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Making Friends

Setting up a Friends group to support your church



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new church roof which will cost about £39,000. Some of the funds come from other sources, some from the PCC and the rest from RodSoc itself.

“Since we started, we estimate that we’ve spent about £80,000 on various projects,” explains John. “About two thirds of that comes from RodSoc while the rest is provided from PCC funds.”

There are, of course, difficulties and challenges. “We’ve applied for various grants and been turned down which is disappointing. We also struggle to recruit younger members, but we’re working on it! There have been some younger families moving into the village, so we try to attract them with fun family events in the summer and good communication about what we’re doing.”

RodSoc has certainly made a huge difference to its church and community. Nine years ago, there was one service a month with attendance just into double figures. Nowadays, there is a fortnightly service with between 35 – 40 attending. The church has gone from a dark, out of date edifice to a well maintained and accessible building which everyone can appreciate and enjoy. RodSoc and the community of Rodmersham are looking to the future as they continue to work together to keep St Nicholas at the heart of the village for the next century.



St Nicholas, Rodmersham

A large and active Friends group and a supportive community have helped the church council transform the life of this attractive Grade 1 listed church

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Helping your Church

Located on the North Kent coast, Rodmersham is a pretty rural parish in three parts. Most of its amenities are located in Rodmersham Green, the church of St Nicholas is in Rodmersham itself and there is a farm with cottages in Upper Rodmersham. With around 400 inhabitants, it's a small community, but a very lively and active one.

St Nicholas Rodmersham is a beautiful Grade 1 listed building which last benefited from a complete refurbishment in the latter part of the 19th century, thanks to its wealthy and philanthropic vicar. Nine years ago in 2007, the outgoing vicar issued a challenge to his congregation. The church was again in poor repair and with little lighting or heating, no car park and not even the most basic of amenities, it was clear that something would have to be done if the building was not to fall into complete disrepair.

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The story is taken up by John Fisher, the first Chair of the Friends of St Nicholas. "From the start, we were fortunate to have lots of local support. Once we got up into the bell tower to have a look at the state of the bells, we discovered that the Victorian bell ringing group had called themselves the Rodmersham Society, so we renamed ourselves in honour of them, although we're always known as RodSoc."

The new Friends group had a huge challenge ahead of them to which they rose with great energy and vision. The community is incredibly supportive, as John

A lasting Gift



explains. "A local landowner gifted us an acre of land which he levelled and filled with hard core to create a car park. Then, when we were laying new water pipes and electrical cables to the church, the same neighbour generously sent down his digger and a man to operate it, plus as much water piping as we needed. My old next door neighbour ran an electrical contracting business and when he heard we were rewiring the church, he offered his services at cost. He also found us a set of floodlights which light up the the inside of the nave and are focused on the wonderful beamed roof."

RodSoc currently has 200 members. It's a registered charity run by the officers and committee members. About a quarter of the committee are regular attendees at St Nicholas and every member of the PCC also belongs to the group.

RodSoc organise an impressive programme of social events throughout the year. John and his wife Barbara are no longer on the committee but still run the hugely popular Harvest Supper, which has a waiting list for tickets. The current committee run cream teas and open days take place outside in the summer, there are hog roasts, an arts festival weekend, a classic car show, village open gardens and the bell ringers run an Open Day with barbecue.

John is clear that a successful Friends Group needs to communicate well. "We put regular updates in the Parish magazine which covers our parish and the neighbouring one. We have an email network which keeps everyone updated and anyone who doesn't have email access gets a printed copy put through their door. We also produce a newsletter and meet monthly. People like to know where the money is going."

Having paid for bell tower repairs, a new flag pole and flags, disabled access, a new loo and kitchen, rewiring and a new car park, RodSoc's current major project is a