

Warden's Report AGM 2021

I recall, my opening words of last year's report were 'I wonder how many times in the history of St Mary's Church, the AGM has been postponed, and for as long as 6 months?' Well here we are, postponed again from the more usual time at the end of April, just 3 months this time.

At the last AGM at the beginning of October, few of us realised how our lives would continue to be affected by the Corona Virus, and just how different some things would be.

In November Remembrance Sunday was marked in the usual way with the laying of wreaths at the memorial, but with a difference, filmed by Phillipa and put on YouTube, and enjoyed by many who were unable to attend. We are most grateful to Ted Maley who over the last 10 years has organized this special commemoration. We wish Mary and Ted much happiness in their new home in Sussex.

In December as we faced lockdown again we came up with the idea of Advent windows. Claire Pincott did an excellent job, getting 23 residents in the village to decorate one of their windows with a Christmas theme, a new one lit up each day up to Christmas Eve when the stable tableau was on show at the church. Many thanks to all those involved, and especially Gill and Steve Wilson and Roger Blofeld.

Unfortunately, because of government guidelines and social distancing, it was felt the Nativity should be cancelled. It was also decided to make a recording of the Carol Service, thank you Jerry and the choir for contributing to a lovely service, so we could hold a service of Holy Communion on Christmas Day. A good number attended, the church was beautifully decorated with candles and flowers. My thanks to all who helped to clean the church and arrange the flowers, beforehand and regularly since.

We have all become more creative across the Benefice with the different ways we can communicate, using Zoom and recordings for meetings and services, thanks Jerry, the 'E.vensongs' on line were great.

Our usual major fund raising events, Snowdrop walks and the Plant fayre were cancelled again. And great sadness was to follow when Celia Hall, a dear friend and supporter of this church died after a short illness. Celia and her husband John took over the organization of the Plant Fayre a few years ago, and when these were cancelled still sold plants and honey at their home gate.

Thankfully a few weeks ago the bell ringers resumed their practice, and have also rung for some services. Tower captain, David Middleton, has kept a watch on the tower and bells during lockdown, also removing a large nest of sticks constructed by the jackdaws posting twigs through an opening. Thank you, also to Mac Head for inspecting the weather vane.

I would also like to thank Val Beardmore for completing the Health and Safety inspection forms for some years, and welcome Janet Blake to the task.

We are committed to forging closer links with High Ash School. Some of the children made Easter cards for the community which we gave out across the Benefice. We also displayed one classes 'Prayers for Pentecost' in the church which showed a good understanding of a difficult subject. We were able to have the Leavers' Service here at the end of the summer term.

The building works are nearing completion, and we are looking forward to a new chapter in the history of St Mary's Church. It would be fair to say that there have been times when we have despaired at the delays thrown at us during the last few months. The planners have been difficult at times, the archaeologists needed to spend extra time researching finds, and there has been a shortage of building materials. Then when you think nothing else can go wrong a robin's nest hatches in the lobby roof so we need to wait for the birds to fledge, and one of the builders catches Covid.

But the future is looking bright. We now have hot and cold running water in the church. We have toilet facilities and a lovely refreshment area.

Gill, Phillipa and I are making plans for a Harvest Thanksgiving Service on 10th October with Bishop Alan, followed by a reception for all those who have contributed in so many ways. I hope many of you will join us on that occasion.

We have a lot to be thankful for.

Julia Turner
29th July 2021