

Annual Report Swilland St Mary's Church 2021-22

Covid-19 Emergency Church Actions

A national lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 medical emergency was proclaimed by the Government from March 23/2020 onwards and the Church was closed as a result with a shutdown of most activities for the rest of the year despite some easings of the situation from June to September but the lockdown was reactivated in the latter month and carried on into 2021. As a result there were very few services, restricted social activity by Government decree, and Christmas celebrations similarly sparse. Reporting in March 21 last year for the Annual Parish Council Meeting we were still in lockdown which was supposed to lift in April and then this morphed into July, with the effects of vaccination providing breathing space and relative protection as the severity of covid infections for vaccinated parishioners appeared for many to wane. Despite all the precautions and vaccination programmes people still died on occasion from the infection even when triple vaccinated.

Electoral roll

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

Service Attendance

In 2021 the Church continued in Lockdown until July when restrictions were lifted. During the year services both inside and outside the building, there were 198 attendees, despite relatively few services. The visitor's book shows only 9 people came to the church during the year (July to Dec) and who signed the visitor's book which is hardly surprising since the Church has been locked by Diocesan Decree since March 2020 until July 21, when not being used, whereas in normal times the church is open during the hours of daylight for private prayer, encouraging visitors.

We re-initiated the church opening in the summer with cessation of lockdown (19/7/21) so now people can enter again for private prayer and contemplation.

Services

As the church remained mainly closed from March 2020 until July 21, there were only a few isolated services mostly on High Days with number restrictions. It opened up again on 24/7/21 when a marriage was celebrated. Participants were restricted for that to approximately 30. Numbers of attendees at other services after reopening appeared still partially reduced in comparison to pre-covid times as some parishioners were still shielding.

However the Benefice did not go short on overall services since the Rev Mark Cresswell acting on our behalf with a holding brief of interim incumbent prior to the Induction of the Rev Katrina Dykes in May 21 devised virtual services on line in 2020 that continued through 2021, uploading to Facebook and U-Tube for everyone to attend on Sunday mornings at 0930. Judging by the numbers liking and

supporting this venture it was a great success and the Parish is grateful to him and his team of Sandra, his wife and other members of the ministry team for their support reading lessons and giving sermons. Later with easing of Covid restrictions actual services were held here later in the year according to the once a month pattern, but communion was restricted to the body of Jesus in the light of risks of using the cup.

In one respect we did outwit Covid by honouring the fallen of Swilland of the 2 World Wars and singing our hearts out. On remembrance Sunday we held an outdoor remembrance service at the war memorial in the churchyard complying with Government Guidelines. A considerable number of parishioners attended on a clear sunny morning as the previous year and offered our respects for those who gave their lives for us. I think we all felt it was a meaningful strike against Covid in a time of adversity. Then in December 21 because of a resurgence of Covid in the form of the Omicron virus strain we held both the Carol Service and Christmas Day Eucharist outside in the cold singing as loudly as possible with the help of Organist Helen Jay who aided us at maximum volume inside the Church. Thanks to Helen for playing for us on quite a few occasions this year

New Incumbent

We are extremely grateful to Mark for his overseeing the Benefice during the period of interregnum and for his quiet authority and care he gave so aptly to all in these troubled times.

The previously unsuccessful continuing advertising campaign in the latter part of 2020 bore fruit with appointment of a new incumbent at the start of 2021 and we welcomed the Rev Katrina Dykes to the Benefice in May 21. We wish Katrina and her husband, Phil our best wishes in her first year of incumbency here. Judging by the support afforded her by her previous congregations in Hampshire at her Induction she will be sorely missed by them, which is our gain. She has already clearly adopted village life here and we are grateful for her efforts and constant smiling face both here in our parish and the benefice at large.

Treasurer Report

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

Fabric Report

This year again for the second one running, all considerations during the year have been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the Covid 19 pandemic

Kitchen Project.

The CW reported last year that progress concerning this project continues to be extremely slow. Despite having both the plans and a concept drawing of how the architect, Nick Jacobs (NJ) envisaged the extension to the north side of the building would look, and then having elected at PCC to continue with his advice in the light of our impecunity we bargained with NJ over the cost of more detailed plans to get the project through planning. He quoted £10k but accepted £5k with us agreeing he would receive his normal architect fee at the end of the project when we hopefully have funds from charities.

