



2020

Thatcham Annual Parish Meeting Annual Report APCM 18 July 2021

Parish Office
St Mary's Church
Churchgate
Thatcham
RG19 3PN

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Thatcham Parochial Church Council 2020/21

<p>Ex Officio</p> <p>Revd. Mark Bennet Revd Nicola Hulks Revd Brenda Harland Revd Angela Brennan (from Sept 2020) Revd Leonard Onugha (on placement at Emmer Green from Nov 2020)</p> <p>Churchwardens</p> <p>Paul Bullock (2020) Colin Waters (2020) Chris Watts (2016)</p> <p>Deanery Synod Representatives (to 2023)</p> <p>Mary Stagg Chris Watts Tony Collie Catherine Forbes</p>	<p>Elected Lay Members</p> <p>John Hicks (St Barnabas) Bernadette Ellison (St Barnabas) Leanne Fowler (St Barnabas) + 2 vacancies</p> <p>Christine Rice (2019) Viv Druce (2020) Emma Watts (2020)</p> <p>Co-options</p> <p>Mark Backhouse (Tower Bells) Peter Harvey De-Gioia (Treasurer to February 2020) Mike Stevenson (PCC Secretary) Leanne Cox (Safeguarding) Ann Dibble (Safeguarding) Chris Druce (Social)</p>

Team Rectors Report

What a year that was! With Nicola on board as Team Vicar and looking forward to the year ahead, working closely with Thatcham Park School on their SIAMS (church school inspection) preparation, the year began hopefully. We had Alison Dean and Leanne Fowler starting to test possible vocations to ordained ministry, Leonard continuing to grow as our curate and doing some outstanding work – but still waiting to conduct his first wedding – we were heading into 2020 with energy, passion, prayer and hope: still reminding ourselves that we are called to be a Christlike church – more contemplative, more courageous, more compassionate. My five years as Area Dean came to an end and I was looking forward to a fresh challenge –

And then COVID. The most abrupt change was the postponement of the SIAMS inspection at Thatcham Park School, which had been announced and was to have taken place in the week of the first lockdown: such disappointment for everyone who had been looking forward to showing off all the things we'd achieved together. And poor Leonard found his planned weddings postponed, and Holy Week services were cancelled and we started to learn some completely new ways of doing things. The Paschal Candle was lit in my back garden and streamed live on Facebook. There were Podcast services from St Barnabas (and material for Thatcham Park School too). We struggled to make sense of what was going on, and so many of us missed the music. I remember I started a series of daily reflections at 8:00am on Facebook on a whole range of subjects. They are still there, I think. And we gradually got used (at least some of us did) to services on Zoom.

As well as weddings (even those who wanted to get married, couldn't – we did, though, have one couple we could marry when their original church was locked down: the three weddings we did do were hugely joyful occasions), our most significant ministry – that of Baptism – also came to a virtual halt. 2020 is probably the first year since records began that the number of Baptisms in Thatcham was in single figures.

Then there were joys – we discovered the churchyard as a venue for services, and worship outside lifted our spirits. We managed a version of cream teas too, and when the choir could sing, they recorded music which we could use in our services – including a recording which was used for the socially-distanced Remembrance Sunday Act of Remembrance – where lone representatives of all our uniformed groups laid wreaths: so very different from the thousands of people spilling out across the A4 in previous years.

There were some big changes in the team too – Angela Brennan came as curate to Nicola: not quite what we'd expected, as we'd not applied for anyone, and then Marcia Wadham as ministry apprentice (before being ordained as curate). Angela's ordination was delayed, and then hardly anyone could attend, so I saw it online rather than being there. I had recommended that Leonard should have a placement before his curacy ended, and a suitable opportunity arose for him before Christmas. All the comings and goings felt rather inadequately marked, and when we do get back together we'll have some catching up to do.

Catching up also on grief and loss. So many people have been inadequately mourned – at Peter Ellison's funeral at the crematorium the driveway was lined with a socially distanced crowd of civic dignitaries, remembering his contribution to our community. The funeral for Clifford Willis – one of our longest standing members, and another pillar of Thatcham and St Mary's life in his prime – marked his passing for those closest to him, but did no real justice to his contribution to St Mary's. Others we will miss include Ian Robinson, Vera Setchell, Alf Wheeler and Daphne Jones. Funeral services varied through the year as the rules changed, and some of us took services entirely at a graveside in a variety of weathers. Once we are beyond COVID restrictions, I am sure that we will gain a new ministry around memorial services.

The year ended in style, though not the style we would have anticipated at the beginning. The sense of passion and creativity in the team, including our newest members, overflowed at Christmas. We paired up with Thatcham Park School to produce a nativity trail in the Churchyard – Nicola took a lead on this and Brenda organised families for telling the story and the choir contributed hymns and Paul Bullock and John Harland sorted out the installation – and we linked also with the star initiative from Thatcham Town Council. On Christmas Eve we opened St Mary's with stations for prayer, and a stunning installation of the nativity created by Angela in the chapel. We missed all our carol services and the thousands of people joyfully celebrating – but instead streamed the reading of the prologue to John's Gospel at midnight, and a communion service with the choir singing live was broadcast in Christmas Day (after which the rules changed yet again, and the choir could not practice).

As I write, it seems that the worst is over and we can look forward with a little more confidence and hope – hope especially that the weary times are behind us, for most of us have felt exhausted sometime during the last year. We will be back, but when we come back, it won't be the same as before. We'll be taking some of our services outside, and thinking about the way we do displays and trails and installations. We'll be catching up with weddings and baptisms, learning about memorial services, reconnecting with friends in the community and civic life. We will be using what we have learned to be a more Christlike church – more contemplative, more compassionate, more courageous and almost certainly more creative.

Huge thanks to everyone who has contributed to the richness of this challenging year. Here's praying for God's blessing on our community and our town for 2021 and beyond.

Mark Bennet

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

From Marcia Wadham

It's strange to think that this time last year, I was waiting to find out when my ordination selection interviews would take place, and what they would look like in a world which had gone almost entirely online. I had no idea whether or not I would be accepted for ordination training, so had no idea what my life would look like after the summer.

As it happened, I was accepted for training and life brought me to join you at St Mary's for a couple of years. It was a real joy to be able to join in a few weeks' worth of outdoor services in the churchyard before both the weather and the November lockdown stopped them from happening. Since then, it's been a huge privilege to see so many friendly faces on Zoom each week, and to be able to join with in-person activities wherever that has been possible.

As will have been reported elsewhere, it has been a strange time to be doing ministry, and even stranger to be doing ministry somewhere new, where opportunities for in-person activities have been so few and far between. Six months in, and I still have no concept of what a 'normal' Sunday looks like at St Mary's, much less what a 'normal' week looks like.

Despite these challenges, though, it has been a time of real blessing. I've been struck by the creativity that has been evident, enabling the church to focus on the things we have been able to do rather than the things we haven't. I've also sensed a real and unshakeable hope in a future where we will once again be able to meet together as God's people, to sing praise to God together, to share in communion (in both kinds) together and to chat together in fellowship over a cup of coffee.

I look forward to being able to share in all those things with you, but I am also thankful for the very different type of community I've been able to share with you over the last few months, and for the incredibly warm welcome I've received.

Lamentations 3: 22 -23

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

Marcia Wadham

From Revd Angela Brennan

If ink costs were no object I'd be submitting a photo diary — no words, just images, as it's hard putting to words what beginning curacy at such a time has been like. When people have commiserated me on the misfortune of being ordained in the middle of a global pandemic, my standard reply is that, not having been ordained before, I have nothing to compare it with! So in the absence of a 'proper' report (or a photo diary) let me share a few highlights of a lockdown curacy.



