

Parish of Saffron Walden Annual Review 2020-21

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This review has been compiled for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting to reflect the passion, enthusiasm and dedication within the three churches and in the various groups and committees and so provide a flavour of activities throughout the Parish. The past 12 months have been very unusual. The last Annual Review document was prepared in early 2020 in the expectation that our annual meetings would be held in April of that year. As it turned out, the risks, uncertainties and frequent changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible to safely plan and hold the meeting until we were given permission by the Diocese to do so on Zoom at quite short notice in October 2020.

The pandemic has had a huge impact across our community and some of our reports are therefore very different to normal. I'd like to thank everyone for humouring my requests for an update on what they've been doing especially those groups who had to reply and say they'd been unable to do very much! Other groups have very different reports as they've evolved in very unexpected ways.

Lisa Brook PCC Secretary

St James' Church, Sewards End

In reflecting on the 2020 year, I suppose we should say this is the Word according to Zoom – like some ancient Greek God or Goddess perhaps. We owe much to the Haslers for setting up the Zoom facilities without which we would indeed have been in the wilderness. Thanks also to Chris Bishop and everyone who gave such support in difficult times.

We worked with the whole village community, particularly during the first lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, to support

vulnerable villages, making contact and providing assistance with shopping and collecting prescriptions.



Our last live service before the first lockdown was in early March 2020 and we went into that lockdown on 23rd March. The congregation from St James joined in Zoom worship organised by Saffron Walden Team Ministry and later by those from St James. Paula Griffiths and Chris Bishop became overnight sensations rivalling the X-Factor stars on mainstream television. We were able to open again for private prayer and contemplation from 15th June and from 5th July for live services, albeit with strict restrictions in place. We mourned the passing of Phil Holmes and a number of the congregation gathered outside the church as the cortege passed by.

On 1st August we were able to celebrate the marriage of Katie Hasler and Charlie Horten-Middleton in front of 10 close family members and what seemed like hundreds of more rowdy friends on – yes, you've guessed it, Zoom. The service was taken by none other than our recently departed clergy Jenny Tomlinson, now the Archdeacon of Birmingham. It was a joyful and lovely afternoon.

September brought the return of regular services until their suspension again in mid-December, a situation we are still in but not for much longer I am pleased to say. So back to St. Zoom. Our congregation at such services matches those attending our normal live services but not always made up of the same people. It will be interesting to see if Zoom has a role going forward. During the open, live period between lockdowns we were able to get in our live Harvest Festival Service and Remembrance Sunday but sadly not Harvest Supper or any Christmas services. We also lost our carol singing and mince pie activities. The silver lining is that we shall appreciate them even more in the future.

The church fabric is in fine fettle and the garden is growing ! Hedging on the eastern boundary was planted in the autumn thanks to the plants being donated by our neighbour. We do need to resolve the work proposed for the windows for which we have a donation but it can wait until life returns to normal.



We are very fortunate to remain in a sound financial position and we are looking forward to the future under our new Rector Jeremy Trew. There will no doubt be challenges but I am sure we will rise to meet them.

Lynne and I would like to thank Judith and Gilly for their excellent work and all of the Committee and church members for the support we get as Pro-wardens. Christine is stepping down from the Committee and we would like to thank her for her help over the years. Especially we must thank Chris Bishop for his ministry and friendship which has held us together during these strange times. To say nothing of his musical talents which kept us all amused. A rock star is born.

We also pay tribute to Mary Mileson, a member of St James for many years, who died early in 2021.

Finally we thank all of you again for the support you have given us during the past year. Onwards and upwards.

Mike Dean and Lynne Ketteridge - Deputy Wardens

St John's Church, Little Walden

Like so many other things this year, the pandemic has had a huge impact on the services at St John's. However in between lockdowns we have managed to hold some services, meeting outside in the grounds of the church at first before being driven inside by less clement weather. The last service we had was on Christmas Day and we have been joining with the services held by St Mary's and the team villages whenever we haven't been able to meet. As well as this we have found creative ways to maintain a presence in the village including:

- Sharing the laying a wreath at the memorial and Last Post/ Reveille bugle calls on Facebook live for Remembrance in November.
- Holding a Zoom harvest festival meet up and writing to all of the village to let them know what we were doing and raise funds for our harvest charities.
- Village carols over three Thursdays running up to Christmas Eve from the Christmas tree lighting, from church and from the Beare's home (since we were unable to stream from the pub).
- A postcard to all villagers to let everyone know they remained in our prayers and signpost help that was available if needed.
- A yellow wreath on the cross outside the church and tubs of yellow flowers either side of the porch on the day of reflection on 23 March.

We look forward to our first service back in church on Easter Sunday and pray that this will be the last time that we will be away, but we would like to thank everyone who has kept the services going within the team – this has been such a valued resource in these unusual times.

Tracey Nicholls

Worship Committee

Membership: The Churchwardens, Oli King as Director of Music, Michael Felgate, Jenny Kirkaldy and Bron Ferland. (In normal times we would, of course have been joined by the Rector and Curate...)

This committee has not met since early 2020 when we reviewed the Christmas services and made plans for many services etc that strangely were then unable to take place! We look forward to meeting again at some point when I'm sure we will be giving thanks for the many and varied ways in which we have continued to worship throughout this very difficult year.

Bron Ferland, Worship Committee

Service Planning Group

In 2020, services in St Mary's fell into four distinct phases.

- From the beginning of the year until 15th March, services were held in church according to our normal pattern on Sundays and weekdays. The interregnum had started but our curate, Rachel, together with the support of retired clergy, kept the show on the road as had been planned well in advance.
- On 16th March, all churches were required to lock their doors by government edict arising from the rapid rise in Covid-19 cases. Rachel used the last few days before her maternity leave started to reconfigure the Grapevine to provide a pastoral letter and a mini-reflection on the Sunday readings. Details of daily Bible readings, a prayer and a cartoon were also added. This modified version continued throughout the year and has been very much valued as an ongoing link in the church community. Services rapidly went online; the benefit of being part of the Saffron Walden and Villages team became very evident as Paula Griffiths and other team ministers led Zoom communion services every Sunday and Wednesday morning from their homes. Paula and Alex Jeewan liaised closely with Oli King to provide recorded choral music for both the Zoom services and the YouTube services streamed from Great Chesterford.
- From early July we were able to restart a single service in St Mary's each Sunday with a restricted congregation to limit the risk of infection. Many people were still shielding at home and others could not attend the services due to limited capacity, so a large proportion of the congregation continued to attend the virtual services provided by clergy across the team.
- By September, St Mary's cameras and new sound desk were installed which meant that St Mary's services could be livestreamed on YouTube and Zoom. This opened up new opportunities, particularly with significant seasonal services coming in November and December. We faced the dual challenge of planning services without a Rector or curate and ensuring that they would provide effective worship both for those in church and those watching online. We were determined to make the most of the new

opportunities our cameras provided to bring services to everyone, despite the ongoing uncertainties posed by the pandemic.

Tentative plans were outlined to the PCC in September – but how to make them happen? The Service Planning Group was born, meeting fortnightly by Zoom for the rest of the year, comprising: Denis Tindley, Gill Caswell, Oli King, Steve Hasler, Matt Williamson, Paddy Carver and Judith Hasler. Each person brought their skills and creativity to work on services that could take place, with or without a congregation in church, which would reflect the rich traditional worship of St Mary's and make it accessible to as many people as possible. Alongside regular communion services with a small choir and congregation, and some family services, the team facilitated:

All Souls Service - pre-recorded without a congregation to enable the full choir to be back in church for the first time, spread throughout the nave. They were joined by representatives of Peasgoods who read out the names of those who had died and lit candles on behalf of their families, who had received special invitation cards to watch online.

Remembrance Service- livestreamed with a small choir and congregation in church, including representatives of the British Legion and the army. A special camera angle was arranged so that the laying of a poppy wreath at the Roll of Honour could be shown.



Christingle Service – pre-recorded on YouTube with members of the Junior choir both singing and representing the many children who would normally have been at this service. In previous years, many children have been involved in preparing Christingle oranges in the Parish Rooms; this year Christingle kits were delivered for all the children at St Mary's primary school to make their own and Christingle themed worksheets were supplied to all the primary schools in town. Children were encouraged to light their Christingles whilst watching the service online.

We give thanks that so many people, not just from Saffron Walden but around the country and even around the world were able to join worship from St Mary's in person and online. Thank you to the team who coordinated all the logistics and to the many contributors who made it all possible.

Judith Hasler

Our Online Service Journey

It was on 16th March 2020 that the Health Secretary announced that all social contact must cease due to Covid-19 and the following day the Church of England issued guidance that churches should be closed with immediate effect. Sunday 22nd March 2020 was Mothering Sunday but there was no service in St Mary's nor St James' nor St John's that day.

