

## **St Mary's Church Buckden Annual Report 2020 (For APCM 2021)**

### **Vicar's Greeting: Revd. Jes Salt**

Welcome to St Mary's Annual Report for 2020, the most extraordinary year most of us have known.

Being unable to meet for live worship for much of the year due to the Covid 19 pandemic has been difficult for many of us. However, with necessity being the mother of invention, it is great we have found different ways of keeping connected - through online worship, Zoom conversations (how many of us had heard of Zoom twelve months ago), socially distanced meetings – often outside, as well as emails, phone calls and personal visits where these have been possible.

St Mary's survives and thrives through the work and witness of its members. Some are mentioned below, but every part of the body of St Mary's makes a unique contribution to its health, so my thanks to everyone for all you do and for all your prayers. However, there are three people I would particularly thank. Firstly, we are especially blessed with our churchwardens: David Pickavance has worked tirelessly and with great skill across so many areas in order to ensure that our worship and witness at St Mary's can move forward. He has been joined by Vas Mowat, who is already making a significant contribution in many ways. Finally, Peter Mount, our new Treasurer, who is building on the sound legacy left by John Wells to ensure that our finances remain sound. My thanks, on behalf of us all, to you for all you are and do.

Many of our church activities have, of course, been unable to take place this year. However, as this report shows, our worship and ministry has continued and, we pray been a blessing to us as a worshipping community, to the wider village whom we serve and, most importantly to God. I hope you enjoy reading about life at St Mary's during this most extraordinary year.

### **Churchwardens' & PCC: David Pickavance & Vas Mowat**

The clear focus this year has been to maintain church services and individual worship as much as has been reasonably possible within the Government restrictions. The services themselves will be covered by Jes but we would like to thank everybody for their understanding and support as the difficult decisions have been made about opening and closing St Mary's. When we have been able to hold 'live' services, your understanding and adherence to the personal safety rules has been fantastic.

Thankfully, Jes, Jane and Georgia and William Coram put a significant amount of effort into recording services that we could enjoy at home during lockdown and that experience will serve as an important stepping-stone for the future, where 'church' is likely to look somewhat different.

When we were able to use St Mary's during 2020, life was not always comfortable, with heating failures and water supply problems. Thankfully, those problems are behind us and we again thank you for your forbearance. The water supply is now assured, and we are addressing the future of the heating system.

As always at this time of year, and increased by the COVID-19 epidemic, we have lost valued and loved members of our congregation and our village. Thank you to all those, mentioning in particular those of 'Friends-in-Deed' who helped and comforted the sick and isolated, the bereaved and all their families through a time made doubly difficult due to lockdown restrictions.

Our fundraising has continued and helped a variety of charities, both local and national and we want to thank all of you that both put a tremendous amount of effort into organising the fundraising activities, and to those of you who gave your time and money.

The project to rebuild the vestry exterior walls and roof and complete the LSR end wall has moved forward significantly. We have Faculty approval and planning permission from Hunts District Council which includes re-instatement of iron railings between St Mary's and Buckden Towers. Cambridge Stonecraft have been selected as the contractor to perform the work which is scheduled to begin in March under supervision of our architects.

Our services may have been curtailed but people have still sought to contribute to the life of the church where possible. So, we want to take this opportunity to particularly thank all of you who have volunteered. Prior to Lockdown 1, you enabled the Community Café and Holidays at Home. Things didn't stop just because we couldn't congregate in St Mary's; prayer and pastoral support continued, Sunday Club/Bible Band continued virtually and there was even Seaside Rock @ Home. We had virtual Saturday Coffee & Cakes, duties and flowers when we could hold services, Angel Voices, bells and organ playing, and fantastic continued support to the village through Friends-in-Deed. And, of course, we had the continued support and work of the PCC, Miles, Ann and Roger. Thank you all.

And finally, we must thank Jes and Jane for their tremendous leadership and commitment to St Mary's, and the huge amount of work that they have contributed, particularly during this trying year. God bless them and we wish them all the best for their future in Rutland.

