecture was on the theme of Russian churches, the chairman alerted members on the appropriateness of the venue chosen for the lecture. He asked Neil Skelton give a little more background.

The Church of St. Mary and St Nicholas, Wilton

Neil Skelton gave an outline account of the church which was built in 1841-45 to designs by Thomas Henry Wyatt and David Brandon for Lord Sidney Herbert, brother of the Earl of Pembroke and his Russian-born mother, Catherine, the Dowager Countess. The architectural style selected was that of a round-arched Italianate Romanesque which was briefly popular in the mid-Victorian period. The interior is lofty and monumental in scale with the character of an early Christian basilica. The focal point of the interior is the richly decorated East End with a mosaic depicting Christ in Glory and the church's dedicatees, St. Mary and St. Nicholas, to either side.

Fine quality sculpture, valuable artefacts, stained glass and stonework were described by Neil Skelton. Many items had been acquired from continental sources or from the 1842 Strawberry Hill sale of Horace Walpole's antiquarian collection.

The Chairman then welcomed Jane Angelini. Jane had graduated in Russian Studies and took a Masters degree in Byzantine & Early Russian Art & Architecture. As well as running St James's Art Tours she works as a free-lance lecturer for numerous organisations, including NADFAS, the Art Fund and Swan Hellenic Cruises.