

# Annual Report Swilland St Mary's Church

## 2023-24

### Electoral Roll

There are 5 names on the electoral roll with approximately 170 inhabitants in the village

### Resignation of Katrina, our Rector.

We were sad to be informed by Katrina Dykes our rector for the last two years that she is resigning her post to enable her and her husband Phil to tend their very sick relatives in Somerset. Katrina left in January and took up an appointment as rector of a group of Churches in north Somerset. We are grateful to her for her work in our parish and within the benefice of 9 churches during those two years particularly her pastoral contribution and for pioneering the initiation of the Joint Benefice Council to administer the needs of the Benefice ensuring administering 9 parishes is easier for her successor.

In pursuit of a successor we have been lucky to avoid a protracted period of interregnum as is often the case when a priest leaves, because Mark Cresswell has agreed to take on the Benefice despite it being a full time job in my and many other people's estimation but with only 0.75 of the full time salary, and even more so when technically he is retired from his job at BP. It means that he will undoubtedly be glad to have his wife Sandra who is the benefice children's lead who I'm sure will help.

His induction will take place on 24<sup>th</sup> of April and we wish him well in the job and hope we in the parish can lighten his load a little.

### PCC.

We have five other members on the PCC in addition to the rector. They are Gill Reidy (sec), Ann Kent (treasurer), Margo Barker (new CW), Gina Wilden (member) and Brian Williams (CW). In the meeting in April 23 the rector Katrina thanked all members for their participation and the work they had done on the behalf of the parish, and as the "ancient" CW I would reiterate Katrina's comments; without all the efforts by all the others on the PCC it would have been quite hard work to look after the church. Thank you all.

### Service Attendance

We have a church rota of services with one priest led service per month and a lay led service every other month. The latter service alternates between our Church and Ashbocking and hence the alternate months. We are gradually changing this so it becomes a monthly feature

and have experimented a couple of times this reporting year; these additional services have gone well.

Last year we had 301 attendees at services. This year we have had 253 attendees, a significant but understandable decrease in number given the fact there were both a funeral and a wedding service last year swelling numbers by 87 people. Without those extraordinary events last year there would have been 214 attendees at services so with that in mind we can take comfort from the number this year of 253

The visitors book shows we had 45 visitors compared to 39 in the previous year. Several of the entries just named a family so it is likely that there were actually more. Normal daily opening continues with a rota of 4 families key holding and providing the opening service. Thanks to all those who participated.

## Elder.

Brian Williams the CW also an elder is running the morning prayer services on the first Sunday in alternate months. By having an elder we are increasing the number of services available to parishioners. Katrina our previous rector has provided a framework for these services with a Benefice lay led service format. Elders don't give sermons but facilitate a reflections slot in which a passage from the bible is discussed with all in the congregation. The interesting discussions that occur in such services continue and there has been excellent feedback from attendees, but the important result is of course the Church is being used more after the removal of our previous second priest led service that ceased several years ago. It also means our attendance figures are on the increase if small when you allow for the fact there have been no weddings or funerals in the last calendar year. We have had 8 lay led services during that time with a total of 70 participants, but that is 70 people who would not have attended if there were only one service a month.

## Joint Benefice Council

During the 2022 the Benefice obtained the agreement of all the nine parishes to start a Joint Benefice Council to oversee the administration of our Benefice thus everything can be done at that level, with the information trickling down to all in the Parishes. This has the advantage of reducing the multiple duplication of effort that the incumbent has hitherto had to endure and simplification of such things as parish policies, safeguarding etc. One representative from each parish attends a monthly meeting and our Church warden is our representative.

We are still on a learning curve in this venture. For instance the payments that each of the other parishes owe to Grundisburgh for contributions the latter funded on our behalf during 2022 and 2023, is proving difficult to administer such there may have to be a financial compromise agreed within the JBC between the 9 parishes. This process is ongoing.