We very quickly became aware of something called Zoom used for on-line meetings and, working with Paula Griffiths, we tried it for the first time in a pilot on Sunday 29th March with Paula leading a Service of Communion from her home. This could all happen so quickly because Tracey Nicholls offered her Zoom account to be used for the trial and for the next weeks and we can still use it by arrangement even now. The pilot went well, a few weeks later we arranged for St Mary's to have our own Zoom account and Paula led the communion service for many weeks right through to July. We regularly had 130-140 people attending these services. Quite a few people who had an iPad, other tablet or a computer were helped to get onto Zoom and the web if they weren't sure how to do so and this helped some to link up with family and friends, near and far, too.

In the meantime, back in March, Alex Jeewan started to record a service of the word each week, which was made available on YouTube accessed via the church website, giving one service that

could be joined 'on demand' and one live on a Sunday morning at 9:30am. Both were viewed by many across the team ministry. Alex's recorded YouTube service was available until mid-August, with the last two being recorded by Chris Bishop, by which time a number of the churches across the team had re-opened.

The 9:30am Zoom Sunday service ran until 4th October. During this period, members of many churches in the team had participated in the Zoom services, reading or interceding. Clergy presiding and preaching included Caroline Curren, John Saxon, John Sibson and Chris Bishop. There was a lot of development of the Zoom service as we learnt more and more about the software. It quickly became clear in April that we needed someone to host the meeting and help people to join so that Paula could focus on leading the worship. An article in the Church Times on 18th April described the hosting role as a Zoom Verger and that role title is now in common usage. Playing music during the Zoom service quickly followed and then came the showing of the words to the hymns on screen as the music played. Our choir, led superbly by Oli, recorded (from their homes) the hymns and reflection music each week for both the Zoom services and the YouTube recordings. This was a huge undertaking which made so much of a difference: at home we could all sing along! From 12th July St Mary's re-opened with a limited congregation and the 9:30am Zoom continued too with Patrick Li, Martin Hugall and Lisa Brook volunteering to be trained as Zoom Vergers to spread the workload.

From early June, we were starting to consider what our service offering would be when churches re-opened knowing that, initially, this would be with limited, socially distanced congregations. Alex and I worked together at All Saints Gt Chesterford to work out how to get internet into the church and how to stream a service live from within the church. The model we developed has also been used at St Botolph's, Hadstock and but it was clear that the larger spaces at St Mary's required more than one camera and a different solution. At around the same time, we became aware of the camera system that had been developed by our sound and video engineer and this was demonstrated, using Zoom, to the PCC at the meeting in June. We moved quickly, helped by the Archdeacon and the Chair of the DAC, who ruled that we could install the cameras with their approval without the need for a faculty which would take three months to be approved. We also upgraded the sound system to a digital sound

desk which allows greater control of the microphones from an iPad. We had the cameras and new sound desk in place by the end of the third week of August giving us the capability to live stream to YouTube from within St Mary's and share this via



Zoom, at the same time, retaining the opportunity for people to talk to others after the service and for those without a computer to dial in.

The new camera system went live on Sunday 13th September, the Patronal Festival, and we have streamed a live service since that date, the 8am on the first Sunday of every month and the 10am on other Sundays except when it is a Family Service. We don't stream the latter for safeguarding reasons. The 9:30am Zoom services stopped on 4th October by which time all of the churches in the team had re-opened. Streaming from St Mary's has continued when there has been a limited congregation in church, in September, October and December and also when there has not (November 2020, January and February 2021). The musical contribution and support from our choir, both recordings played in the services or with cantors in church, has again been superb. At the time of writing, St Mary's has just re-opened to limited congregations.

As with our use of Zoom, we have developed what we stream to YouTube over time to include pre-recorded music, photographs, pre-recorded video and we have also added new views over time. We can now show baptisms at the font and have the ability to link in a mobile camera from just about anywhere in the church.

Streaming our services to YouTube allows them to be watched at a later time as well as live. The general pattern of viewing, for example for a 10am service, is that about 60 people watch at the time, half on YouTube and half on Zoom. By the end of that Sunday, the service has been watched by over 100 people and two weeks later by 150 to 180. 8am services are similar with less people watching live and more watching later on the Sunday and overall viewing numbers being similar to 10am services after 2 weeks. The camera system has allowed us to record special services for later broadcast, for example, Christingle and the Lighting of the Christmas Tree Service, and these have worked well and reached far more people than could have been in the church in December. Other special services have had a large number of views: All Souls Service - 544, Remembrance Sunday - 680, Advent Carol Service - 571, Christmas Carol Service - 611, Institution of Jeremy as the new Rector on 3rd March 2021 – 469. We have also streamed funerals and baptisms: one baptism included a godmother in Atlanta in the USA, and funerals and our regular services have been watched all over the country and in far flung places like Sweden, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia.

It was a privilege to be a part of the team, drawn from right across the team ministry, which developed and delivered all of this, a wonderful example of so many contributing their gifts and talents.

Steve Hasler

Baptism Team

In the early weeks of 2020 we had three baptisms at St Mary's, at which Rachel officiated, with more planned for the spring and summer months.

With Rachel about to go on maternity leave, Andy Colebrooke kindly took over responsibility for baptisms, but at about the same time all church services were suspended. Whilst enquiries continued to trickle in, it was not until the autumn that government and Church of England regulations made baptisms feasible again. Andy arranged two baptism preparation meetings via Zoom, and conducted two baptism services, one just before and the other just after the November lockdown. Even so the baptism parties were restricted in both cases to a maximum of six people, but thanks to modern technology the services were live streamed via YouTube to godparents, family and friends unable to attend because of the

number restrictions. In one case we understand people tuned in from as far away as Atlanta and Kenya!

We anticipate that we will have quite a number of baptisms at St Mary's in the coming months we have quite a backlog!

Big thank yous to Andy Colebrooke and Steve Hasler.

Lesley Lancaster

The Guild of the Holy Trinity

The Guild of Servers at St Mary's has existed for generations but the year since I wrote my last report, in January 2020, has been like no other. I have served as a member of the Guild for over 40 years and there has been no period in recent years when the presiding priest has not been assisted by a Sub-Deacon and servers. However, it is worth to re-iterate the purpose of the Guild of Servers and the way it has operated.

The Guild of Servers fulfils an important role in the liturgy of St Mary's. Members of the Guild serve at the services of Holy Communion every Sunday at 08.00am and at either 10.00am or 11.45 Communion (after the All-Age service) to support the presiding priest. We, the servers, are conscious that, in assisting the priest at the altar, we are also leading the congregation in worship. The Guild draws its members from all areas of the church family of St Mary's, and St James and St John's – the PCC, welcomers, sidemen and women, bell-ringers, the baptism group, and others.

A server, with increasing experience, carries out duties of increasing importance. Traditionally, one begins as a Taperer, progress to being a Crucifer and, when licensed by the Bishop, may serve as a Sub-Deacon and administer the chalice. Occasionally, at festivals, we have a Crucifer and two Taperers. In addition to leading the clergy procession and the choir, if in attendance, the Crucifer and Taperers accept the communion elements and the alms from the offertory procession. The range of tasks performed by servers within the ritual of Holy Communion is contained in a small pocket booklet 'Notes for serving at the Altar' which is given to each server.

Currently, the Guild includes a small team of Sub-Deacons who serve in turn at the 08.00am (1662) Holy Communion. A bigger group provide a team of a Team Leader, two Sub-Deacons and a Crucifer at the 10.00am Eucharist. At this service the Sub-Deacons administer two chalices at the main altar with a third accompanying

a second Priest, Deacon or Ordinand to offer the Chalice at the additional station in the south chapel. On occasion, if there is no second priest, we need to call upon a fourth Sub-Deacon to administer in the south chapel.

There is also a number of Lay Assistants who do not serve in communion services in the church but who are licensed by the Bishop to give Holy Communion within the community to the sick and housebound. They have agreed, if needed in an emergency, to administer the chalice in church. St John, Little Walden and St James, Swards End also have Lay Assistants licensed to administer the chalice.

Although the list of servers is quite long, many of us also have other responsibilities in St Mary's, or in other churches. To balance these various commitments, we ask members to serve only on Sundays when they are free of other church and/or family commitments. We look forward to serving again at the altar, assisting Rector Jeremy and the clergy team when a more normal and traditional pattern of services resumes.

If you are interested in assisting in worship by serving at the altar, or becoming a Lay Assistant, then please do contact me. We shall be happy to welcome new members.

Noel Starr

Welcome Teams

This year has been unusual. None of the teams have been on duty. As none of the big services were in the normal format again sidesmen were not required. A very small team have supported services in the times we have been able to have a congregation in church. May it not be too long before we are able to have our usual congregations and our teams.

Richard Peet has stepped down from being the coordinator after several years in this role. Thank you for all your hard work Richard.

If anyone wishes to take on the organising of teams for special services please get in touch.

Gill Caswell

Music

Bewildering, frightening, a time for opportunity, social connection, upheaval, creativity...are all words I would use to describe the year.

The initial impetus in March 2020, was one of trying to hastily establish an online service format. Alex Jeewan was highly impressive in his spontaneity and energy, and we soon managed to establish a short service format which we pre-recorded in Great Chesterford and uploaded to YouTube on a weekly basis. This involved a lot of research in exactly how to go about doing this and a wide variety of local musicians!