Outdoor services have been one of the great joys of lockdown for me — I love being outside, being a church without walls — it's how I think we are really called to be as a worshipping community. We were just emerging from the first lockdown when I went to my first 'in person' service, and when we all broke our bread I really felt like I could have been in a crowd of over 5000, on a windswept hill by Lake Galilee, all of us hoping for good news.



In my first weeks in post, I took my children over to the lakes and while we were there we discovered this quiet space, a little water-side chapel of green. The Celtic Christian tradition talks about 'thin' spaces where heaven seems near enough to

touch the earth. It was quiet at the lakes, if not 'silent' as the sign suggests, but there was a kind of stillness about the place with only the inquisitive buzz of children exploring, and birdsong in the air — in my book, this patch of earth in our own parish, is as 'thin' a space, as any.

That ministry is full of surprises, is one of its great blessings. I'm no kids TV presenter, but I have had more fun than I could have imagined recording school assemblies! Shadrach is my mischievous helper, he has planted seeds to illustrate resurrection, built a Lego house on sand and rock, and played the part of the shepherd who tried not to eat the lost sheep. It's been a steep, but enjoyable learning curve, and whether this translates into 'in person' collective worship remains to be seen...



I give thanks every day for being here with you at St B's and St Mary's. Thatcham Park School, where St B's meets, has up on it's wall the words of Paul to the Thessalonians: 'Encourage and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing'. How lucky am I to be somewhere with such a manifesto?!

I feel very thankful for God's many gifts, for the gift of a warm welcome, of worshipping communities that build each other up, of all the opportunities and connections we have around us, of a team that likes each other, of a wise and down-to-earth training incumbent, of work that doesn't feel like work, and of the privilege of being the person who is asked to say something about the love of God. I dearly hope that in the coming year, I will be able to add to these gifts, the chance to get to know you in person.

Angela Brennan

From Revd Leonard Onugha

It is almost half a year since the Area Dean of Reading informed me in a phone call that I was to start effectively as curate-in-charge of St Barnabas Emmer Green the very next day! That 'green light' was but one in a series of sudden changes that I have experienced and had to get my head around over the last year. Perhaps it is best to *begin at the begin*. As I left for home following a burial at the cemetery on the 18th of March 2020 amidst rising COVID-19 numbers, little did I know that it would be my last physical parochial duty for the best part of four months, but so it proved.

For the first month or thereabout, I fully embraced and enjoyed the solitude. I was mostly grateful for a little room in which to write the required theological reflections and academic essays that is the way of curacy in the diocese. I gladly tackled those alongside finishing off an Alpha course that I was running in conjunction with the Baptists. The relief however lengthened into restlessness as the weeks turned into months, and then the restlessness became boredom. I was most relieved therefore to be able to recommence physical meetings in the parish again later in July. With that experience in mind I was really very grateful to physically be in the parish in Emmer Green when the subsequent lockdowns came about. I could continue to be physically present for the parishioners and congregation, and in fact play a crucial role in providing the community with a focal point for grieving, when a young lad was fatally stabbed in the midst of all that.

Like for most people, the last year has also been very difficult for me, emotionally and mentally, and at times, it has been very bleak. There were periods in which I felt a real sense of isolation which led to feelings of confusion and anxiety about the future. This coupled with economic uncertainty and a fragile job market (even for clergy) led to feelings of despair on occasion, finding myself wondering 'what's the point of persisting in ministry?' Nothing new there, just one that was accentuated by COVID. At the same time I (and I'm sure many others) have been able to reflect more positively and to reassess our lives and priorities. Those positive reflections also enabled personal growth, and led to decisions to make good changes in a number of areas. Some of the changes have created room in my life and schedule, enabling me work on some interesting opportunities for Emmer Green and the diocese as they emerged.

I have worked with the diocese to create a role for a Development Enabler for minority groups within the diocese as well as the framework for a well-led network for ethnic minority groups too. I also became a Vocations Advisor and have so far worked with two candidates in the exploratory phase of their vocations journey. I additionally joined the National Mentors Register of the church in order to help increase the proportion of under-represented groups among the clergy of the Church. In the middle of all that, I also joined the production team for the diocese's Church at Home online services. I have been lead producer on three services to date, including Candlemas and Easter. My day job needs also be added to the above. I led the efforts to (first) regather the congregation at Emmer Green as a worshipping community, and subsequently enabled the transition back into the church building for the first time since March 2020, following a risk assessment. Additionally, I organised a vigil for the community at Emmer Green on the first anniversary of Olly Stephens' death, involving Bishop Olivia and the local MP, Matt Rodda. So, in all, I have had a varied and eventful time over the last year, but full of the blessing of God.

I look forward to the next year with a mix of excitement and trepidation, but as always moving forward toward it prayerfully.

Leonard

Parochial Church Council – Background and Proceedings

Thatcham PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Team Rector and the Team Vicar in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church – spiritual, pastoral, evangelistic and ecumenical.

The PCC met at St Mary's Church once during the year in February and virtually by ZOOM in October (following APCM) and in February 2021. The Standing Committee met 7 times virtually by ZOOM

Highlights of the year have been the imaginative ways adopted to keep up with the need to maintain contact and fellowship during this year of year of the pandemic.

Arrangements were made during 2020 for 9 baptisms (70 in 2019) and 3 (8) weddings. In addition there were 59 (54) funerals (19 with a service at St Mary's, 40 services at a crematorium)

Membership

Members of the PCC are either ex officio, co-opted or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. St Barnabas Church is represented on the PCC by up to 5 members elected by their own church meeting.

Committees

The PCC operates through a Standing Committee and working groups, which meet between full meetings of the Council. The Standing Committee is the only Committee required by law; it has power to transact business of the Council between meetings, subject to any decisions made by the PCC.

FINANCE REPORT

Report to the Accounts December 2020

St Mary's General Account (day to day running of church activities) shows a surplus of expenditure over income of £9,368 which after taking account of the surplus of £3,567 at the start of the year gives a negative balance of £5,081

The St Barnabas General Account shows a net loss of £2,052 in 2020 and a positive balance of £541 at the end of the year.

Incoming resources from donors to St Mary's (collections/stewardships/tax reclaims & donations) were £13,600 lower in 2020 than in 2019.

We again managed to pay the Parish Share (our contribution to the diocese for clergy stipends, housing and pensions) in full. The Parish Share was set at £95,377 in 2021 the same as in 2020. This means we have to make 12 equal payments of £7,869 each month (after deduction of the 1% rebate for payment by direct debit)

The intention to launch an appeal and attract grants to enable repairs to roof, floor and organ and improvements to the Meeting Room and kitchen had to be put on hold because of the pandemic as priority shifted to meeting the Parish Share. The pandemic also reduced the value of investments by about £5000 (to 252,980) and affected our ability to hold fundraising events for missions.

The need to increase Stewardship giving is now urgent, especially if we are to meet the running costs of both churches and pay the Parish Share again in full in 2021. If

anyone is thinking of increasing their Stewardship payments during 2021, please feel free to come to speak to any of the churchwardens or a member of the clergy.

We have a small team maintaining the books and banking the cash - Ann Watts at St Mary's and Bernie Ellison at St Barnabas. Particular thanks go to them and to Peter Harvey Di Gioia who provided invaluable support before moving away to Newark. Appointment of a replacement as Treasurer is a priority for 2021.

Tax Avenue have been appointed to examine the accounts which have been converted to a take advantage of QuickBooks software.

Investments and Fund Structure

There have been no changes to the structure of the St Mary's PCC investment funds during 2020.

There follows a brief description of the history, management and restrictions of each of these PCC managed funds.

Curates Housing and Expenses (formerly known as the Hatherley) Fund

The capital arose from the sale of a house given to the Church in 1935 for a succession of curates to live in. The PCC has a 29.4% share of the rent after deduction of expenses on a property in Station Road which was let by the Diocese as it was not required to house a curate. The income is applied for general parish purposes and so is **unrestricted**. The first call on any surplus income is the payment of curate / clergy expenses.

