

# Express Community

## Beeston Parish Church

by the Editor

*BEESTON Parish Church sits steadfast to one side of the town centre, apparently unchangeable as Beeston residents wait for change to happen all around it – Tesco, the tram, elaborate plans for The Square whether the tram comes by or not, the council's 'Master Plan' for rebuilding the Beeston's town centre...*

*But as everything and everybody else waits outside, change has happened within the church walls.*

*The massive re-ordering project that started in 2007 was completed earlier this year and, over the weekend of June 21 and 22, all were welcomed into the parish church of St John the Baptist to see the internal transformation for themselves.*

The congregation of St John the Baptist moved out of the parish church in September 2007 to make way for the builders. They took up temporary residence in the church hall at the Catholic Church of the Assumption on Foster Avenue, courtesy of Fr Kevin Clark.

On Sunday morning, though, the bells at St John's continued to ring out and call the Anglican faithful to worship in their temporary home – access to the bell tower at St John's had not been denied.

During the next nine months, the church was closed to members of the public as construction company Sol and masonry specialists Bonsers Restoration ripped the inside of the building out, looked for trouble spots (finding plenty) and re-ordered everything.

Before Sol and Bonsers moved in, members of Beeston's Parish Church Council (PCC) had held lengthy discussions with church members on how best to equip the church building for use by

the whole community in the 21st century.

Top of the topics for lengthy discussion came the Victorian pews, dating back to 1844 when the church was last rebuilt – should they go or should they stay? Traditionalists fought vigorously for retention but, in a decision that was never going to please all of the people, out they went.

A quote from 'The Nottingham Review', August 30, 1844, reminds us of how the narrow, dark wooden pews were the epitome of modern thinking at the time: "The newly erected church will be consecrated by the Bishop of Lincoln... It is provided with open seats, uniform throughout, and there is not a pew door in the church... and the seats being vested, in the ordinary and churchwardens, every parishioner will be seated at their discretion, due accommodation being allowed for families and friends."

Visitors to the same church on the opening weekend would have noticed a dramatic difference between the 1844 description and the modern seating now in

place – light oak-coloured chairs upholstered in green fabric.

This radical thinking in green for what was, it has to be said, an old-fashioned church was merely the beginning. The new seating leads the eye towards the outer walls of the church. Cleaned stonework and repainted walls create an impression of far more space. Visitors to the church are awestruck by what they now describe as "cathedral-like" proportions.

The wooden timbers of the roof have been stripped of old dark varnish and oiled to enrich their natural golden colour, the effect further enhanced by the installation of 21st century lighting – uplighters.

In a nutshell, this apparently unchanging church at the heart of Beeston has been not so much changed as transformed. The structure remains the same but it has become a 'Building for the Whole Community'.

This was the theme for the festival weekend of June 21 and 22. Saturday's garden party welcomed hundreds of visitors to

the church, in spite of the non-stop rain. All outside activities were quickly accommodated inside (except for the barbecue – which managed to do a roaring trade), where the Nottingham Wind Ensemble, conducted by Claire Franklin, entertained visitors with a medley of popular music from across the years. Refreshments were served inside the church, where the games, children's activities and stalls destined for a garden party had been re-housed.

*Continued on Page 9...*