He provided said plans which were submitted and then because of Covid and other factors the planning just seemed to stop after an onsite visit from a planning officer for ESC and Lynette Fawkes from Historic England last summer. Eventually this was sorted out after harassment of the people concerned and planning was granted this month.

The next step is to obtain a faculty. The Diocesan Committee attended a second onsite meeting *en masse* and seemed very supportive on the day and subsequently by email. The new Diocesan Secretary, Edmund Harris has been very helpful to us advising on protocol and process. Katrina our rector and Brian the church warden have petitioned the DAC and completed the application process for the faculty. We now await the result of notification of various advisory bodies including the Victorian Society; they have 6 weeks to voice any objections to the faculty application. When we have both planning and faculty we will be able to resume the search for funds.

At present we have about £15K in the fabric fund and some other money that we might be able to use in the quest to amass £122k so for accounting purposes I think we have about £20k towards the project having already paid approximately £8k to the architect

Quinquennial Inspection

Every five years we have to have an architectural survey of the church to ensure the fabric is preserved. The relevant survey was performed by the Architect Nicholas Jacob who reported in his executive summary

“The general condition of the church is good and there are no urgent works required. Apart from routine maintenance, there are only a few repairs recommended in the coming 5 years, the most significant being masonry repairs to the tower plinth and west door & surround and an overhaul of the nave and chancel eaves gutters, fascias, soffits and downpipes. At the same time consideration could be given to improvements in the form of additional RWPs at the west end on both sides and the introduction of copper strips in the north slope roof tiles to control moss growth; work on the north elevation could perhaps coincide with the building of the WC extension now under consideration. There are a number of other suggested improvements recommended; although not of great urgency, these could be considered in conjunction with other repairs and as and when access is available.”

There were no “A” category repairs listed. The report has been circulated to all PCC members for review and it is to born in mind during the annual inspections of fabric over the next 4 years.

Churchyard maintenance

This last year our churchyard has been looked after by John Lord and we are very grateful to him

Still on this aspect we would again ask all who walk through the Churchyard to respect the fact that it is consecrated holy ground and ask dog walkers to prevent their animals from fouling but if this inadvertently occurs they clear up afterwards. We have placed notices to this effect on the footpath through the Church yard. However we still seem to suffer continuing fouling

The work parties who serve us well both in terms of function and socialising whilst working met to deep clean the church interior in the Autumn and to continue to maintain the exterior which looks reasonable. Thank you all our hard workers and can we have a date for a Spring morning please.

Health & Safety

Safety Officer; Church Warden.

Items since last year

1. The accident book; in the vestry cupboard records no accidents in 2021
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. The defibrillator had a new battery in 2015 and underwent a service in December 2019. There is also a public defibrillator at the school gate of Witnessham School now.
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 and suggested we would be seeking to fund that repair when we managed to raise the money for the new kitchen particularly if we adopted the idea of converting the vestry into a kitchen. So we await the new facility hopefully.
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. We held one fire drill during the last year and another is planned in the near future
6. At present toilet facilities are available in both 1 and 2 Church Lane for needy worshippers
7. BW inspected the churchyard trees visually during the year after the leaves dropped. Regarding the lost silver jubilee mountain Ash, nothing has been done to replace it but the CW who is also a Parish Councillor requested at the last PC meeting for trees in the Government Tree Planting Scheme 2022 and Council tree officer informed him there would be some available as needed. He did this because a tree surgeon, James Kelway recommended that the Ash trees on the north side of the new graveyard are failing and most probably rotting within. In recent weeks after this advice CW has asked another tree surgeon to opine and if agreed they are at risk then to quote for removal. We await his quote. Our fabulous copper beech continues to thrive and had a crow's nest in it this year which is supposed to herald that the tree is good! There are some branches down on the perimeter of the original church yard on the west and north side and these will be cleared at the Spring work party. 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 severe trouncing at the autumn work party reunion.
8. We have safeguarding policies on line; with a benefice appointed officer, Karin Upson overseeing. Jackie Williams has also been co-opted to be deputy safeguarding officer with responsibility for Swiland and Ashbocking. There are ongoing significant changes it appears every year concerning

safeguarding. The Bishop's Council has introduced changes to the policy. The new booklet has been downloaded to electronic records and the privacy statement is now displayed in the porch. All PCC members are required to train to level C1 and church wardens are now required to have trained to C2 level and in this regard, the original C0 qualification has been superseded by C1. I understand all PCC members have complied with this requirement. The Church Warden has completed C1 and C2 courses as required. It is now apparent however that all of us have to complete a Domestic Violence Course. One member of the PCC has reported they have completed it and it is hoped the rest of us will follow in the near future