Thatcham Church of England Charity

The original capital arose from two-thirds of the sale proceeds of the Old Infant School in the Broadway; one-third is administered separately by the Diocesan Board of Education.

This charity is governed by a Charity Commission Scheme sealed on the 21st May 1980; the clear income from the permanent endowment is for furthering the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England in the ecclesiastical parish of St Mary's Thatcham and is therefore an **unrestricted** fund. All the income is applied in the parish.

The Church Estate Charity

Charity Commission ref – 00436

This is an ancient charity referred to in the Charity Commissioners Report of 1907; the income is to be applied to the upkeep of the church and the churchyard so this is a **restricted** fund.

Income is derived partly from investments and partly from 6/16ths of the income from Moor Meadow Charity, administered by Thatcham Parochial Charities.

The Rookery Church Fund

The small amount of income arising from the legacy by Mrs Hall who died in 1916, subject to the income being **restricted** to the fostering of the Sunday school. The Rookery was the name of the house.

Bankers: St Mary's PCC - Lloyds Bank plc & St Barnabas - HSBC
Independent Examiners: Tax Avenue, Turnfields Court,
Thatcham Investment Managers:

BlackRock Investment Managers, 12 Throgmorton Avenue London
EC2N 2DL
CCLA, Senator House, 85 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4ET

A summary of the Accounts together with the Independent Examiner's Report is attached at Appendix 2.

Stewardship Secretary's Report – St Mary's.

A total of £ 66,750 was given through the Stewardship Scheme in 2020 (£68,063 in 2019). This included £21,863 through the Parish Giving Scheme following its introduction in September 2018. Giving through weekly envelopes was 9,069 and standing order payments were £24,380. In addition £14,661 was reclaimed from HMRC (£16,587 in 2019).

By the end of 2020 there were 23 donors paying by Direct Debits through the Parish Giving Scheme. 27 donors were supplied with weekly envelopes (4 were not used -2 because of transfers to PGS). However whilst some of the givers using envelopes continued to find ways of using them many found the lack of regular services broke the routine of regular giving. 58 donors gave through Standing Orders.

Great thanks are due to the faithful members of the Stewardship Scheme who by regular and sacrificial levels of giving keep St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches going.

Please continue to review your giving at least annually – index linking is a principle worth considering. Occasional donations are greatly welcomed, but commitment to regular giving is essential if we are to budget for paying for our priests through the Parish Share, maintain the fabric and support sustainable growth of the church in Thatcham.

'Donate' facilities have been incorporated into the website for St Mary's.

I continue to positively recommend the Parish Giving Scheme to all regular givers. Over half the Dioceses in England have joined and together they cover the costs of the small administrative team based at Gloucester Diocese. All the remainder is paid direct to the relevant parishes by the 10th of each month and gift aid is claimed from HMRC and distributed to parishes about three days later. This significantly reduces costs and administration at the local level. Other bonuses are

- the donations can be index linked if the donors so choose, and
- the donations are paid as a single sum to the parish bank account thus avoiding the checking of multiple pages on Bank Statement entries, and
- it reduces the bank charges (currently about £25 per month) for handling cheque or cash donations.

I would again encourage everyone to make a will and to consider making a bequest to St Mary's. It is not difficult to arrange and can make a significant difference to the future of a growing church in Thatcham.

Chris Watts
Stewardship Secretary

Child Protection/Safeguarding report

Know your Safeguarding Team:

Leanne Cox - Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Officer for children and young people, Children's Advocate for St Mary's Church and Verifier. I oversee the safeguarding team, report to the PCC, link to the Diocese and keep records of risk assessments.

Ann Dibble – Safeguarding Officer for Vulnerable adults and the Safeguarding Training Administrator. Responsible for recording everyone's completed training and informing them when they need to renew their training.

Sue Ball – Safer Recruitment. Responsible for the appointing process, especially for youth and children workers, making sure they have the correct paperwork. Recording everyone's DBS checks and informing them when they need renewing.

Cath Forbes – Children's Advocate for St Barnabas.

Steve Rice & Leanne Cox – Verifiers – initiates the DBS process and checks documents of applicants.

There has been one safeguarding case this year which was referred to the Oxford Diocese Safeguarding Team. Rev Mark and Leanne Cox know the details, and this is now a closed case.

During lockdown I have been busy on Zoom, meeting other safeguarding officers in the diocese and also meeting the Oxford Diocese Safeguarding Team. It was lovely to come together with other parishes to discuss safeguarding updates, explore new areas of learning and how to respond to safeguarding concerns. I have also completed a Domestic Abuse Course. I have another one in September to discuss some new types of abuse that have just been identified such as Gas Lighting and Spiritual Abuse – training on these will follow in the future.

In every PCC meeting we make sure that safeguarding is on the agenda and ask if anyone has any concerns. I also started to revise signs and symptoms of certain types of abuse to keep it fresh in everyone's minds.

The Safeguarding Policy has been updated to include taking steps to protect children on the online world and using videos safely in lockdown. Risk assessments are currently all being updated for all children's groups.

Hopefully the Safeguarding Team can meet up again in person to review and work through the Safer Church Action Plan to make sure we are providing a safe and caring environment in our places of worship.

Leanne Cox

ABC during a pandemic!

ABC held its last face to face meeting on 11th March 2020. The notice to close to comply with government regulations due to Covid-19 went out on a Tuesday so I thought I had better turn out for ABC the next day just in case people had not heard.

And, sure enough a family turned up, so we had a few minutes together before saying our farewells until we knew not when.

I'm glad I did that because a few people came to church just to sit and pray and think about things. Just at that point we had not heard of social distancing and all the rest of it and certainly had not realised the severity of all that was about to unfold.

Although we haven't met in person for ABC for over a year we've kept in touch via email and Facebook. An email is sent round every week and Helen Cooke puts most of it on our ABC Facebook page – thank you Helen!

The email contains the story we would have shared together if we had been in St Mary's. Attached is a colouring sheet and a link to an online craft coupled with a photograph of Jason our favourite storytelling sheep dressed as a character from the story. He's sometimes helped by his friend Little Tom.

We also send round other relevant church news including Connect when it becomes available. We offer a listening ear and the opportunity to come into St Mary's for a prayer appointment. Several people have been in touch to keep us updated with their news.

The highlight of my daily walks has been when I have bumped into members of ABC past and present so we can catch up and share how we've been feeling – socially distanced of course!

We had the pleasure of seeing one or two ABC families on Christmas Eve as they came into church to light a candle. Many more families enjoyed the Nativity Trail painted by Thatcham Park school children and teachers. There were QR codes attached to the nativity boards which could be accessed using a Smart phone. Several ABC families past and present starred in the nativity videos contained within the codes, along with music and a telling of the Christmas story. Not quite the same as our traditional crib service but a very imaginative way of working within government guidelines – well done Nicola for all your technical expertise, creativity and encouragement!

The nativity boards were placed in the church yard by the site controller at Thatcham Park and a couple of church members, John from St Barnabas and Paul from St Mary's. A real sense of collaboration between both churches and school.

Lockdown has made us all more creative, and I hope we've done our best to help people through it.

We are very much looking forward to being able to meet in person in the meantime we continue via Facebook and email.

Brenda Harland

Children and Young People @ St Mary's 2019

Groups for young people are held on 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sunday of the month during the school year. We meet during the 10.00 am communion service in the meeting room. We aim to provide an enjoyable atmosphere where young people can learn the teachings of the bible at their own pace.

Our material is aimed at ages 5-11 years and we study the bible through craft,

prayer and games. Time is spent discussing the story and thought given to how the teaching applies to our daily lives.

Pathfinders

(11 – 14+ years)

Due to Covid restrictions young people's groups and Pathfinders have not met since 16th March 2020.