I am relieved to say that the junior and senior choirs thankfully remain intact, and overall, numbers are healthy given the circumstances. We were mercifully able to quickly establish and develop a process for online choir practices, and moved onto Zoom by the end of March. This involved daily 'test practices' at one point, teaching various members of the choir - gradually widening the net to include everyone. Recently, we marked the unfortunate anniversary of having been online for one year. In term of services, we have sung in various formats ranging from solo cantors to elaborate 'choir units' consisting of 4, 6 or 8 singers. This involved the use of that wonderful tool 'Excel'! Yet another thing formerly unfamiliar to me! All in all, a very steep learning curve for everyone involved.

Online practices on a weekly basis help to maintain core skills/repertoire and routine – all crucial to an active church music scene. Other essential factors also include social connectivity. To this end, Patrick Li organised a fantastic Zoom performance of *'Under Milk Wood'* by Dylan Thomas, and Diana and David Hoy have put together two quizzes. We also developed formats for online Choral Evensong, Remembrance Day Words and Music, mini-Daily Devotional Offerings during Holy Week and Plainsong Compline services – the latter of which has now taken place several times. My sincere thanks to the aforementioned people for their time and commitment.

'Stitched' recordings have now become common place and the choir individually record themselves on a regular basis. Much credit goes to Peter De Vile who has been instrumental in painstakingly editing together hundreds of individual tracks into various motets destined for inclusion in our weekly worship.

The adult choir managed to sing as a full choir in church three times over the year: All Souls Service in November and the Advent and Christmas Carol Services. These were all designed with near military precision with full seating plans, risk assessments and Covid-19 safe distribution of music! Jeremy Allen accompanied the choir

which was literally scattered over the entirety of the main body of the church. I have never seen this done before with any level of success and is true testament to his expert level of musicianship.

The junior choir has continued to meet and resumed practices in early May 2020 having had a short break. Bron Ferland spearheaded a comprehensive ribbon training programme which is the most impressive which I have seen in recent years. Bravo Bron! My thanks also go to the other volunteers and helpers who assisted with this substantial project. The juniors have had the opportunity of sending in recordings for whole choir motets and have additionally recorded one or two of their own tracks. They were fortunate to go back to practicing in-person during the autumn term and sang at a couple of family services, Christingle and Christmas Eve services.

Alas, it has been necessary to suspend the brass group and Joyful Noise for the period concerned. My intention is to restore both groups when times allow. They are both integral to our music making and are hugely missed! It was also necessary to cancel our lunchtime concert and organ recital series, which will have an impact on the SMMA finances in future years. My thanks go to the SMMA for all of their help and support over the course of this year. They have continued to meet and have been a useful base for discussion and advice.

Looking forward, we are enormously excited to welcome Jeremy Trew and his family to St Mary's and look forward to working with him over the coming months and years. Precise planning for the long-term is difficult for obvious reasons, though I do hope to establish a folk band for the family service and perhaps a church orchestra at certain times of year.

Our organ scholar Elliot left us in July having completed a very successful two years in post. He is a highly musical, hard-working and enthusiastic young man and went from beginner level to being awarded a place to study at the Royal College of Music junior department. This is a huge achievement! We wish him the very best for the future. We hope to appoint our next scholar in time for a September start.

Very sadly, we lost Hilary Parry-Jones recently. Hilary was a much loved and loyal member of the choir and librarian extraordinaire. Her loss is much felt by this community. We also lost two ex-members of the choir: Susan Smith and Mary Knight. May they all rest in peace.

I would like to thank Lizzie Bennett who has run online soprano sectionals throughout the year on Zoom - this is no small feat; to Steve Hasler for his incredible energy with driving forward the online and sound systems; to Martin Hugall for his help with the website; to Judith Hasler for steering the services with such combined sensitivity and efficiency. My heartfelt thanks also go to Bron Ferland who has helped, advised, and administrated continuously over the year. To Jeremy Allen who has supported, composed and led much of the choir practices over the year. Lastly an enormous thankyou to Denis and Gill, our simply awesome church wardens who have been there every step of the way – we could not have done it without them!

Oliver King

Saffron Walden Society of Change Ringers

Bell ringing activities followed the normal pattern of ringing for services and practice nights from the start of the year until mid-March when Covid-19 restrictions caused ringing to stop completely. We had again entered a band in the George Pipe Trophy, the 12 bell competition between towers in Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, which fortunately took place prior to the first lockdown at Ipswich in February.

We re-commenced ringing at the end of July when we came out of the first lockdown but were restricted to only ringing for live services on Sundays with only six people being allowed in the tower and ringing bells where the ropes fell two metres apart. Having 12 bells and a large rope circle we were able to ringing every other bell (2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12). This presented challenges in terms of bell control and sound, but was better than no ringing at all, a situation faced by most towers in the country. We stopped ringing again in mid-October when we went into the second lockdown; since then the bells have remained silent other than on Christmas Day.

Despite the restrictions and lockdowns the Society members have stayed in touch. In place of our Tuesday practice night we have held social evenings on Zoom. We have also met on Zoom to use '*Ringin' Room*', a virtual bell ringing tool which has proven to be more difficult to 'ring' than actual tower bells. Also, between the lockdowns, we held several long walks which were very well supported and, on Great Ringing Day (27 June), held a picnic in the castle grounds.



Looking ahead to 2021, we will recommence normal ringing activities once Covid-19 restrictions allow and, as well as refreshing the skills of our existing ringers, hope to teach new ringers having already had people showing interest during the lockdown periods.

We would particularly encourage any members of the church who would like to see the bell ringing or 'have a go' to come up the tower and see what goes on. Watch this space for dates of upcoming open days/evenings, as soon as we are able.

Stephen Wood, Ringing Master

Church Flowers

Normally flowers are placed in church each week with the exception of Advent and Lent.

Last year was somewhat different when for a large majority of time the church was not open and it was not practical to have flowers. However flowers for Remembrance and Christmas were placed in church, without any congregations but visible on Zoom. Earlier this year I did a pedestal for Jeremy Collingwood's funeral service.

Sadly in June last year Christine Wood died. She had been a long serving and valued member of the team. Hopefully we will be able to have Easter flowers.

New members are always welcome - still no men joining us.

Pam Russell

Sewing Group

The Sewing Group have all been working away at home during lockdown so there will be quite a number of kneelers to be dedicated

when we are free to do so. I think the sewing has been quite a life saver for some of us, a silver lining even....maybe.

Tessa Hawkes

Sunday Morning Car Service

The Sunday Morning Lifts to Church has been running for many years and in several formats. This service has been put in place for members of the congregation who find it difficult to get to the 10am service and is taken advantage of by several people either on a regular or random basis.

We ran the service for the first 10 weeks or so of 2020 until church services were suspended from 18th March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Lifts to Church service did not run during the rest of 2020, either because the church was not open for services or because social distancing rules and guidelines did not allow it.

At the time of writing, when the Sunday Morning Car Service can resume, who will be wanting a lift and which of our previous drivers will be available are all unclear. However, attention will be turned to this when it is clearer, based on government and Church of England guidance, that the service will be able to restart.

Steve Hasler

Prayer Team

I write this in the afterglow of the quiet morning on Zoom which Hilary Davey led for us on Saturday 13th March. It was our second Zoom quiet morning, the first being on the Saturday before Advent - led by the Prayer Team. Both very different but the feedback was positive in differing ways for both! These two events have been the visible outworking of our meeting together on Zoom to pray and adjust to the consequences arising from Pandemic. The first quiet morning felt as if we were stepping out in faith so we were hugely encouraged by people coming and by the feedback. THANK YOU to everyone.

We were delighted to welcome Alan Curren to the team at the start of 2020. We did manage to fit in two prayer evenings, praying for the new Rector, before lockdown happened and when the church was closed. While everything stalled for a few weeks as we did not know or have the know how to operate Zoom. It wasn't long before Zoom was being introduced to us all and we managed to get

services on Zoom. This included Evening Prayer, we found that for whatever reason quite a lot more people joined us and a year on I think it is true to say that there is a sense of fellowship growing, as we are able to share in each other's up and downs of the pandemic journey; as well as bringing and the praying for the needs of the nations, local needs of the church, Saffron Walden and the Diocese. Someone who regularly comes described it as the anchor of the week!

Alan Curren joined the Prayer Team in early 2020. He brings energy, years of varied experience and history of St Mary's, along with many other gifts to the team not least his eye for and to detail. Thanks to this quite a lot of prayer activities have been updated on the website as well updating the Prayer Diary. Please note that during lockdown no paper copies of the Prayer Diary are available at present -except to those who do not have any internet - the up dated copy can only be found on the website. One of the key parts of the Prayer Team is to actually pray! So we have extended times pray before each meeting and intend to resurrected times of meeting just to pray for the church and the wider community. This is something we did before lockdown and now with growing confidence in our zooming we are going to start doing it again.