Allocation of the Parish Share between the 9 component churches in the benefice is also changing. It was agreed to divide each individual parish share, that is the amount of money each has to contribute to the Diocese for priest salaries etc, will relate to the general income each parish receives, which is very different to the old method. It is considered reasonable to ask parishes with more income to contribute more generously. This procedure is due for review after one year, with each parish able to veto depending on appropriateness by each individual

PCC. For Swilland this has meant an increase in contributions by about £1000 this year as our income from collections, donations etc has been relatively healthy. The income and donations that are intended for the proposed kitchen fund are ring fenced and external to the calculation.

## Safeguarding.

Karin Upson has continued to be the Benefice safeguarding officer with Jackie Williams her deputy. Thanks to them for providing this oversight. There have been no incidents in the parish during the year. Karen has decided that age 80 is the point at which she wants to step down and she has very recently passed that milestone, so we express our added thanks for working so hard on an expanding remit and wish her well in her “technical” retirement but of course we still expect to see her at the occasional service in Swilland. Jackie Williams has tentatively agreed to take on the role of Benefice Safeguarding Officer for this year, but although she has leader qualification in safeguarding from her work there has been no approach from the Diocese on the matter as yet.

During the year safeguarding revalidation for our Elder became due and he is undergoing a leadership on line course this month. The Diocese sends out invitations to church members via the safeguarding officer from time to time to ask them to revalidate

## Treasurer Report

The Parish Accounts were presented and signed off with the Auditor prior to the APCM.

## Fabric Report

### Churchyard

#### Trees

On the day of our parish work party in November Robert Stennett and the CW inspected them again and Robert agreed to lop of a dead branch on one of the trees using a cherry picker this year in 2023-24 when the weather improved and the ground was harder, but to date the ground has been almost constantly waterlogged. The trees that were “probably dead” in 2022, according to a tree surgeon have leafed up fine since then and hence remain. Subsequently we obtained the advice of the diocesan tree expert by video conference in 2022 who pronounced them reasonable but to watch for dieback. Certainly this year the trees have leafed up well. Our community is relieved and hope they will survive for many years. Our magnificent copper beech tree continues to please us; such a wonderful tree dominating the site. There is no obvious concerns. A small branch shed in a storm caused minor damage to the east stained glass window.

#### New Oak tree

During the year we obtained the faculty for the new oak tree sapling, donated by William and Liz Barraclough, to be situated at the south side of the new graveyard and planted it. Katrina blessed the tree and it is thriving. As this end of the burial plot is very wet we expect that as the

tree grows over the next 100 years or so that tree irrigation requirements will improve the nature of the burial area.

## Churchyard maintenance

This last year our churchyard grass and mowing has been looked after by John Lord again who gave his services free, and we are very grateful to him for his continuing efforts

We held another working morning in November before the Remembrance Day service and various willing volunteers set to and sorted out the usual problems with suckers, ivy, leaves. Thanks to all who participated and for the coffee time convivial chat. There are some gravestones that have either broken, tipped or been invaded by shrubs. The most notable one is at the north side of the second graveyard where a holly bush continues to make its presence known every year. All the headstones even when tipped appear firm.

Despite requests to clear up after dog fouling we are still experiencing some occasional fouling mainly in the old church yard so it may be free roaming dogs that get into the area without owners

## Registers

During the year the registers were inspected and the logbook kept up to date. The log records various events of significance and is reproduced below for perusal

## Church Warden's Log.

Entries for the calendar year are extended to contain the faculty work that has occurred since the last annual church meeting and we will exclude Jan-Mar for next year

28/1/23	Oak Sapling planting permission	Made enquiries re need for Faculty B permission
31/3/23	Oak sapling	Reply that online application needs tweaking.
16/4/23	Annual meeting PCC	New CW appointed Margo Barker at the meeting. Welcome Margo and thank you for standing.
6/5/23	Coronation Charles 3	Magnificent ceremony. Next day Swilland has street party in Church Lane
9/5/23	Oak sapling	Faculty B granted for oak sapling. Emailed Liz Barraclough and Sec Gill Reidy for inclusion in records
1/6/23	Spirelet damage Stained glass window damage as result of earlier storm (April)	Robert Stennett noticed damage to the spire through telescope. Subsequent walkabout showed extent of damage and also damage to east stained glass window. Both will need faculty B