We look forward to seeing our young people in church and welcoming them back to their groups soon.

Helen Holman

Music at St. Mary's

Last year, I reported that our organ was very poorly. Unfortunately, I don't think that the enforced rest this year will have helped with its problems. Like most things, the organ and choir have been redundant for most of the year.

We have tried to keep in touch doing what we love. In July, we made our first foray into the land of digital and virtual choirs (sound only – none of could face the idea of videoing ourselves). The idea was to sing along and record on Zoom, from our own homes, to a backing track supplied by Tim. Some of the choir managed it but most didn't. Recording your own voice part alone at home does not do it justice and in fact it can sound awful. Not good for the ego. However the end result, after some clever electronic linking by John Hicks, was not too bad, but it wasn't good enough to encourage us to repeat the experiment.

Instead, later in the year when we were able to meet in the church in groups of 6, we arranged for two sessions a week to enable us to record as many hymns and anthems as we could to cover services for Harvest, Remembrance and Christmas. All the way through October and November five of us plus Tim recorded items on Fridays which were then relayed to a further group of six on the following Wednesday who added their voices to the original recording. A big thankyou to Mat Evans for managing all the recordings and to Tim for his excellent accompaniment.

The donation of a really good amplifier and speaker system (many thanks to the anonymous donor) meant that we could create a reasonable sound in order to support the outside services which took place throughout October. November services were accompanied live by Tim and six choir members. A small group of singers also managed to sing carols live in early December around streets in the town centre. We were part of a Churches Together and Town Council initiative to bring some Christmas cheer to Thatcham residents. This worked well and may be repeated this year.

Our recordings also came in useful for some Civic occasions. We supplied all the hymns for the Remembrance Service live streamed from the Memorial and Christmas carols for the turning on of the lights.

The highlight and real privilege felt by some of the choir and Tim was being able to come together in the church to support the live streamed service on Christmas

morning. That was the last opportunity we had to be together, albeit a small choir and no live congregation and we now really cannot wait to get back to singing for you all.

Viv Druce

St Barnabas Church

What a strange year in the life of our church! At the start of all of this none of us foresaw that one year in we would be celebrating our second Easter apart. There have been big challenges for us all but also moments of real hope. A huge highlight was Angela joining us as curate in July and she, along with her family, have already brought so many good things to our community.

In this report I'd like to highlight a few of these things as we look back and also reflect on all that is to come.

Services

In the last year the majority of our services have been online via either our podcast or on Zoom. Our music group has recorded fresh music for us regularly (they have at least an album's worth of material now!) and our worship together has evolved over this time.

There have been people we have really missed who haven't been able to join us online or in person this year as they seek to keep safe. There have also been new people that have joined us that have encouraged us and brought new life through this difficult time. At times we have been able to be back in person and have been tremendously grateful to the school for allowing us to meet there when restrictions allowed.

For me the spirit of St B's is that we know we are a church and a community wherever we are. Meeting in a community building gives us a sense that we are a community without walls, that we are church wherever we are. Lockdown hasn't changed that but nonetheless, we really do miss each other!

Small Groups

Our small groups have continued to meet this year including a new online study group that looked at the Creeds and now are studying Mark's gospel together. We also produced a series of Podcasts on Christian basics which we have been sharing through our new Instagram feed. Instagram has been a fruitful way for us to connect with others in our community during this time when we are missing the face-to-face interactions that our usual groups and activities bring.

Supporting the School

A huge part of our community life is, of course, that we meet within Thatcham Park School and we always seek to be a blessing to that community. This year we have gone online in our support, initially through weekly videos for home schooling families and later into weekly assembly videos to be used in class. We've also led class sessions via Zoom on topics such as Forgiveness and the Easter story. It is a real delight to see the children, even if only through a screen!

At Christmas we enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with the school in the form of our Nativity Trail. The school created some truly stunning painted boards to tell the Christmas story which were accompanied by a QR code telling the story with actors from our ABC Toddler group past and present. It was encouraging to see that even under big restrictions we can still work together in creative ways.

Supporting Families, Parents and Babies

One of the significant pieces of outreach we have been part of this year, and one that we hope to see grow in the coming year, is our outreach to families and particularly new parents. Over Christmas we launched a campaign to collect supplies for the West Berkshire Baby Bank and had a great response.

In October we led activities for the Baby Loss Awareness Week including the memory tree in St Mary's Churchyard. That week truly showed how far the impact of baby loss goes, through the ribbons on the tree and those who attended our open church evening and lit a candle. We hope to continue to raise awareness and offer support for baby loss this coming year.

Dreaming New Dreams

None of us really know what life will look like, or what our community will be like on the other side of this Pandemic. What we do know is that God has so much more for our community and we have been seeing glimpses of this during this time. In this coming year we have two new projects, dreamed up in lockdown, that we will be embarking upon.

The first of these is to launch a Baby Café to support new parents. Having a baby during this pandemic has been tremendously challenging and isolating for many. The baby café will be a safe space for parents to come with their new baby; find support, friendship and a big slice of cake! We have received full funding for our project from the Diocese of Oxford Development Fund so we will be beginning very soon.

Our second project, dreamed up after seeing how enthusiastically outdoor worship was received during the pandemic, is Muddy Church. In the coming year we will be launching a new monthly service down at the Nature Discover Centre for families to connect with God, with nature and with each other. Every session will feature storytelling and a range of seasonal activities – and, of course, mud! We're very excited for this new opportunity and collaboration with the Nature Discovery Centre.

And so the future may be unknown but we are optimistic and hopeful that this next chapter in the life of St B's will be a great one.

Nicola Hulks

Deanery Synod Report

Thatcham Parish is part of the Newbury Deanery – a group of parishes in West Berkshire running as far as Hungerford and Lambourn and up to Compton and The Ridgeway. In some recent documents the Deanery has described itself briefly as follows:

Newbury Deanery covers some 105 square miles of the western part of West Berkshire. It includes the urban centres of Newbury and Thatcham, the market town of Hungerford and an extensive rural hinterland. The eleven

benefices (roughly speaking groups of churches overseen by a single priest) encompass 36 parishes ranging in population from over 25,000 to under 100, together with 42 church buildings, and one church which has no building of its own. There are 15 paid clergy in the Deanery and three House for Duty Posts (unpaid clergy) – not counting curates in training.

The Deanery is an administrative unit of the Church of England which is part of its structure of “synodical government” – the way the Church makes decisions about its internal workings where they affect more than a single parish. Traditionally the Deanery has had two functions – (the money function) allocating the parish share which pays for the clergy and support costs (just under £1million for Newbury Deanery) and then collecting it; and (the people function) negotiating the deployment of clergy at a time when clergy numbers nationally have been declining. More recently the people function has been developed into a more positive mode of mission planning – actively supporting parishes and their people to meet the common challenges we face. The Newbury Deanery Synod also maintains a link with the South African parish of Batlharos in the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman.

The Deanery is run by the Deanery Synod. Like the PCC this is a mixture of clergy and elected lay members, but in the Deanery case the members represent the different parishes. The Deanery Synod elects a standing committee and appoints officers to act as an executive, and to progress the various aspects of its work. It may also receive requests from the Diocese of Oxford or from the National Church to respond to matters of interest – this happened with the legislation on women becoming bishops. The Deanery Synod can also raise matters of concern and ask for these to be addressed at a Diocesan or national level.

2020 was the final year of a four year term for elected lay members.

A sincere vote of thanks was extended to all Parishes that did their best to meet their 2020 Share allocation. In aggregate, the Deanery paid 93.6% of the total requested by the Diocese – a shortfall of £61,635.

This was slightly greater than the 5% shortfall that was anticipated at the October Deanery Synod. 21 Parishes paid their Share in full, and 8 Parishes managed to pay part of their allocation. For the first time in many years, the Deanery did not qualify for the full 3% rebate on meeting its allocation in full. We did, however, meet 50% of our allocation by 31st July which earned a rebate of 1%.