The last piece of news is that we are very grateful for Kathryn Fiddock who has agreed to coordinate the Prayer Chain. If you would like anyone or anything prayed for please do contact her on l.fiddock@ntlworld.com or tel: 01799 500844. Details of this can also be found on the St Mary's Website Prayer Page

Finally nothing of the above would be taking place but for the Prayer Team working and praying together. I am so grateful to them all of their consistency and willingness to share their gifts.

Sue Walker

Julian Group

In more normal times, this group meets on every second Tuesday of the month for a short reading from Julian of Norwich's '*Enfolded in Love*' and half an hour's silent meditation / contemplation followed by discussion. The Julian group have been unable to meet all year.

Tessa Hawkes

Coffee, Cake and Company

Coffee, Cake & Company began as a form of support for people affected by issues around mental health. Over the last few years it has developed to include a range of people who enjoy the opportunities they find within the sessions.

In normal times we meet monthly, welcoming individuals who are there for diverse reasons, in an atmosphere of Christian love and trust. We enjoy some very interesting conversations and reflections on our experiences throughout life, we often have a laugh, and we always finish with a few minutes of prayer and a hymn. Coffee, Cake & Company has not met for an entire year now. We will consider its future when national and church restrictions on meetings are lifted.

Marisa Baltrock

Prospects

We are fortunate in Saffron Walden to have the Well-being Hub on Audley Road, which provides a day centre supporting adults with learning disabilities. A small but dedicated team from St Mary's have been running a special service for the centre since December 2016 and we weren't going to let a little thing like a pandemic stop us!

After a short period where no services took place, we started running sessions online via Zoom. Where we used to do one physical service face to face a month, we have stepped this up to a service every other week. Many of the attendees of the centre are self-isolating as they are clinically vulnerable, so the services are one of the few times that they see someone different and they enjoy the fun activities we plan for them. They are also growing in faith as they take part in prayers and join in the hymns. This remains one of the most uplifting services that brings laughter and joy and a sense of wonder to us all. Unfortunately we don't see as many people as we used to, but we have made new friends and are grateful that through modern technology we are still able to gather together to share God's love.

It is an absolute joy to play a part in running this service. We have a fabulous team from St Mary's who help and support this and the team from the wellbeing hub are simply amazing! We look forward to being able to meet in person again soon but for now the services will continue online so that everyone remains safe.

Tracey Nicholls

Home Groups

At the beginning of the year there were seven home groups running, one on a monthly basis, four fortnightly and two on a weekly basis. With nearly 50 members in total, these groups are an important developmental aspect of our church life at St Mary's. They give members an opportunity to explore aspects of their faith, study the Bible, learn from one another, pray together and deepen relationships. The groups are a resource and strength for their members. The longevity of these groups and the commitment of members attest to their value, and it is my hope and that of the ministry team that more groups can be established.

The particular emphasis and approach varies from group to group and within each group over time. The material that forms the basis for discussion is decided by each group periodically and varies from specific courses such as the published Pilgrim Courses and York Courses, to considering the Bible passages from the previous Sunday, to using a study guide to consider a part of the Bible, or a group may decide to have a looser or more topical framework for content.

As with all other face-to-face activity, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the functioning of home groups this year. Four of the groups made the transition to Zoom and continued to 'meet', and the other three kept occasional contact between members. Individual members of those groups not running on Zoom were offered the opportunity to join or form another group, recognising that some may have been interested and able to Zoom even if their group was not operating in that way.

The groups working on Zoom commented on the downside of loss of personal contact and the need for a somewhat more ordered style of discussion. At the same time, it was noted that it enabled some members to 'attend' who might not otherwise have been able to do so by reason of mobility problems or dependency responsibilities (childcare).

The planned series of Lent talks under the auspices of Churches Together was also impeded by the pandemic. By Advent, we had become more acquainted with zoom, and Caroline Curren devised and led a course running twice and with around 30 participants based on the book by Peter Sills, *'Light in the Darkness'*. We aim to

publicise courses across the team, such as the Alpha Course run by John Saxon, to offer opportunities beyond each parish.

Finally, a big 'thank you' to hosts and leaders! If anyone is prepared to consider leading a group, Alan Currer would be pleased to chat this over and offer any support that might be requested. Likewise, anyone interested in joining a group should contact Alan. Details of each group are on the Home Groups page of the website.

Alan Currer

Book Group

St Mary's Book Group, like so many other activities, has been a, we hope only temporary, victim of the coronavirus pandemic. We started 2020 with three lively discussions, of a novel, *I Capture the Castle*, an autobiography, Tara Westover's *Educated*, and Neil MacGregor's illustrated account of what it is to be a German, *Germany: Memories of a Nation*. Then the lockdowns started and indoor meetings became impossible, but we did all manage to meet for a drink in our garden during the summer period of relaxation. Sad news is the death in 2020 of two members of the group, Gillian Ram and Jeremy Collingwood. They each made a distinctive and valued contribution to our meetings and we shall miss them.

When the restrictions on meetings permit, we hope to resume our pattern of meeting on a Friday evening each month, at 4 Castle Street at 8.15pm, to discuss a book we have chosen between us. Copies of the book are made available through Saffron Walden Library. There is tea and coffee — and in winter a log fire. Details of the date of the meeting and of the book to be discussed are published in the weekly Grapevine. Membership is open-ended, and people often come because they are interested in a particular book. New members are welcome.

Helen and Robin O'Neill

Social Team

As you all know, social events have been one of the victims of the Covid-19 pandemic and none more so than efforts by the Social Committee. We have been unable to do anything to support the social and fundraising life of our congregation, and I am especially sad that we have been prevented from welcoming Jeremy and Alison in our culinary way. We hope that as the weeks pass and some sort of normality returns to our services; we will be able to

restart refreshments and events as we have been able to do in the past.

Sue Birchall

Communications Committee

The Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns have highlighted the importance of good communications in the parish. The inability to meet face-to-face for much of the year has meant that existing forms of communications with parishioners had to be reviewed and checked that they were fit for purpose and new ways of communicating have had to be devised. Not all come within the direct purview of the Communications Committee, but the Committee has tried to keep abreast of developments and consider whether to recommend changes as appropriate.

The weekly email/letter to parishioners, together with *The Grapevine*, despatched by Dawn Saxon from the parish office, have ensured that details of all services in the team churches have been made widely available. The Zoom and live-streaming arrangements, master-minded by Steve Hasler, have been well-received and have enabled large numbers of people to join services across the team parish. Although there are some parishioners who did not previously use electronic communications, many have learned to do so during these extraordinary times and some people who have not been able to attend services for many years have enjoyed the opportunity to attend them from the comfort of their homes.

The church website, ably managed by Martin Hugall, has also provided an excellent means of keeping people, not just parishioners, informed about what is going on at St Mary's. The ability to make changes at short notice has been a boon, especially when rules about what is open, what is closed, which services will be held with a congregation present and which won't, have had to be accommodated at little advance notice. Martin has been able to recruit Patrick Li to be his back-up – a vital requirement now that electronically disseminated information has become main-stream. Riina Driscoll has kept our Facebook page, another aspect of our electronic media, full of useful information.

2019's decision to publish the Parish News magazine on-line, in addition to a limited hard-copy print run, could not have been more timely. The pandemic and concerns about the risks of passing the virus on via paper products has meant that, whilst Andy Colebrooke

has unfailingly produced excellent e-versions of the magazine, hard-copies have not always been available in their month of publication.

Clifford Want has continued to produce press releases and adverts for the local media, albeit less frequently than in previous years because there has been less to publicise, although adverts about online services have been placed when possible.

Perhaps the biggest single task in the year was deciding how to publicise services over the Christmas period. Traditionally this has been done by means of a Christmas card delivered by hand to every house in the parish. The task had become an increasing challenge as the town expanded and the number of volunteers reduced. The pandemic and the ever-increasing threat of a further lockdown in the build up to Christmas meant that last minute changes seemed increasingly likely. It was decided to abandon the home delivery of cards and spend roughly the same amount of money on two full colour adverts in a local newspaper – one covering the period of Advent and the other Christmas and Epiphany. Thanks to Jim Butler these adverts were inserted and approaches to the parish office suggest they were indeed noticed by local people.

In most years the Committee undertakes total reviews of one or more of the church leaflets. This year, given the unusual juxtaposition of an interregnum, our curate being on maternity leave and the impact of the Covid-19 virus, we have merely ensured that the basic information is up-to-date. The arrival of a new Rector will enable the Committee to return to this task, taking full account of his views. Judith Felgate has worked alongside Dawn Saxon to ensure the leaflets available are up-to-date and the information on the noticeboards in the Church is maintained as necessary.

My thanks go to all members of the Committee who have all put in exceptional work over the year and have between them ensured that the church has kept in touch with both the congregation and the wider community.

*Rufus Barnes Chair,
Communications Committee*

Parish Office

What a different year we have had. I packed up the parish office in the middle of March and moved the office to my study at our house in Debden.

The photocopier and risograph only being used for the weekly postal mailing for those not on laptops/lpads or without a printer. It has been good to keep in touch with all of St Mary's church family.