9. Other policies are stored in the safe, with a version electronically held by BW. Last year Chris Stennett very kindly undertook a revision of existing policies and extensively reviewed our GDPR policy. We were most grateful to him in this respect. Chris requested all PCC members to fill out an GDPR audit form as required by the Information Commissioner but on account of his premature demise it is uncertain whether everyone did indeed fulfil this requirement. Please would PCC members notify the CW regarding compliance? This function of GDPR monitoring is expected to be subverted to the Benefice GDPR compliance person after formation of the Benefice Joint Council.
10. Electrical Safety. The CW has discovered that PAT testing of plugs is not compulsory in 2020. We only have 2, with a previous testing cost of over £100, and he therefore elected to simply inspect the plugs routinely during use. The testing procedure of the electrical system was last completed in 2019 which means it is due again in 2024. The plugs looked in reasonable condition this year
11. In relation to fire safety the extinguishers were checked in the summer of 2021 and we continue to participate in annual testing with the rest of the Benefice.
12. The Church Log Book is updated electronically (held by the CW) and from time to time a paper copy of the updated log is filed in the Church Safe. Last entry for this year to date is 11/3/22

Goods and Ornaments of the Church

1. The plate, chalice, and other ornaments were checked during the year.
2. There have been no breakages, additions or losses

Coffee Mornings

The monthly coffee morning hosted by various parishioners, were resumed during the year which enabled those who do not regularly come to church to get together with the church community. The interaction between parishioners normally facilitates social contact and interaction and hopefully as they become a constant feature more people will attend these pleasant occasions. Thanks to all those people who have hosted the events

Other Activities

The other usual activities that the Parish holds remain beached as a result of the Pandemic. In this respect the Men's and Ladies Groups have not met. There was no Christmas draw again and hence no supplementation to parish funds that usually occurs. Christian Aid as a planned doorstep visitation did not occur though we did distribute envelopes for completion and delivery back to the Church Warden and this only achieved a fraction of the normal contribution but of course did not figure online donations so it is likely that a proportion of people used that method to donate. The Christmas Carols evening with the finale at the Moon and Mushroom also was in abeyance because of the rise of omicron..

Fund Raising

The appeal for funding the proposed vestry/kitchen/toilet extension is "resting". During the year as is reported elsewhere in the Fabric Report, the PCC sought and obtained planning permission as this appears to be necessary to interest appropriate weighty Charity donors. Various applications that the fundraising committee were hopeful would bear fruit failed because of amongst other reasons the successful planning permission proved axiomatic. Now with that in the bag as it were and a faculty application ongoing we expect to surge forward this year. We think we have about £20k which we could earmark towards the project so it is increasing. We only need a few people/charities to make £20-30k donations and we will be there!

Churchyard maintenance

Our churchyard has been very well looked after by John Lord. Again we are most grateful

Still on this aspect we would ask all who walk through the Churchyard to respect the fact that it is consecrated holy ground and ask dog walkers to prevent their animals from fouling but if this inadvertently occurs they clear up afterwards. We have placed notices to this effect on the footpath through the Church yard. However we still seem to suffer continuing fouling

The work parties who serve us well both in terms of function and socialising whilst working met and beavered both inside and out. Thank you all our hard workers and can we have a date for a Spring morning for April please before Easter to get back into our church rhythm again.

Carols

We had little opportunity for carols this year as I alluded to above. Singing as a congregation we pounded out carols on both the day of the Carol Service and on Christmas day outside but in the light of the omicron upsurge in December cancelled the carols in the street event but we expect to enjoy it this coming December.

Church Warden

The Parish lost Andy Ling one of our two Church Wardens in 2019 and have not managed to replace him. This means that we have one Church Warden at present but would welcome any offers from other members of the electoral roll or another member of the congregation after probationary period on the electoral roll to take up the vacant position.

Church Elder.

The reduction in the number of services has inevitably meant some of the congregation have faded away despite the enthusiasm of our ministry team and our band of stalwart parishioners. To try and give the situation a bit of a boost the CW has undergone a period of training over the last 18 months or so and has been appointed a Church Elder meaning he can conduct services under specific Church of England guidelines and will commence this in tandem with Linda Pollard the Elder at Ashbocking, starting at Ashbocking in April and then Swilland in May.