The Deanery focus continues to be on discerning local needs and on responding to Bishop Steven’s Common Vision initiatives.

Thank you for your support for Mary, Tony and myself who have served as representatives over the last three years and to Catherine Forbes who has joined the team.

Chris Watts

St. Mary's Church Bellringers

Following ringing for Christmas 2019 and New Year Ringing 2020, Bell Founders John Taylor and Co. arrived, as planned to carry out some relatively minor maintenance items, to the rope pulleys and new bearings to bell numbers 7,8,9 & 10. The work was carried out very efficiently within one week, with assistance from Richard Marshall and Mark Backhouse. Although we missed one Tuesday night practice, the bells were rung on the Sunday before and after the work commenced.

The cost of £6,620 plus vat was met from funds held by the PCC for bell maintenance.

We rang two quarter peals in February as our contribution to the Newbury Branch Quarter Peal Week.

I had a minor operation in January and did not return to ringing until March, just before the first lockdown. My thanks to Rachel Backhouse for running the ringing during my absence. With the ringing room small and poorly ventilated, and following discussion with Revd. Mark, it has not been possible to return to general ringing during the remainder of the year.

However, on Saturday 15 August, the tenor bell was tolled 75 times as part of the Royal British Legion Remembrance Service for VJ Day. The tenor was tolled again in November on Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance Day, 11 times on these occasions. My thanks to Mark Backhouse for carrying out these Acts of Remembrance.

In August, we were all shocked and saddened to learn of the sudden death of Di Bridle, a regular Sunday Service and practice night ringer at St Mary's. She was a very competent ringer and made a much valued contribution to our ringing here, in the Newbury Branch and further afield. She will be greatly missed by us and many other ringers..

On a happier note, Margaret Robinson, our previous Tower Secretary for 14 years' celebrated her 80th birthday on 16 April. As is customary at St Mary's, Margaret was given an engraved table bell. Unfortunately with strict lockdown rules in force at the time, it was not possible to present the bell personally to Margaret and so it was sent by Royal Mail Special Delivery with our best wishes.

Bill Butler, who had fallen and broken his hip earlier in the year, became 90 on 7 August. With lockdown restrictions relaxed, Sue and I made a socially distanced visit to Bill in his garden to present him with two plants and a Waitrose token for "wine, cheese or anything you fancy" on behalf of the ringers.

A number of ringers made individual socially distanced garden visits in the following days to wish him well.

We are currently, awaiting further information and guidance on how and when it may be possible to resume ringing.

Tony Smith
(Tower Captain)

Churchwardens

Special arrangements were required in 2020 to enable local incumbents to ensure the incoming churchwardens were properly 'charged' with their responsibilities. This took place at St Mary's in November 2020 at the first opportunity following the postponed Annual Meeting held using ZOOM on 8th October.

Particular thanks go to Viv Druce and Glenn Peters who stood down after periods of valuable service and to Paul Bullock and Colin Waters who have both returned to the ranks of churchwardens

If you are new to the Anglican Church you may not know that the wardens are the eyes and ears of the Bishop in the parish. They have an obligation to ensure that the

Rector and Clergy are doing as they ought (they most certainly are), that the business of the church is running satisfactorily (better than might be expected under the circumstances) and that the fabric is in good order (oh dear ! see below). They are also tasked to keep the congregation in order !

All three of the wardens with Mark are trustees for the Thatcham Almshouse and Thatcham Relief in Need Charities, working with other agencies to help those people in our community who have fallen on hard times or with health and disability issues.

We have a faithful band of people working in the background (and in a few cases obliged to remain in post during the pandemic) as cleaners, servers, gardeners, sidespeople, coffee makers, pew removal and replacement, assisting at services, singers, little church providers, providers of home communions, hospital visitors....and many more jobs. The church would not function without them. If you feel that you would like to contribute to God's work in any way, all help is welcome regardless of how little you are able to do. Please get in touch with me or Ann the Parish Administrator or indeed Sue Stevenson who maintains the rota.

Chris Watts

Fabric

In summary the log of work by contractors and volunteers to the fabric of St Mary's includes:

- Spring and autumn clean and clear
- Monitor water/tree damaged areas to north nave wall and Pathfinders Room and the south west corner of the Meeting Room
- Test lightning conductor
- Test and service Fire Extinguishers
- Service heating boilers
- Tune and minor repairs to organ (noting the Choir manual is not operational)
- Replacement of five floodlights around the tower with LED lamps

Minimal progress has been made on the project to repair the organ as priority had to be given to pandemic issues.

The PCC's architect, Christian Randall of Wantage submitted his first five yearly report on the state of the fabric in 2018. He listed the regular concerns of clearing gutters and repairs to rainwater downpipes, repairs to stonework and flint facing and ivy on the tower. In addition he noted:

- the need to address the repair of the roof and valley gutter to the western end of the north aisle and above the Pathfinders Room
- significant dampness and deterioration to the plaster on the external walls to north and south aisles,
- damaged floor tiles and 'subsidence' to the central and northern aisles
- rotting of timber thresholds to both north doors.
- a series of minor repairs to stonework

Attention to these items was recommended within 18 months. In addition improvements are required to the Meeting Room and kitchen. An Appeal has yet to be launched for funds to cover the cost of the organ and building repairs, totally refurbished kitchen complying to current building and health and safety regulations

and further improvements to Meeting Room and storage. A Fundraising Group has not been able to make progress due to the pandemic.

Thanks are again due to Chris Druce, Paul Bullock and also to Mark Backhouse for help with general repairs and lower level lamp replacements, to Marion and a team of dedicated gardeners for work on the flower borders, to Rita for polishing the brass and to all who regularly clean, arrange the flowers and maintain the brassware.

Chris Watts

Inventory

Four panels depicting the Nativity were prepared by Thatcham Park School and St Barnabas and displayed in a Churchyard Trail over Christmas 2020. The panels are stored on the gallery. 10 crosses were constructed for a Holy Week trail in 2021. The panels and crosses are to be stored on the gallery.

The Meeting Room clock has been replaced.

The Inventory now includes the amplifier / speaker referred to by Viv in her report on Music.

Chris Watts

Sewing group and Flowers.

The Sewing Group has not met but continues to sew as required. As well as making linen items for use at communion we also repair items and alter the length of choir robes when the user changes or grows. We have been given over time lots of fabrics, lace, and other sewing needs and these we use to create items for the craft sale and raffle usually in November but in 2021 at the Annual Meeting. Please feel free to visit us in the chapel at 2pm when we can get back to normal, and join in if you wish even if all you can do is tacking!

Marion and friends.

There are now a lovely group of flower arrangers with many differing talents all of which are welcomed and encouraged. Display were created for Christmas and Easter and the rota for Sundays will restart soon.

Marion and team.

Little Churches, Home Communions.

"Little Churches"

The 'Little Churches' will start again soon when regulations allow.

These churches are made up of people who live in the residential / sheltered housing in Thatcham. Communion is offered along with readings, a short bible verse and narrative and prayers. Some services also have one of two hymns and each is usually accompanied by refreshments either before or after the service. Usually held on a Saturday morning, the service the exact time varies from location to location. Visits will be made to: Nevil Court, Ferndale Court, Gilbert Court, Walnut Close and Thatcham Court. This service provides a lifeline to those who are unable to attend a traditional Sunday service or simply prefer the informal setting of a common lounge.

Nothing would happen without the faithful dedication of a handful of volunteers for whom I thank on behalf of the Clergy. If anyone is interested in helping out should speak to any of the clergy team.

