

## Merrymeet Church

It has been known since 2007 that there are issues with the roof at Merrymeet. In the quinquennial inspection in 2017 it was confirmed that the nail rot had progressed to an extent that action was needed. Added to this it had been discovered the year before that the flèche (the tower/spire) was in need of extensive work.

Over the next two years the Parochial Church Council (PCC) worked hard to find solutions. The roof required a complete rebuild and the flèche would be a part of that work as well. Last year there was concern that a storm could render the roof unsafe because of the flèche and so an intermediary repair was done last summer to ensure that it was at least safe for the coming winter storms. Meanwhile a small team made up of some congregation members at Merrymeet, some residents from the village and headed up by Bryan Bradbeer who is on the PCC, started working together to put together a proposal for the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a community scheme grant that would include putting the roof right. Other funding options were not open because the church doesn't quite meet the criteria for heritage alone or for community use alone.

The short story is that the funding possibility closed down and the PCC were faced with the bill for the roof which was unattainable. Therefore the only reasonable and responsible option was to "move toward closure". In Church of England parlance this opens up a process which includes consultation with the local community. Unfortunately lockdown has meant the diocese lawyers have been unable to access documents to inform what sort of process this should be and we are still waiting. It's been incredibly frustrating and has given rise to lots of unpleasant rumours and accusations. The fact remains that the PCC took the decision because they don't have the means to fix the roof, and needed to act before the roof deteriorated much further and became unsafe. It may be that, as a result of this decision, it evokes enough support to both fix the roof (we don't know firm figures for this, but a review done in 2016 estimated around £150,000 including the flèche and professional fees. This will need to be checked with proper quotes.) and to ensure the congregation can be financially self sufficient for the foreseeable future. This would be wonderful! We have already seen a generous pledge to help patch the roof to buy us some more time. I hope that in that time the PCC, congregation, and wider community, can come to a decision that results from exploring all options together.

On September 14th we will have a public meeting at St. Martin's Church, Liskeard (so we can fit as many in as possible!) to explain more fully how we have arrived at this difficult decision and to look at the possible ways forwards. My hope is that we also may know the status of the building and so have a clearer idea of what is required of the PCC and how to do that well. But since it sounds like accessing the documents is reminiscent of accessing the restricted library section at Hogwarts, it may not be the case.

All of this has underlined the necessity for communities to recognise how vulnerable their church buildings are. Most are now running out of reserves and all the churches in our cluster run the risk of running into similar difficulties in the future, including St Lalluwys, Menheniot. In all of this I want to urge folk to consider that our buildings should serve the people, not the other way round.

It remains to be seen what the outcome of the situation at Merrymeet will be, but prayers are ongoing, and I hope that folk will work together to find a solution, and seek to discern the mission of the congregation and the church moving forwards.

From Menheniot Parochial Church Council  
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