A big thankyou to Barbara Flaxman for printing and copying our Thursday postal mailing and to John Mumford for looking after the parish rooms with the various weekly checks that have to happen, fire alarm tests and the like.

A weekly bulletin has been sent out each Friday morning to approx. 280 households during the Covid-19 pandemic keeping us in touch with services at St Mary's and services from the Village Team churches. It also contained news of what was happening at St Mary's church and relevant links to help that was available.

All parish rooms bookings have been on hold since the middle of March until the end of the year due to the pandemic.

During those times when we were not in lockdown due to Covid-19 restrictions we mastered using Eventbrite for bookings for the services. It helped us manage the restricted numbers of people permitted at the services and collecting details for track and trace.

We have had to order large amounts of hand sanitizer, cleaning materials and put in to place other safety measures in compliance with government guidelines. There are now two hand sanitizer dispensers in the lobby and the main hall in the parish rooms.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement during this difficult year.

*Dawn Saxon
Parish Administrator*

Weddings Coordinator

The invasion of coronavirus gave rise to many challenges for wedding couples who were faced with uncertainty over whether their wedding could go ahead and, if it did, how many guests would be permitted and would they be able to sing hymns etc? At the time of a lively marriage preparation course in February 2020, held in the parish rooms because of the closure of the usual venue St Mark's College, twelve excited couples were looking forward to their forthcoming wedding and were happily making plans only for them to be disrupted the following month.

Whilst most couples decided to postpone to 2021, five weddings did actually take place last year – one somewhat hastily-arranged

wedding in Wenden's Ambo on 22 March, the day before the first lockdown (requiring a speedy common licence because there was no time for banns to be read), the wedding of Katie Hasler and Charlie Horten-Middleton in Swards End in August with Jenny Tomlinson returning to officiate and only a few guests but a large presence on Zoom. Peter and I were delighted to catch them looking radiant as they left the church....



A second wedding in Wenden in September sadly turned out to be Tim Hardingham's last wedding before his tragic and unexpected death in October. There were two weddings in October, at Debden and Hadstock.

This year the marriage preparation course was conducted on Zoom, sensitively led by Alex Jeewan with John and Dawn Saxon leading the group discussions. It was more difficult for the couples to engage and interact with each other than in person but Alex, John and Dawn kept the momentum going brilliantly and the couples all felt more prepared for their wedding day and hopefully for married life too. They still face uncertainty about the ever-changing guidelines but are being admirably philosophical about the whole situation and all are trying to be positive. There were thirteen couples, a lockdown baby and a puppy!

Tim's death leaves a huge hole in the team ministry. He always made sure he got to know his wedding couples and gave a very personal and intimate wedding.

It's good to have Caroline Curren in Ashdon and I look forward to Rachel Prior returning from maternity leave after the birth of her baby daughter. We also welcome Jeremy Trew who will take three weddings in just less than a week in August!

I am hoping all sixteen booked weddings will actually happen this year – six at Saffron Walden, three at Littlebury, two at Great Chesterford and Ashdon, one at Wenden, Debden and Sewards End. The couples all deserve to enjoy a special occasion after the anxious times of the past year.

Caroline Goulder, Wedding Coordinator

Children and Youth Committee

Membership: Matt Williamson our youth worker, Oli King our Director of Music, Anne Cass, Margaret Jacobs, Kathryn Bennett and Bron Ferland (Chair).

As we usually meet termly, sufficiently far into the term to comment on activities, we did not manage to meet at all last year but the work of members of the committee has largely carried on throughout the pandemic. Tinies and Joyful Noise were casualties, as was Matt's work in schools but most activities have carried on in some form or another. Matt has produced regular online activities which many church families have taken up and has Zoomed with, for example, Aftershock; Oli has Zoomed with the Junior Choir and Choral Scholars and many have contributed to recordings used in online services; Margaret has ensured that the uniformed organisations are also now thoroughly conversant with Zoom technology. Kathryn too has been busy ensuring that those who had agreed to DBS checks pre-Covid-19 are ready to become responsible adults when face to face working restarts...Matt can also claim a totally new activity with the recent Bedtime Church aimed at our young children and their parents!

The one thing we haven't been able to do is to plan and discuss arrangements to take our young people to offsite activities - when we are at last able to do this, we will know that normal business has been resumed.

Bron Ferland Chair, Children & Youth Committee

Youth Work

Aftershock

It has been a very different year for Aftershock, switching between meeting on Zoom and face to face, but throughout it all the young people have been understanding and have joined in whatever the circumstances. Over the course of the year, we have taken a deeper look at The Lord's Prayer, the early church in Acts and how they were unleashed as family, servant, power, herald, organisation, sign and disciple. This term we have been looking at the Bible and exploring how we got it, how it was put together, what types of books are in it, and most importantly we can study it.

As well as the Bible studies we put on a socially distanced individual challenge night, quiz night, film night and a Zoom Escape Room which was great fun. We also had an art class run over Zoom by one of our talented young people which resulted in my 'masterpiece' finding its way on to the fridge! We were also lucky to have Lynn Treneary join us before lockdown where she spoke to the young people about her work with CMS. The young people loved hearing her stories and had loads of questions about her work.

Unfortunately, we were unable to host our yearly Jimmy's fundraising meal this year due to Covid-19. However, we are looking forward to next year where we can put it on again to raise much needed funds for the amazing work that Jimmy's Night Shelter do.

H2H

H2H also switched between Zoom and face to face depending on the guidelines, however, it has been great to see so many come along and support our young people as they use their gifts in leading us in worship and teaching. Our hope is that we can meet face to face soon, worship together, learn from our young people and enjoy some yummy cake!

Youth Bible Study

Youth Bible Study has stayed meeting on Zoom over the year. With the closure of school and after school clubs we have seen an increase in numbers which is positive. The young people we have at YBS have loads of questions about the Bible, which we have the privilege of trying to answer! In the first part of lockdown we looked at why God ordered the Israelites to destroy the nations in the

promised land; we considered whether it was ok for Rahab to lie about where the spies were and asked why there are chapters and chapters describing the Tabernacle in so much detail. We are slowly studying the book of John, when I say slowly, we started it about ten weeks ago and have only reached chapter six! We don't mind though, sometimes we can rush through the Bible thinking we know what it means, but each time we learn something new and take away a different idea from it.

Church@Home Resources

With Team JC not being able to meet face to face since March 2020, I have been sending out a weekly email to all parents packed full of resources for all ages. This has included a video of a Bible story, some 'I wonder...' questions for parents to use to facilitate a conversion with their children, plus some questions the children can ask their parents. Also in the email is a craft idea for the children to do and during the first lockdown I included some prayer activities which coincided with the Thy Kingdom Come fortnight and some extra activities ideas to do with their children. For the older children and young people, I include a short blog on the passage with some questions to reflect on.

All our children and youth work activities can only happen with the help of volunteers, my thanks go to Tracey Nicholls, George Harpum, Hilary Walker, Alison Knights and Chris Cowling who have helped throughout this year, either in person or on Zoom. If you would like to help with any of our children and young people's activities, I would be happy to chat to you more about the groups we run and how you can get involved.

Matt Williamson

St. Mary's Tinies/Bedtime Church

As is the case for many of our children and youth groups, we have been unable to restart Tinies since March 2020 due to Covid. However, since January 2021, Alison Knights, Chris Cowling, and myself have started a new monthly venture for 0-7 year olds called Bedtime Church, which we do over Zoom. Each month at Bedtime Church we are joined by Barnaby Bear and his friends and together we explore a different bible story with some songs and prayers.

So far, we have looked at the story of creation, Noah's Ark and Moses. For each story we hand deliver a gift for every child which

they bring along to each session. These have been a holding cross and battery-operated candle for creation (which we hope they will use again for their prayers at home); two toy animals for Noah's Ark and a dolly peg in a box for Moses (with holes in it so the baby Moses can breathe).

We have been blown away by the uptake of this new venture and have averaged about 30 children each month which is really encouraging. The families who we have attending Bedtime Church are from Tinies or have been baptised at St Mary's Church. For a lot of our families Bedtime Church is the only current contact with church that they have. Our plan is to run this until the summer and then reevaluate whether it is safe to restart Tinies again in September.

Matt Williamson

St. Mary's Pre School

Looking back on this year who would have thought how unique and challenging it was going to be?

In March 2020 due to the pandemic we closed our doors to all children apart from vulnerable children. Families and staff stayed at home to help keep everyone safe and well.

After the May half term we opened our doors to children from key worker parents, vulnerable children and those going to school. This saw us open in 'bubbles' of children for four days a week. The staff worked hard to support those families attending Preschool, those at home and those that were due to start with us in September. We were introduced to the world of Zoom meetings, virtual tours and story times read online!

We helped families whose children were due to start school and were feeling understandably nervous and anxious about their children starting in an uncertain world.

In July we said a sad goodbye to the children leaving us to go to school and in September we welcomed back the children along with new families.

We have all learnt to social distance, wash hands and have a much-embedded cleaning routine! The children have settled in well to the new ways of Preschool and the restrictions the pandemic has brought upon us.