West Berkshire Community Hospital

When permitted we will resume the practice of meeting each Sunday afternoon at 1:45, for a short service of Holy Communion at the hospital. Volunteers from St. Mary's and other churches in Thatcham and Newbury give up their time to sit with patients and other visitors. The service lasts about 40 minutes and over the years numbers increased significantly. It was not uncommon to have 10 patients attend. Each one is looked after. In some cases, it may be the only time a patient will be able to interact with other people as sadly, some patients receive no visitors at all. The valuable outreach is only possible because of the volunteers who make it happen.

My personal thanks go to Joan Collins and Margaret Holmes for their commitment to this vital ministry.

If you feel able to give up an hour or so every now and again, please come and find me.

Steve Rice

C.A.M.E.O. Come and Meet Each Other

CAMEO started in January 2014 with the aim of a weekly meeting place to bring together people in Thatcham who live on their own, who feel lonely after bereavement, or are unable to get out, to come together to make friends, and chat over homemade cake and a cuppa.

Since those early days the group grew substantially and was self funded with the introduction of a weekly raffle. Joan, Viv, Ann and myself, along with three drivers volunteered to serve the group and our reward was to see CAMEO flourish. The number of people coming rose to over 40, but they did not come every week. Cakes and tea were served during the afternoon, mostly home baked cakes, although on special occasions we buy doughnuts and they go down very well!

The process of restarting CAMEO will begin as soon as the restrictions are lifted.

Meanwhile we continue to collect milk bottle tops for The Thames Valley Air Ambulance charity with bags of tops appearing in church from around the parish! Over £110 has been raised from milk bottle tops. **Only milk bottle tops please.**

pp Theresa Lucas

The Thatcham Parochial Charities

I wrote a report on the Charities last year, as an introduction as to who we are and what we do in the local community. The Charities play a significant role in the life of our church. The rector and all three churchwardens are ex officio members of the Board of Trustees and I (Chris Druce) am currently a representative of Thatcham Town Council and Chairman of Trustees.

There are 2 principal charities – the 'Thatcham Parochial Almshouse Charity' and 'Thatcham Relief in Need Charity'. We cover the area of the 'Ancient Borough of Thatcham', encompassing modern Thatcham, together with Cold Ash, Midgham and

Greenham. The trustees have a wide remit of responsibility, covering various needs of our local community.

The Almshouses – The first almshouses in Thatcham were established by Thomas Loundyes, in 1446 AD. Some of the present almshouse flats, in Chapel Street are named after him. To qualify for accommodation, applicants should be 'of a certain age', a resident in the Ancient Borough and can demonstrate a housing need. All flats are currently occupied. As you can imagine, this year has had special calls upon the trustees, to ensure the continuing health and well-being of all our residents. The clerk's regular visits were initially replaced by weekly telephone calls, until doorstep visits could resume. Maintenance work needed to be reduced to essential work only, with contractors wearing necessary PPE and any non-essential work put on hold. Hand sanitizer stations and information signage was installed in all properties and additional cleaning in communal areas was introduced. Fortunately, there was no major outbreak of virus in any of the properties.

Relief in Need Charity –

The object of this charity is to relieve, either generally or individually, persons resident in the Ancient Borough, who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress, by making grants of money or providing items or services to reduce that need.

As with the Almshouse Charity, this year had very special needs for our local community and Relief in Need was very much 'Open for Business'. During this year, the charity awarded grants in excess of £22,000. This is the highest value since 2007, the year of the floods! This included £7,500 to a local, Coronavirus appeal fund, which was match-funded by local charity, Greenham Trust. A further grant was awarded to a local youth hub, specifically to help young people with problems during the epidemic. And, of course, there were the normal requests for white goods, flooring and specialist equipment for those with disabilities.

So, you can see, it has been an eventful year. Lockdown does not mean that everything stops !!

If you know of anyone who may need a helping hand, a piece of equipment otherwise unaffordable, do, please, have a word with me, Mark, or one of the churchwardens.

Thankyou – Chris Druce

House Groups

Thursday group has not been meeting over the past year, but I think we all miss our weekly natter and look forward to meeting 'Face to Face' when we can. The dynamics of the group will change when we get back together so we will be at a good point to welcome new people who would like to give 'House Group' a go.

Julie Dunwell

Wednesday house group has attempted a mixture of approaches, over the last months and we are hoping to return to some kind of structured learning, in May; at home or at St. Mary's.

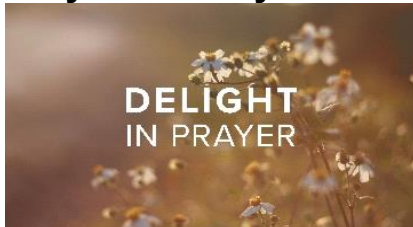
During the last lock down we met via Zoom for informal chats and support. We had a new adventure lead by Ben Hulks, who was part of Wednesday house group. It takes place on Tuesdays at 7.30 and has all along been a structured

learning/discussion time. A different day and Zoom has worked really well for this group!

Lourdes Cottam

Further details on the website or from the Parish Office

Prayer Ministry at St. Mary's



This year we have been praying in our homes, on our walks, on the phone and video calls, in fact wherever we have safely been whilst we haven't been able to pray with people in person.

Sue Stevenson.

MISSIONS



Thatcham Christian Aid Committee

This year has obviously been a difficult year for fundraising with the pandemic. However, we have kept going as well as we could online, and we did manage to raise a magnificent £1243 in 2019/20 (the Christian Aid financial year runs from October to September). We have held a Zoom Quiz and Zoom Bingo, as well as an online AGM. As I write this, in March, we have already raised £1360 this year, and have Christian Aid week to come (May 10th to 16th).

So we are incredibly grateful to all our supporters in Thatcham, not least those who have donated from St Mary's. You have been incredibly generous.

However, this compares with about £4000 that we raised in 2018/19, and this drop in giving has been replicated across the country. Also, the needs are greater during a pandemic (imagine having Covid in a refugee camp with no running water).

Equally, other needs don't go away, and work with these is continuing - Christian Aid week this year has focused on those suffering from climate change. Droughts are now more frequent and intense due to the climate crisis, and millions of people in

Kenya are struggling to get enough food and water. So Christian Aid has, for example, helped communities to build earth dams, so that when the rains do come they can store the water they need to live.

Sometimes very little giving on our part can make an immense difference. However, we know that this is a difficult time with many calls on our money, and some of us can't afford to give. So if you can't give, please do pray for us. Or consider doing something instead - we are a small committee, and always welcome new members or new fundraising ideas. Please do talk to me, or Mary Baker and Steve Rice (the other Committee members at St Mary's) if you would like to know more.

Lastly, I would like to give thanks to God for all the support you have given us and Christian Aid throughout the year.

Sarah Bennet

Chair, Thatcham Christian Aid Committee

Fairtrade and Traidcraft

The aim of FAIRTRADE is to secure a better deal for farmers and traders in 74 countries around the world. FAIRTRADE was founded by CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Traidcraft, The World Development Movement and The National Federation of Women's Institutes. The Headquarters is in Bonn, Germany.

The key areas of activity are to:

- Provide independent certification of the trade chain for products and licensing of the FAIRTRADE mark on products
- Help in growing demand for FAIRTRADE products and empowering producers to sell to traders and retailers.
- Work with their partners to support producer organisations and their networks.
- Raise awareness of the need for FAIRTRADE with the public.

The organisation has 1,5 million farmers/workers and 1210 FAIRTRADE certified producer organisations. 25% of all FAIRTRADE workers are women. Products are sold by all 5 of major UK supermarkets and over £23 FAIRTRADE premium is generated from sales in the UK.

FACTS:

- A typical poor family in a poor country spend 70% of its income on food.
- Small holder farmers grow 70% of the world's food but make up half of the world's hungriest people.
- 1.4 billion people in the developing world live in poverty, 300 million children go to bed hungry every day.
- The richest 85 people in the world have more wealth than the poorest half of the world
- FAIRTRADE promote better education and healthcare.

