



■ Repaired - The weathervane on The Repair Shop last year. Pic: RICOCHET/BBC

Final fundraiser for historic weathervane

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AN HISTORIC church has called on the community for support to help place a centuries-old weathervane back in its rightful place atop the bell tower.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin, in South Benfleet, saw its vane damaged after it fell off the church roof in a storm in 2019.

At first it was believed the iconic cockerel weathervane, which had been a landmark used by residents since 1785, had been lost in the storm.

Thankfully, it was eventually found inside the tower "in a very frail and rusted state" and almost "irreparable", according to church member Diana Hawkins.

Much of the mangled cockerel's metal work had eroded, while other parts were crumbling away and the post that supported it was not up to the job.

Retired priest Father Leslie Drake enlisted the help of Dominic China on the BBC show *The Repair Shop* who took on the task of restoring the weathervane - the oldest item he had ever worked on.

The weathervane was successfully restored, in an episode which aired in February of last



■ Home - St Mary's Church

year, but now the church needs to fundraise £1,600 for repair works to place it back where it belongs.

Father Leslie said: "The weathervane has been a local landmark for more than 200 years.

"The oldest wall in our church dates back to 1077, so it's incredibly historic.

"A local craftsman made the

weathervane and it's been an important symbol of the church for a long time."

Ms Hawkins added: "Now all that's needed is to put it back on top of the spire.

"As some may know, nothing is easy with a Grade I listed building and with current safety regulations.

"However, with all plans made, necessary precautions

taken, and money raised, it was carefully hoisted to the top of the spire.

"Everything went well until it was found that all that was in the spire to rest the vane on was a decaying tree trunk, probably dating back to 1785. Totally unsafe to hold the vane.

"So very carefully it had to be hoisted down again and new plans were made."

The church searched far and wide to obtain an affordable quote for the repair works.

They settled on a £8,714 bill of which they had already raised £5,000 and are now turning to the public in hopes of obtaining the rest. obtain the rest.

"We hope we can get the cockerel at last back on top of the spire," Ms Hawkins said.

"It would be wonderful to have it there by Christmas."

She added: "We are nearly there, but we need a little help to raise the final £1,600 required for this project.

"Please help us by contributing to this project, and then take pride when you see it back in place, another chapter in St Mary's long history."

"As a small gesture of our thanks, you will receive a certificate and an invitation to a thanksgiving tea."

To donate, visit <https://go-fund.me/16fdb7c>