Unfortunately this year we have not been able to have our normal Mothers' Day tea party, Fathers' Day breakfast, camp out or end of term party but Father Christmas did call in via Zoom to say Happy Christmas to us all at our Christmas end of term party.

Faye Jeffs, St. Mary's Church Pre School



St. Mary's C.E. Primary School

2020 has been a different year to normal for St Mary's. However, the Governors of St Mary's are proud of how the School community has risen to all the challenges that the pandemic has driven, whilst still providing memorable

learning experiences for our pupils.

January 2020 started positively and the Reception class launched their spring topic of Superheroes by everyone dressing as Superheroes. The day consisted of superhero activities and a visit from a fun storyteller.

In February 2020 our Year 3 visited Saffron Walden County High School to perform their dance show and we couldn't have been prouder!

In March the school faced the challenge of home learning, while also staying open for key worker and other pupils. The positives that have arisen from this experience are enhanced pupil and staff IT skills and the school has more higher spec IT equipment, which will benefit learning beyond lockdown. The Governors would also like to highlight the kindness demonstrated by the school community, with the organising of Foodbank collections. In September St Mary's opened again to all pupils and staff drove many high points during the autumn term.



In November 2020 the School was able to welcome Ben and Hannah from Spirit of the Wild for the pupils in Reception, Year 1 & Year 2. The pupils were introduced to a wide variety of species and some lucky pupils volunteered to hold a few. Needless to say, that the children had an absolutely amazing time as they saw some incredible and varied creatures.

For Remembrance Day some of our Year 1 pupils helped to make a huge purple poppy picture to commemorate animals that have served in the forces and Reception made a handprint picture and their own creative cardboard cenotaph.



The PTA organised a 7 Marathon's sponsored event, which raised an incredible £3,000. The majority will be spent on the new school library which the School is hoping to receive planning permission for soon. The rest of the funds were used to welcome a pantomime company to the school to perform Sleeping Beauty.

In December Year 6 had a crime scene investigation morning. Unfortunately, when the children arrived in school, someone had trashed the classroom leaving 8 specific clues for the children to solve. All the staff were suspects and the newly appointed detectives/officers had to use their skills to solve clues. The children took on their roles amazingly well and after much investigation and interrogation discovered the culprit!

The school is looking to build many experiences led learning days into its teaching during 2021 and we are all hoping for a less disruptive year.

*Victoria Boraster-Sharpe,
Chair of Governors*

St. Mary's Guiding

7th Saffron Walden (St. Mary's) Rainbows

The Rainbow unit, due to Covid-19, has been on hold throughout the last year. A few Rainbows during this time worked independently

on their interest badges. At the beginning on this year (2021) the previous Rainbow leader and her team decided to step down after many years of service. To save the Rainbow unit from closure I have stepped in to start the unit up again. With a very full waiting list I am hoping to start the Rainbows up again after Easter, initially on Zoom but looking towards proper face to face meetings once allowed. We meet Mondays 4:15-5:30 and would appreciate any assistance offered.

Saffy Lester – Rainbow Leader

7th Saffron Walden (St. Mary's) Brownies

Like all the other groups our activities ground to a halt last March! Hoping that it would only be a couple of weeks we stayed in contact via emails and supported our Brownies with gaining interest badges, both from the new programme and some of the old ones that we had in stock. This kept us busy for a few weeks, and then in June we turned to technology and started Zooming. A few of the girls were quite reticent, as were some of the leaders, however we have all got much better with it, and our meetings have continued, and we now have almost the whole pack joining. We have now 'virtually' had three enrolments, a teddy bears picnic, a Christmas party, a talent show, and achieved lots of badges, including two members gaining their Bronze award. We are starting to make plans for returning to face to face Guiding, for when we are allowed. We continue to have a long waiting list, further hampered by being unable to move girls onto other local units, as they are keeping their numbers low, due to insufficient volunteers.

Julie Lester – Brownie Leader

7th Saffron Walden (St. Mary's) Guides

Having suspended meetings in mid-March, we got going again after the Easter holidays using Zoom and have carried on almost every week since. Zoom was new to all of us and most members rose magnificently to the challenge. We have kept in touch with all of them even if they have been wary of meeting online. We have been completing a wide range of activities from the Girlguiding programme and have looked at Feel Good activities in particular. We took part in a virtual sleepover organised by Anglia Region called Midsummer Madness over the solstice weekend when

several members slept out in tents in the garden and did some online crafts and activities. During the Autumn Term we managed two face to face meetings outdoors, one when we planted some bulbs in the churchyard and the other a pre-Christmas meeting round a fire when we toasted marshmallows and sang Christmas carols. It was so good to see each other again and we look forward to being able to meet again in person as soon as possible.

Margaret Jacobs – Guide Leader

Saffron Walden District Rangers

The Ranger unit has now closed. I resigned as leader in April as I felt unable to give the girls the support they deserve. I hope that it may be possible to find another leader in the future.

If anyone would like to help with any of the local Girlguiding units please contact SW-Commissioners@outlook.com

Margaret Jacobs

Mothers' Union

On 9th February 2020 St Mary's branch of the Mothers Union celebrated their 100th Anniversary at the Sunday Communion service. Members took part.

The AGM was held on 13th February and our small choir sang a traditional hymn from Zimbabwe at the Women's World Day of Prayer on 6th March. We had an elected committee and everything seemed straightforward and normal.

In late March coronavirus took over our lives and there was total lockdown. All Mothers Union meetings were cancelled, including the Anniversary lunch we had planned. For a while in the summer things seemed to improve but then rapidly took a turn for the worse.

The committee, ever optimistic, agreed that three of the members should work on a programme for 2021. This was accomplished owing to the generosity of the guest speakers who accepted that it may not be possible to hold the meetings. Nevertheless, we told ourselves that we would be prepared when the time came!

In December all members received a printed programme, for 2021, a Christmas card, a message from our Chaplain and a covering letter with an update from the Branch Leader.

In no time it seemed the AGM was due again with no prospect of meetings. Undaunted a postal vote was organised using an

authorised form from the MU Diocesan office. 73% of members returned the voting forms and 93% renewed their subscription.

The MU Diocesan President, Judith Meaden, has sent members some points to reflect on our experience of lockdown in lieu of her cancelled visit this March. Officially, members can meet one person outside now, which they will do on a fine day in March for discussion. A first step, until full meetings are permitted.

Due to Covid-19 we have had no Christian Fellowship or corporate worship but our faith and hope have sustained us and also our prayers for each other.

However, we have an elected committee, a published programme and are ready to resume meetings as soon as we are able. The Mothers Union Theme for 2021 is 'REBUILDING HOPE AND CONFIDENCE'

Brenda Sheath, Branch Leader

Women Who Wonder (WWW)

This group for Christian women usually meets on the second Tuesday of the month to discuss, listen, learn and support one another. Due to the pandemic we have not been able to meet in the past year. When we are able, we plan to relaunch this group.

Gill Caswell

Men's Activities

Unfortunately COVID restrictions meant that activities were curtailed. We have missed these valuable occasions for good fellowship and look forward to resuming the full programme as soon as permitted; breakfasts, lunches, suppers and walks. We hope to welcome some new participants as well as sharing opportunities to get to know our rector better.

Thanks to our organisers; Robin Betser, Bill Rose and Anthony Armon-Jones.

Denis Tindley

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee continues to monitor the finances of St Mary's and met three times during the year. The membership of the committee comprises Revd. Michael Lovegrove, (Chairman), Denis

Tindley (Church Warden), David Birchall (Treasurer) together with Steve Hasler, Robin O' Neill and Simon Potter. Alun Thomas who had only recently joined the committee had to resign on his removal from the district but we were pleased to welcome Tim Game.

The routine business of the committee is unchanged:

- To receive reports from the Treasurer on the current financial position
- Consider any changes to our investments
- Consider request for immediate or future expenditure which need authorisation either by the committee or recommendation from the committee to the DCC
- Review what we pay our employees
- Review the Treasurer's proposed budget for the next year
- Review the draft annual accounts.

Other routine matters include the review of quarterly management accounts and variances to budget, monitoring of cash reserves and the review of the reserves policy.

Little did we know in January 2020 when we approved the small 2020 budget deficit of £3k that the interregnum would last all year or that we were about to enter a serious pandemic that would last all year and beyond. Together, but mainly due to Covid-19, our unbroken run of eight years of surpluses have come to an abrupt end. Two years of substantial deficits will put a large dent in our reserves but we can be very grateful that we have sufficient reserves to absorb these deficits.

The final result for 2020 was an actual deficit of £31k and the budget for 2021 is also for a deficit in the region of £32k.

We give thanks that worship continued to be offered at St Mary's during the pandemic albeit through the medium of streaming services thanks to the investment in an audio-visual system.

Although we face a challenging financial future, we are confident that the work, worship, witness and ministry of St Mary's will continue to flourish thanks to previous prudent financial management, the generosity of our congregation but above all thanks to a generous God.