Typical products include: tea, coffee, sugar, sweets, pasta, biscuits, cleaning products, home products, fashion products, toys and stationery.

A stall selling a limited range of food products begin again in the Meeting Room every 2nd Sunday each month when Services resume. Products can be ordered from the TRAIDCRAFT catalogue.

Relan Clarke

Children's Society

Collecting boxes at St Mary's and St Barnabas are used to support the Children's Society in this parish. £40 was sent to the Society in 2020. Collecting boxes are available for anyone wanting to support the Society in its work with children.

The money goes to help the Society and its network of centres and projects to deliver specialist services for children who face disaster and danger in their daily lives; children who are unable to find the support they need elsewhere.

If anyone would like to take on the organisation of events for the Society, please speak to Ann Watts or any of the Churchwardens

Ann Watts

USPG

USPG is working with the Anglican Church in Zambia to develop healthcare and leadership programmes that will have an impact on the life and outreach of the church and community. Support was given for training of specialists at the Hospital of St Francis at Katete in Zambia.

£719 was given to US in 2020 thanks largely to Cream Teas in the churchyard.

If you would like to help, please speak to Ann Watts (864567) to arrange for a collecting Globe.

Ann Watts

West Berks Foodbank



At the start of the Covid pandemic the Foodbank rapidly changed its operational processes when all Foodbank Centres closed to clients in line with Government guidance. From seeing clients face to face, food parcels were delivered direct to clients' homes by a new army of volunteers, many of whom were recruited from people on furlough from their usual jobs.

Thatcham parish has continued to support the Foodbank with donations whenever possible and in various ways. St Mary's became a focal point for the wider community's generous response at Harvest Festival and to the Reverse Advent Calendar scheme in December. Many people continued to donate in the supermarket permanent collection boxes or they arranged a home collection via the Foodbank's newly formed 'Food on your Doorstep' initiative. This idea of leaving donations on the doorstep to be collected helped to keep everyone safe whilst maintaining the level of donations needed.

By mid-March 2021 the Foodbank had fed 9589 people – almost twice as many people as in the previous reporting period. This staggering number reflects those who had lost their jobs, businesses folding, becoming ill or being on furlough.

As well as giving food parcels to individuals and families, the Foodbank has also supported schools, other organisations and those temporarily housed in hotels. Meanwhile donations have poured in from supermarkets donating fresh produce to supplement the standard food parcels, from catering organisations forced to shut and villages getting together to co-ordinate collections via social media groups. Many people donated money too.

All of this has enabled the Foodbank to provide the necessary food support to those in need in West Berkshire.

Thank you to everyone.

Sue Stevenson

Rainbows and Rangers (Girlguiding at St. Mary's)



Both of the Girlguiding groups that would normally meet each week at the back of St. Mary's have continued to meet online through Zoom. The Rainbows (5-7 year olds) and Rangers (14-18 year olds) have done all sorts of things from game and crafts to pamper evenings and escape rooms. 'Goody bags' have been sent out to the girls each term with all the craft and activity materials that they need for the online evenings. ... but both the girls and the leaders can't wait until they can meet in person.


If there is anyone who would like to volunteer to help with the Rainbows or Rangers please contact Julie, julie@dunwell.org or if you would like for information www.girlguiding.org.uk/

Connect

Connect, our parish magazine, is published ten times a year, double issues being December/January and July/August. Particular emphasis was made of circulating the magazine on the website and hand delivery on request. The magazine includes news, information and illustrations about services and events in St. Mary's and St. Barnabas. All of our clergy team provide a regular article but more contributors are always welcome. Any articles or adverts to be published can be sent to Steve Rice, steverice1@virginmedia.com, or Julie Dunwell, julie@dunwell.org.

Julie Dunwell

Service Rota Teams

	<p>A much smaller version of the rota has been operating during this year as we all negotiated what churches and their congregations were allowed to do.</p> <p>How blessed we were to be able to hold services in the church grounds during the good weather; many thanks to those who provided an outside PA system and pre-recorded music. Thank you to everyone who coped with differing weather challenges to read the lectionary readings or lead the prayers.</p> <p>During the winter and spring periods our services transferred to Zoom so thanks also to those who volunteered to read and lead prayers for these.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sue Stevenson</p>

St Mary's Church Website

The web site was very active and full of information, announcements and activities. Unfortunately, the pandemic has severely reduced what St. Mary's is able to do and as a consequence the web site has reflected this. As a result of this quieter period the following version controlled documents have been produced or updated to ensure that the management and maintenance of the web site can be transferred to other individuals in the future.

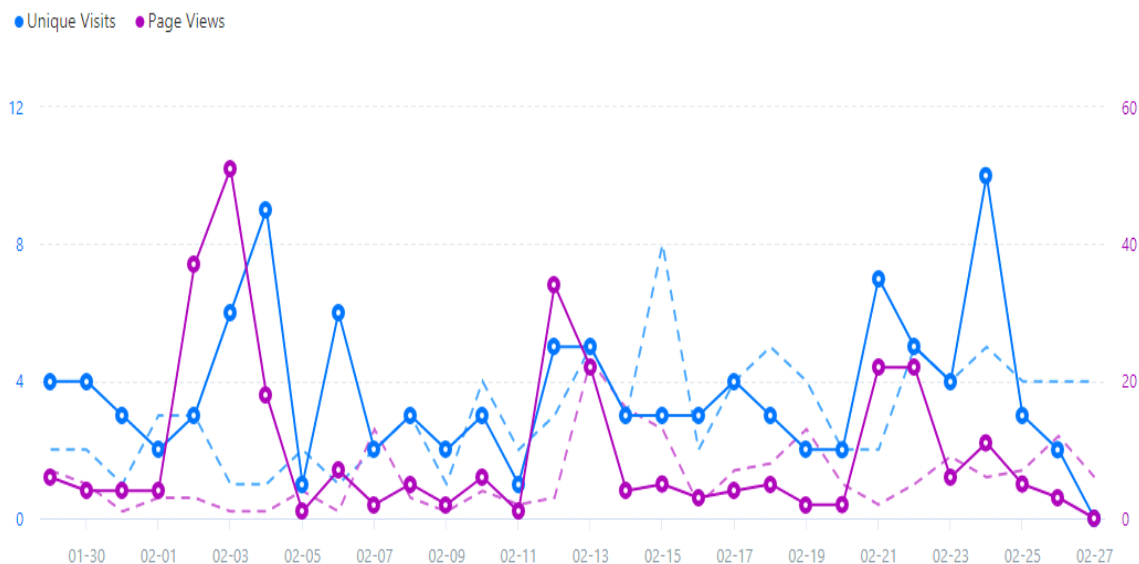
- Domain Name Hosting
- Web Master Job Spec
- Web Site On-Line Contracts
- Web Site User Guide

These documents have all been issued for review.

The contract with Fasthosts for hosting the domain name (stmarysthatcham.org.uk) has been changed and previous costs of around £160 per annum which included the old web site are now £12.59 per year. Similarly, the web site hosting by Weebly has seen a saving of £19 per annum having reduced the annual cost from £58 to £39 per year.

There have been changes to the Weebly web site environment and as a consequence the usage reports and statistics do not have quite the same format as those given at the last APCM. For the month of February 2021 the number of hits and related page views is shown in the graph below. What this plot shows is fairly consistent with much of the activity over the last couple of years. The most likely explanation of the small number pages viewed per visit is a reflection on the ease of use of the web site and how quickly users can find the information that they need.

The previous period (January 2021) is shown as dotted lines.



As lockdown begins to ease, the number of visits to the web site is increasing as shown by the following charts.

Overview

Daily



January 29, 2021 - February 27, 2021



The following tables show the most visited pages and the internet search engines that were used to access St. Mary's web site.