July-Aug 23	Ditto	Sought estimates for both and applied for faculty B x2
21/7/23	Extension Sch of works	Plans finally received from Architect in draft and awaiting our comments. Entered into faculty application site but more data required. Ongoing
18/9/23	Stained glass window damage	Faculty B1 -1 issued for repair of stained glass in East window.
11/10/23	Faculty public notice	Notice for faculty for extension displayed in and outside of Church
11/10/23	Faculty problems spirelet	Contractor was going to use cherry picker. Diocese concerned wanting schedule of works. Contractor now thinks needs scaffolding. Advised insurers
15/10/23	Parish Share	New method of assessment of parish share agreed by JBC and we try it for one year and then review. It will mean paying more for Swilland.
11/11/23	Maintenance	Work party cleared churchyards and tidied WW memorial for service. Inspection no further damage seen to church. Yellow fungus growing from site of felled rowan tree near south porch.
13/11/23	Tree Planting	Katrina blessed oak tree planted in second church yard in presence of Liz Barraclough, Ann Kent and Brian Williams to commemorate 21 years that William and Liz lived in Swilland
15/11/23	Extension faculty	Public notice completion recorded in online faculty site on line and application for payment requested.
1/12/23	Faculty for kitchen/toilet received	secretary to include in records
12/12/23	Stained glass E.window	Lost Quarry replaced by David Sear, Lincoln £240plus vat
13/12/23	Spirelet damage	With agreement of insurers asked Nick Spall to get scaffolding done to assess repair prior to faculty agreement
22/1/24	Scaffolders	Started putting up the rig
23/1/24	Nick Spall contractor	Scaffolders plan finish putting it up next week and then Nick will make out application for faculty inclusion which only awaits his schedule of works
8/2/24	Schedule received from Nick Spall re spirelet and some minor roof repairs	Sent email to Julie Alcock in diocesan office for quick confirmation of faculty B

16/2/24	Faculty B for spirelet	Permission received with provisos. Sent copy of provisos to Nick Spall, steeple jack who stated he would comply with the conditions (17/2/24)
22/2/24	Accounts 2023	Audited accounts received from Ann Kent. Thank you
11/3/24	Spirelet repair	Work completed by NS and scaffolding removed. Very tidy workers. Invoices received and sent to Ann Kent for payment
25/3/24	Insurer Ecclesiastical	Invoices re church repair sent to contact Chloe Wattam at Ecclesiastical

## Organ

There have been several instances during the year when the organ was found to be sticking on the keyboard. The organ is serviced every year and it is only 6 years since it was completely refurbished at a cost of £18k. The firm Boggis who did the refurbishment suggested that it needed more playing time, so can I suggest that the key openers of the Church turn it on and run up and down the keyboard when they are on duty say once a week to help this situation.

We are exceedingly grateful to Helen Jay for playing for us during the year at a considerable number of our services.

## Kitchen Toilet Project.

We have had reasonable movement on the project this year. We finally drummed up enough money to pay for the Schedule of Works from the architect and lodged this with the Faculty Office in time to receive the required piece of paper on a significant day in the CW's life (80<sup>th</sup> birthday).

From there it was back to snails pace. Since 2020 when we started requesting financial assistance we have approached or written about 15 charitable trusts or individuals. The CW has written 11 long often convoluted applications involving a significant amount of time, and garnered or received pledges in total £71360, but of course there has been significant outlay so our fighting fund now stands at about £66000 with one £40000 pledge (anonymous) and earmarking a future £20000 of parish reserves, which we do have in the coffers mostly in the fabric fund with reasonable reserve in excess of this for any future emergency repairs.

