

By JANET McMEEKIN

THE former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Runcie, will attend a special service to thank villagers who raised more than £130,000 for a church spire appeal.

The Save Wheatley Spire campaign started last September after St Mary's Church spire was found to be crumbling.

Restoration committee members are confident that they will reach their £150,000 target before the thanksgiving service on February 5 when Lord Runcie will be preaching.

Campaign administrator Mr Peter Targett said: "It has been a fantastic community fundraising event. We have had donations from as far away as Kansas City."

Mr Targett said much of the money

Former archbishop honours spire appeal

was pledged through covenants and the Inland Revenue's Gift Aid Scheme.

He said: "There have also been a lot of entrepreneurial events, such as raffles, progressive dinners and donations from organisations in the village.

"I have been very impressed with the way people have responded to the challenge.

"We have been quick to acknowledge and thank anyone who has given us a donation by replying within 36 hours."

Campaign chairman Mr David John said: "The campaign has progressed extremely well and we are delighted by the generosity of the local community."

Runcie is church's special preacher

A SUCCESSFUL campaign to restore one of Oxfordshire's most noted churches was crowned by a visit from a former Archbishop of Canterbury.

Lord Runcie was the guest preacher at St Mary the Virgin in[^] Wheatley on Sunday

during thanksgiving service.

He used to take services while the principal of the Ripon theological college at nearby Cuddesdon.

The church launched a £150,000 renovation appeal last autumn to replace the soft stonework of its tower and spire.

Grants were provided by English Heritage, South Oxfordshire District Council and the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust.

St Mary's was built in 1857 by George Street, who also designed St Philip and St James in Oxford.

The vicar, Rev Michael Farthing said:

"We were looking for patrons and Lord Runcie, who used to take services here, was happy to become involved.

"It has been an extremely good appeal under the chairmanship of David John, who was formerly the head of Wheatley Park school."