*Reverend Michael Lovegrove
Chair, Finance Committee*

Property Committee

The committee met by Zoom in March 2020 and February 2021. The committee is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of St Mary's church, the Parish rooms, Verger's cottage, Curate's house and, in association with the Town Council, the churchyard.

Following a major error by the contractor installing a smart meter for British Gas, damaged heating system boilers and pumps, and the roof alarm control panel were replaced. The contractor accepted liability.

Three cameras, a digital sound desk, additional microphones and electrical sockets, and internet connections for YouTube and Zoom were installed for livestreaming of services.

The committee received a paper on the options for an additional site for the Garden of Remembrance which will now go forward for discussion with the rector and PCC.

Inspection of the copper on the chancel roof following an ingress of water above the windows on the south side of the chancel, identified urgent replacement which is planned for the autumn of 2021.

Future major projects are the refurbishment of the organ, replacement and upgrading of the lighting, refurbishment of the Parish Rooms upstairs, and meeting the Church of England's objective of Carbon Zero by 2030. This is a substantial and onerous programme that will require us to raise additional funds and find resources to champion the projects.

Throughout this difficult year, I have been immensely grateful to Steve Hasler for his wealth of knowledge and expertise, and to Mike Felgate, Richard Freeman, Robin O'Neill, Lawrence Gooderham and Edward Gildea for their support and advice.

*Denis Tindley Chair, Property
Committee*

Buildings Project

No further work was carried out in 2020 on the relocation and refurbishment of the Audley tomb due to Covid-19 restrictions and the lack of a resource to lead the project following Graham Cottam's move from Saffron Walden. We hope to return to the project and begin to progress plans again for the tomb and the clergy and choir vestries later in 2021.

*Denis Tindley on behalf of the
buildings Project Team*

Friends of Saffron Walden Parish Church

This year has been the same for the Friends as for many due to the pandemic and the restrictions that brought for us all.

However our wonderful Sewing Circle continued to work from home and there will be a lot of kneelers to be dedicated at our Patronal service later this year.

We had two aborted attempts to visit Lincoln Cathedral together but we will get there and as soon as we feel it is safe for us all a new date will be set.

Sadly no glossy newsletter this year but watch this space for the exciting one to be produced in March 2022.

We greet our new Rector, Jeremy Trew, and look forward to working with him. We feel sure that there will be projects we can help to fund in the coming year which will commence with adding the Rector's name to the list of incumbents near the west door.

Pamela Mugliston

Transition Project

As with many people this was a very unusual year and, in our case, definitely divided into three sections.

January to March: Our team met every Tuesday morning in the Parish Rooms as usual. Between one and five clients attended each week seeking help with their job hunting, CV, application forms, interview practice etc. Coffee (or tea) and biscuits provided by our friendly "Receptionists" broke the ice and the "Advisers" then did their best to provide the help needed.

On the 10 March it became inadvisable to continue these face-face meetings and the project was effectively closed down.

March to September: It was obvious during this time that there was going to be a major disruption in the job market, probably resulting in higher unemployment than that caused by the financial crash of 2008. It had been this event which caused unemployed members of St Mary's to form the Transition Project to assist themselves and others, and thus demonstrate the presence of the church to the town.

Realising that we would not be able to meet clients face-to-face we set about reorganising for remote working. We also believed at

that time there would be a massive increase in unemployment and that we would need additional advisors to meet the demand. Three additional advisers joined us in this period. We also recognised that we needed a wider on-line presence. A Facebook page was added to the programme partially to offset the loss of advertising previously carried by the Walden Local and leaflet distribution by the now closed DWP desk in the Uttlesford offices. We also set up an encrypted data transfer system between advisers to handle client data, together with unique email addresses for advisers and a dedicated, published phone number for client use.

September to December: With the gradual easing of lockdown and restarting of advertising, we were prepared for new clients and relaunched the on-line version of the Transition Project with several press announcements. These appeared in the local press and a number of magazines and web pages. This was also co-ordinated with the local Citizens Advice Bureau together with the Essex and Cambridge based Department of Work and Pensions. These groups were also anticipating a dramatic increase in the number of unemployed seeking help to find work. None of these measures, including distributing leaflets with Foodbank parcels, has had much impact.

We only had 14 new clients in this period – less than one per week. However we found that remote working using email, phone & Zoom proved much more time consuming for those seriously seeking work.

Much to our surprise, it appears that there has been only a small increase in unemployment but there has been a dramatic increase in those not actually working but supported by furlough and similar job retention schemes. This analysis is supported by graphs recently published by the BBC and a comment from the Harlow DWP:-

“When I speak to people the first thing they say is there is nothing out there and then the second is that it is not worth applying until restrictions lift. It is sometimes difficult trying to convince them otherwise.

I am aware that your support/offer is being advertised here at Harlow Job Centre, and therefore hoping that you should receive more referrals shortly. At our next office meeting I will tell

everybody that I have referred to you and that your feedback was swift and appreciated.”

Another comment demonstrated that the work of the Project is appreciated.

“She was hugely impressed and so grateful for the time and effort you gave her. She is now feeling well prepared ready to tackle the jobs market. I think she will recommend you to all her friends!

She said she was applying for three jobs so we shall see how she gets on. She said that she is optimistic that if she doesn't get them she will try again.

With best wishes and many thanks”

In fact there are a lot of vacancies around for those seeking work.

Financial: For the last 12 years the work has been supported by the PCC together with donations of cash and also computing equipment from ComputerCare. Where appropriate the computer equipment has been passed on to support clients and in one notable case had a massive impact on the ability of our client to manage home schooling as well as job searching.

We have also received a grant this year from Educational Services 2010 to help with the additional expenses of going digital. This grant has enabled us to offer telephone support (0790 1173 763) as well as pay for newspaper advertising, web space, leaflet printing and extended Zoom meetings. None of our advisors charge for the use of their personal phones.

We currently anticipate serious problems with unemployment when the furlough scheme finishes.

*Gerald Gardner on behalf of the
Transition Project Team*

Jimmy's Group

Jimmy's has continued to provide support for the homeless in Cambridge during the pandemic. They work with the local community, volunteers and partner agencies to deliver 24/7 emergency accommodation and supported housing for those who would otherwise be homeless or vulnerably housed. They support them through positive changes and help them resettle into more suitable and stable accommodation, leading them towards an independent lifestyle.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to host our usual Aftershock meal or Harvest Festival donations. However our church family has collected £492.01 in regular donations in support of Jimmy's. This has been used to continue our monthly vegetable donations from the market and donations given directly to Jimmy's.

We would like to thank you all for your continued generous support of Jimmy's.

Tim Game

Archive Group

As is the case with most groups, we, as an Archive Group, have not met at all during this Pandemic, not even virtually!

Our last report focussed on what, on behalf of the group, I had been submitting to the Parish News for publication - articles from magazines produced at the beginning of the Second World War. Since there was no further material available after 1940, I decided to go back to 1890 and reproduce articles recording what was happening in the churches within the Deanery. I hope very much that this potpourri of reports has been of interest to parishioners and so ends my very short Covid-19 affected review for this year!

Canon Chris Bishop

On behalf of the Archive Group

ECO Church

In February, the Bishop of Norwich, Graham Usher, was been given responsibility for the Church of England's Environment Programme, charged with leading bold, collaborative action across the Church to tackle the grave existential crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. His opening address runs with the headline: '*Courageous decision-making is needed to tackle climate change*':

"The coming year gives an opportunity to increase momentum and for the UK to use its hosting of the G7 and COP 26 to make a global statement that we intend to lead by example. Christians, alongside people of other faiths, intend to play their part by encouraging practical changes at local and national levels, but also as local and global advocates for far better care and justice for God's gift of creation."

I hope that the PCC will be proactive in accepting that challenge. COP 26 will indeed be a 'make or break' moment for the future of humanity.

Bronze Award: We were successful in achieving the Bronze Award in October. That just constitutes the foothills of the mountain we need to climb!

Churchyard: During lock-down we have continued to increase bio-diversity and pollinators in our churchyard. In the autumn we planted 500 bluebells and 500 wild daffodils. We also extended the circular 'medallions' of turf and planted them with more wildflower seeds, which are already germinating. A further 500 snowdrops were planted 'in the green' last week and half a dozen bird boxes have been installed, in addition to our hedgehog boxes. The Guides planted their own drifts of daffodils in the churchyard and the primroses, many of which failed to survive the drought last spring, were replaced in time for Mothering Sunday.

Communications: A topical article about the environment has appeared in every edition of the Parish News for the last 2 years and has been added to the Eco pages on the website. Our thanks to the Andy Colebrooke and Martin Hugall for publishing these so efficiently. It would be interesting to know what sort of readership these communications enjoy.

Worship: Concern for the environment has continued to be reflected regularly in our worship, prayers and sermons during lockdown.

Buildings: No progress has been possible in this area during lockdown and we are being advised that solar panels on the roof are not a cost-effective option at the moment. The Bishop of Norwich is encouraging all churches to switch to a Green energy provider, but unfortunately, we have recently embarked on a three-year contract with our current supplier, who includes some clean energy in the mix.