There are 6 current applications awaiting consideration and at present we are applying to the lottery fund (protracted) with Viridor next on the conveyor belt. Alarmingly despite good advice from the Diocesan fund raising team some charities after initial approach are telling organisations such as ours that they are not accepting grant applications from churches. The pub continues to support us with financial donations from the Quiz nights and the big events they hold, but it seems like a long haul particularly with the cessation of normality we experienced during Covid.

We have recently put out an appeal for funds from the village and results are awaited and there are various fund raising ventures in train during the future year.

Time runs on. We still need a bat survey and an archeological survey. Finding a bat surveyor has been quoted at about £800 which is a joke, for someone to report there might be bats in the coal house and any other concerns we need to circum-navigate. The architect will supervise the archeological survey but these problems touched on in this part of the report makes one realise that the jobs of church supporters and volunteers is unnecessarily complicated in this morass of regulations and red tape

Thank you for everyone who is helping with these endeavours.

## Church Damage

In June we discovered that the April 23 storm had ripped the copper of the finial on the top of the spirelet of the tower apart and thus the contents of the tower were being wetted during bad weather. As mentioned earlier, a small branch presumably in the same storm fell from the beech tree dominating the site, and smashed just one small quarry glass from the east stained glass window, so both these mishaps needed repair.

Both needed Faculties from the Diocese for progress. The glass quarry was relatively easy but to obtain permission for the spirelet was much more protracted than anticipated. The architectural advisor would not sign off on the repair without a detailed schedule and the steeple jack stated until scaffolding was in place he would not price the job. Eventually permission was granted but it required delicate balancing and timing from the insurance company, the steeple jack, the scaffolders, the administrative staff at the faculty office and the CW, indicative that even Faculty B applications that should be easy to obtain can be totally unwieldy and crying out for more latitude.

So the spirelet and the window look good again at costs with vat of £12000 approximately and £300 respectively with a job for the treasurer reclaiming in excess of £2000 vat

## Health & Safety

Safety Officer; Church Warden.

Items since last year

1. The accident book: in the vestry cupboard records no accidents in 2023-4
2. The first aid kit is held, due to the dampness of the Church, at 2 Church Lane, 50m away. There is also an automatic cardiac defibrillator there. The battery is periodically checked by the Church Warden. New pads were fitted in March 23. There is also a public defibrillator at the school gate of Witnesham School.
3. The Exit and No Exit labels to existing doors were inspected. These notices are in accordance with Health and Safety advice; people are aware of the fact that there is only one exit.
4. We reported last year that it is advisable that the door at the base of the tower is repaired to fit again and locked to prevent unauthorised access but report this function is achieved by locking the vestry door at present so the advice of PCC was requested. The advice of the PCC is that the vestry door should be kept locked whilst the church is

empty during the day to deter unauthorised entry. There is also a notice warning the tower is unsafe to deter possible interlopers if perchance someone reaches the ill-fitting tower door. The whole of the wood panelling around this door on the vestry side is rotting. I mentioned this at the site meeting in February 2019 with the Diocesan Committee Chair and suggested we would be seeking to fund that repair after we managed to raise the money for the new kitchen, but this thought is now redundant since the vestry is not changing in the kitchen project .

5. The Fire Safety procedure document is displayed in the vestry for church officials to study and implement. We have to hold fire drills periodically, and there have been at least 2 during the reporting period.
6. At present toilet facilities are available in both 1 and 2 Church Lane for needy worshippers
7. Trees have already been mentioned above. CW inspected the churchyard trees visually during the year after the leaves dropped. Our fabulous copper beech continues to thrive and had a crow's nest in it last year which is supposed to herald that the tree is good!. During the routine tours of the graveyard there do not appear to be any further breakages of head stones but the holly bush which we pruned severely several years ago arising from one grave was back with a vengeance and was given a another pruning at the autumn work party reunion.



13/4/24