Top Active Pages February 2021		Referring Sites	
Page Name	Views	Referrer	Views
/	60	www.google.com	28
/services.html	19	www.google.co.uk	4
/contact.html	18	www.bing.com	1
/bulletin-connect.html	17	uk.search.yahoo.com	1
/whos-who.html	15	duckduckgo.com	1
/covid19-restrictions.html	14	Google continues to be the major search engine being used to find and access the St. Mary's web site. Although <u>Google.com</u> far exceeds <u>Google.co.uk</u> . It is not possible to determine if these are international searches or just people using <u>.com</u> instead <u>.co.uk</u> .	
/history.html	9		
/electoral-roll.html	9		
/donate-giving.html	9		
/st-barnabas.html	8		

The web site is wholly reliant on its content from all participants who are directly and indirectly involved with St. Mary's and who produce information for general consumption and who organise events. The timely provision of such notices is greatly appreciated and helps to promote the church activities and as can be seen from the tables above, keeps a very wide audience well informed. If there is an announcement to make, then it should be on the web site. Please keep the information flowing.



Minutes of the Thatcham Annual Parish Meeting by ZOOM on Thursday 8th October 2020 commencing at 7.05pm.

Attendance: Revd Mark Bennet (in Chair), Revd Nicola Hulks, Revd Brenda Harland, Revd Leonard Onugha, Revd Angela Brennan, retired priests Ven Michael Harley and Revd John Coombs and 31 residents of Thatcham

Apologies received from: Gay and Tony Collie, Alison Dean, Peter Harvey-Di Gioia, Debbie and Colin Waters, Viv Druce, Pam Hicks and Henry Moffatt.

The Revd Mark Bennet opened the meeting with prayer.

01

Minutes of the meeting held on 9th April 2019 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

02

Election of Churchwardens

Paul Bullock, Colin Waters and Chris Watts were proposed and seconded and elected to serve as Churchwardens for the year 2020/2021

Mark thanked the wardens for their work in the past year and Glenn and Viv for their service over many years.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

.....Chairman

.....date

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held by Zoom on Thursday 8th October 2020, commencing at 7.40 pm.

Attendance: Revd Mark Bennet (in Chair), Revd Nicola Hulks, Revd Brenda Harland, Revd Leonard Onugha, Revd Angela Brennan, retired priests Ven Michael Harley and Revd John Coombs and 31 residents of Thatcham

Apologies received from: Gay and Tony Collie, Alison Dean, Peter Harvey-Di Gioia, Debbie and Colin Waters, Viv Druce, Pam Hicks and Henry Moffatt.

Minutes of the APCM on 9th April 2019 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

Matters arising

None

Annual Report

Proceedings of the PCC as summarised in the Report were noted.

Fabric of St Mary's and the Log Book. It was agreed that the logbook for 2019/20 and the amended Inventory be agreed and placed in the records of St Mary's.

Inventory. It was noted that two altar candles presented by Revd Marion Fontaine in memory of Win Easen and blessed by Bishop Steven had been added to the Inventory together with the air conditioning equipment installed to the Ringing Room and Tower Roof in December 2019/February 2020.

The report of the activities of St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches in the past year was presented to the meeting. Following a proposal from Mark Bennet, seconded by Mary Baker, it was adopted unanimously.. Thanks were expressed to all those who contribute to the work in the parish.

It was reported that there were currently 192 names on the Electoral Roll as revised 1st October 2020.

Other matters noted from the Report included:

Mark expressed thanks for the work of all those groups and the individuals responsible for the wide and varied activities recorded in the Annual Report.

In particular, he referred to the work of the Safeguarding team in dealing with the constant stream of requirements, revision to policies and guidance and in keeping up to date the certification people working with children and vulnerable adults. Leanne had prepared a draft annual policy update for the APCM which had been circulated. Attention was drawn to the recognition of concerns regarding 'spiritual abuse'.

The Policy statement for 2020 was approved without dissent.

Presentation of Accounts

Chris Watts presented the accounts as approved by the PCC on 24th February 2020 as amended as recommended in the report and statement of Simon Witcomb the Independent Examiner. He expressed thanks for help received over the year from Peter Harvey Di Gioia, Bernadette Ellison and Ann Watts.

Chris noted that the Parish Share had again been paid in full and within the required timetable thus qualifying for the maximum available rebate. The General Account for St Mary's had shown a surplus of £5,500 for 2019 and a in the cumulative surplus of £3,567 and the General Fund for St Barnabas had shown a surplus of £765 over the year

Proposed by Mark Bennet, seconded by Steve Rice and agreed unanimously that the Accounts for 2019 be approved. The meeting thanked Peter, Bernie, Ann and Chris for their work on the Accounts.

Appointment of Independent Examiners

The Meeting accepted the recommendation that Tax Avenue Accountants of Turnfields Gate, Thatcham be appointed to examine the accounts for 2020

Election of representatives to Newbury Deanery Synod

The meeting received nominations for Antony Collie, Lourdes Cottam, Mary Stagg and Chris Watts to be elected as representative for St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches on Newbury Deanery Synod for the period 2020/4

Election of PCC 2017/8

John Hicks, Leanne Fowler, Bernadette Ellison and Lourdes Cottam were elected to PCC to represent St Barnabas. (Cath Forbes subsequently agreed to substitute for Lourdes Cottam)

Chris Druce, Margaret Holmes, Lynne Starr, Ann Watts had all served 3 years and were due to stand down. Steve Rice had decided to resign from PCC. The meeting accepted the nomination of Viv Druce, Kevin Dunwell, Ann Watts and Emma Watts to membership of the PCC. Chris Druce agreed to allow his willingness to be co-opted as representative of the Social Committee to be referred to the next meeting of the PCC.

In summary the PCC includes

Ex officio members,

The clergy:

Revd Mark Bennet, Revd Nicola Hulks, Revd Brenda Harland, Revd Leonard Onugha and Revd Angela Brennan

Churchwardens:

Paul Bullock, Colin Waters and Chris Watts.

Deanery Synod Representatives for the period to 2020/4.

Tony Collie, Lourdes Cottam, Mary Stagg and Chris Watts

Elected Lay Members:

Christine Rice (2019), Viv Druce (2020), Kevin Dunwell (2020), Ann Watts (2020) and Emma Watts (2020).

Appointed by St Barnabas:

John Hicks, Leanne Fowler, Bernadette Ellison (up to 2 vacancies)

Co-opted members (subject to annual PCC approval):

Treasurer – Peter Harvey-Di Gioia

Safeguarding Officers – Leanne Cox and Ann Dibble

PCC Secretary – Mike Stevenson

Bellringers – Mark Backhouse

Social Committee – Chris Druce

CTiT – (2 vacancies - a representative from each of St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches)

(Giving a total of 24 members with up to 6 vacancies (up to 4 representatives of St Barnabas and 2 representatives to Thatcham CTiT)

Mark thanked all those who have agreed to serve on the PCC from 2020 and expressed thanks to all who had served over the last year.

Rector's Remarks

Mark thanked all who were working for St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches both within the congregations and in the wider community and referred those present to his comments made during consideration of the Annual Report.

Open Forum

It was noted that the newly elected Churchwardens do not take up their duties until given their charge by the Team Rector (under Regulations approved by the Bishop of Oxford under provisions required to prevent the spread of Covid 19).

Mary Baker informed the meeting that £353 had been raised for Christian Aid in connection with the recent AGM. Mary and Sarah Bennet expressed particular thanks for support for Christian Aid in this time of great need.

The meeting also noted with gratitude the tremendous ongoing response to the appeal from West Berkshire Foodbank to mark Harvest celebrations.

The meeting with the Grace at 8.30 pm and was followed by Evening Prayer led by the Team Rector.

..... Chairman Date

The next meeting the PCC was scheduled to take place using Zoom at 7.30pm on Tuesday 20th October 2020.