Engagement the community: Edward has been active on 3 working parties of the UDC: Air Quality and Transport, Rivers and Biodiversity and Planning and has been the environmental representative on the Local Plan Stakeholder Forum; Richard Freeman has a senior role in the UDC, which is wrestling with the complexities of fulfilling their commitment to net zero carbon by 2030 with tightly limited budgets and the challenge of Covid-19.

It would be interesting to know what other members of our congregation are active in environmental or political groups through which the aims of ECO church are reflected.

The team: We were delighted to welcome James Razzell as youth representative onto the team, which now comprises Jackie Damary Holman, Chris Knight, Chris Hall and Edward Gildea as well as James. We are looking forward to the return of Rachel and would very much like to involve more members of the congregation. It is not really a committee. More members are really needed if we are to make Eco church more than a side line.

Aims for 2021

- Achieving the Silver Award.
- Highlighting the importance of COP 26 and encouraging our congregation to engage with the politics that surround it.
- Calculating our footprint: we hope to use the Church of England's energy footprinting tool to calculate our carbon footprint and take expert advice with a subsidised energy audit provided by Parish Buying on what steps to take next.
- Lighting: the switch to LED lighting is on the agenda of the premises committee and we hope to ensure a low carbon footprint in the plans for the refurbishment of the Church Rooms.
- Changing Lifestyles: It is hard to tell whether we are having any impact at all in this area. We would like to do a survey of members of the congregation when normal services resume and then compare the results in a year's time
- We hope to re-schedule Edward's talk on the environment and COP 26 as soon as restrictions are lifted.
- Youth: we hope to build on the involvement of the guides to engage young people further.
- Worship: Climate Sunday is taking off around the country with excellent resources available through A Rocha. It would be good to institute one here at St Mary's.
- Deanery: Resume discussions with a view to supporting other churches in the deanery embarking on the Eco church journey.

Edward Gildea

Links with the Worldwide Church:

Lynn Treneary, our CMS Mission Partner in Maridi, South Sudan

On Sunday March 15th 2020 Lynn Treneary, now an ordained Deacon, came to preach at our Sunday morning service, gave us a presentation in the Parish Rooms, followed by lunch and spent the evening being with the young people at AfterShock. The following Sunday we were in lockdown and such a



gathering would not have been allowed, so I do marvel at the timing of it. As always, she challenged and inspired us and a particular joy was seeing how the Aftershock group engaged so perceptively with her. Because of Covid-19 a lot of her engagements had to be cancelled so we were just very thankful for her being able to be with us giving us a very vivid picture of her life and work in Maridi Diocese and Chaima Institute. The thing that was exciting her most was the enthusiastic take up of the Bible studies starting up around the Diocese. The issue that was concerning her most was still the lack of medication for Nodding Syndrome and the toll this was having on the young people in the South Sudan.

Lockdown did mean that Lynn could not get back to South Sudan until the autumn of 2020, most of last year being spent between Aberdeen with her daughter, son in law and grandson, and Southport where her mother and other daughter live. She was able to get back to there in the autumn of 2020. To say she was thrilled to return would be a very big understatement! Not only was she thrilled but so were those in Maridi Diocese and Chaima Institute. Needless to say she received a wonderful welcome on her return. It was not long before once again she was being very active in the diocese accompanying the bishop to many of the events he was participating in and getting involved in the life of Chaima Institute.

One of the setbacks though, was that she was due to be ordained priest at Easter tide 2020 which could not happen as she was still in lockdown in Aberdeen. This was postponed and was going to happen this year instead. However she has had to come home again due to back problems and in pain with the flight home proving difficult, painful and exhausting. She has now started having tests and x-rays to see what the problem is. She will update us when she has a diagnosis and as yet I have not heard any more news from her. Do please keep her in your prayers as not only is

she in a lot of pain but all her hopes of ordination have once again had to be put on hold. Please pray for South Sudan, all in the Maridi diocese and the Chaima Institute. The pandemic is heightening the problems of food shortage, lack of medical staff, hospitals, medicines and homelessness. This however does not seem to dampen the faith of the Christians and the peace treaty seems to be holding.

Another highlight was the zoom CMS South Conference on the 19th and 20th of February where we heard from the CEO and some of the senior leadership team, that they had been spending a lot of time in dwelling in the Word/scripture, listening for the call and re- envisioning of CMS's mission. This is an ongoing process but they are moving more to be in partnership with the countries/ continents over the world including churches and dioceses in the UK. We also heard from, the Director of Europe and the Middle East, partners in Tanzania running Neema Craft and partners in mission from Asia. They gave us a bigger picture of what was happening on the ground in so many places of conflict, countries where persecution and hardship were very real. The inspirational stories could take up a whole book but the common theme ran through the stories that it was in the consistent, practical, ordinary, seemingly small acts of kindnesses in everyday life that seemed to be making a difference and enable faith to grow and take root against all the odds. Bringing God's Love into these situations happened by getting alongside and living in the communities that they were serving, whether it be in a remote village in the bush, refugee camp or a bombed-out suburb that enabled this to happen.

The last highlight I would like to mention is that every month there has been a CMS meeting on Zoom with other representatives from churches. It is a time of pooling ideas, hearing how CMS is working in partnership with dioceses and churches in England, as well as getting practical updates on things like safeguarding. CMS have developed a substantial programme and been getting alongside dioceses and churches in the UK to enable and encourage them to spend time dwelling in the Word/Scripture to hear and then action the call of mission for them. This is called Church Mission Partnership and is part of their Pioneering Church Outreach. From what I have heard it is a very creative programme and those who have done this have really found new and creative ways, relevant to their parishes and dioceses, for mission. I gather

that Chelmsford diocese have done this with them along with churches in the diocese and have gained from the time spent being part of this course. Always I find CMS a challenging, humbling and faith stretching community to be part of. If you want to know more do either look on their website or become of our prayer group support for Lynn Treneary.

Sue Walker, CMS Link

David and Sári, serving with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Romania

David and Sari Gardner continue to work on Bible translation for the Roma community in Romania as well as supporting the work of Wycliffe and other Bible translators worldwide.

Covid-19 has caused disruption to a number of their projects where face-face working was required, but they have succeeded in supporting the publication of 1 Samuel as well as testing & recording Bible stories. These stories will also be posted on the internet and distributed as DVD videos. As another part of the Roma reading programme, Sari (with Erik's help) has been preparing an alphabet game for multiple generations of mobile phones for the local Romani dialect, using either a Romanian or a Hungarian alphabet. Inevitably Covid-19 also interrupted Sari's programme of teaching children and adults to read.

Covid-19 constraints meant that work on a literacy programme for Roma children in conjunction with another NGO was stopped for months.

David has also been heavily involved in the programming of the Romani Scripture website (ashunledevles.eu.org) which carries a range of written, audio and video materials for teaching and discipleship. David has also played a significant role in developing a major programme to enable translators worldwide to create printed materials irrespective of their typescript, font etc. This program, PTXprint, has already won praise, for instance a typesetter of Genesis in Chad (Central Africa) reported "This is going to be a great time-saver for me, as most of the complexity of XeTeX is hidden behind the friendly user interface of PTXPrint. Thank you for your diligent efforts! "

David & Sari are currently helping the Standard Romani Bible Translation Committee develop a translation programme which aims

to produce a Bible translation useable by all Roma language groups in Romania.

The Family

School and university attendance was severely disrupted by the various Covid-19 lockdowns in Romania. Pandemic restrictions in Romania are rigidly enforced by police with road closures to prevent travel through infected villages and road blocks with 20 minute police checks to verify that documents are valid.

Roof repairs, updating the well pump system as well as house painting provided variety to the enforced stays at home. It also gave members of the family an opportunity to survey the world from the rooftop – see photo.

David was badly affected by a liver problem for several months but is now well on the road to recovery. None of the family had confirmed cases of Covid-19, although Mark may have been infected whilst at university. Aniko is now in her final (Baccalaureate) year which currently means catching a bus at 6am.

Emma did well in her end of year exams and was accepted at a new school in September but has had very little contact with classmates.

Erik is finding that on-line teaching is not sufficiently challenging and has undertaken some additional home school classes!

The financial support from St Mary's as well as other local churches and individuals is highly valued as their income is totally dependent on direct donation (Wycliffe does not have a central support scheme). Their worldwide support met 95% of their budget last year.

As always, once travel restrictions have been lifted, the family would welcome visitors – there is a direct flight from Luton to an airport 20 minutes from their village.



Emma, Aniko, & Mark taking advantage of a roof top view

Gerald Gardner

Vision Statement

Our Mission

Sharing God's love

Our Vision

Our aim as a church is to:
worship God with joy and reverence
tell of God's love in Jesus Christ
learn about and live our Christian faith
pray and learn about prayer
serve God's world through prayer and action
offer Christ's ministry of wholeness and healing
encourage all to discover and use their gifts for God
engage with and nurture children and young people
welcome everyone warmly and offer generous hospitality
value and care for each other

In all this, we will use the resources we have - our time,
buildings and money - wisely in God's service.