### **Ministry and Worship: Revd. Jes Salt Worship**

Our ministry and worship in 2020 was significantly affected by Covid 19 Pandemic, but thanks to the wonders of communication technology, we have found creative ways to worship and to stay in touch with each other.

2020 started with our 11.00 service continuing to attract around 70 each week and the Wednesday morning service and Bible Study continuing to be well attended. Sadly, the first few weeks of the year saw the death of two much loved friends, Beryl Atkin and Peggy Wright, and it was good that we were able to commemorate their passing and celebrate their lives appropriately at services in church. We also hosted a Deanery Evensong on 15<sup>th</sup> March which was the last service in St Mary's before the first lockdown.

St Mary's reopened for live worship on Wednesdays on 15 July and then for Sunday worship on 16 August, with social distancing and other Covid 19 precautions

reducing our capacity to around 45. In practice our attendance averaged 15 on Wednesdays and 34 on Sundays due to many being understandably reluctant to gather in a group, and also with Sunday worship being available online.

St Mary's closed again for lockdown 2 on 5 November. Among other things, this meant that we were unable to hold our normal Remembrance Service, although we were able to offer a shorter act of Remembrance in the churchyard around the war memorial.

Although we were unable to hold our usual Christmas celebrations, St Mary's hosted the recording of the Churches Together online carol service and also 'carols by Zoom' and an online carol concert by Buckden school. We held services on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, but understandably attendance at both services was small, after which the church once again closed.

**Online services** Like many other churches, we have offered an online service every week since the start of the pandemic, including 'special' services at Easter, VJ Day and Ascension. That has entailed a steep learning curve for all involved! Initially services were streamed live on Facebook but evolved into a pre-recorded service streamed to a dedicated St Mary's YouTube channel. Huge thanks are due to Jane for mastering the technical skills and producing such attractive services.

Viewing figures have, after a slow start, been reasonably positive. During the various lockdowns there have been generally between 60-75 views each week. We continued to stream services when the church reopened for folk who were reluctant to attend a live service and there have been 40-55 views each week.

Our online Remembrance service attracted 187 views and the Christmas Carol service no fewer than 332 views.

It is clear that online services are here to stay, and it is pleasing that the PCC have grasped the importance of developing this aspect of ministry.

I am, as ever grateful to the ministry team of Miles, our Associate Priest and Ann and Roger our Licensed Lay Ministers for all their support and help during this difficult year.

Due to the pandemic, many other aspects of our ministry had to be curtailed; we only had 1 baptism and 1 wedding during 2020.

The restrictions on size and types of funerals have been one of the sad consequences of the pandemic, with friends and relatives unable to commemorate and celebrate their loved ones as they would have wished. As a result, there were only 4 funerals or thanksgiving services in church, with another 2 at Buckden Cemetery and 14 services at local crematoria.

Although we have been unable to meet for Daily Prayer, the team have continued to pray each day at home, and we have met each Wednesday on Zoom to pray together. Many thanks to Fiona Bailey for very ably facilitating this important part of our life together, and which feels to have grown stronger during the year.

Three of our four bible study groups have sadly been unable to meet, but Richard Noble's monthly group has continued by the members conducting its studies via email.

### **Children/Youth**

We have, obviously, been unable to run most of our usual children and young people's activities, and it is particularly unfortunate that, having started so well, the youth club has had to be suspended. Similarly, our monthly 'messy church' run with BDCT had just begun to develop momentum before the pandemic with more than twenty different families having attended at least once.

However, Catherine ran a creative online Easter activity for younger children, and Jane and the Holiday Club team created a virtual Holiday Club which ran over three mornings during the summer holidays. The Bible Band team continued to meet during lockdown 1 and this was very much enjoyed by all who took part.

At Christmas Catherine replaced Marilyn who stepped down as Children's Leader after many years faithful and skilful service. Thank you, Marilyn, for all you have done, and we wish Catherine every blessing in her new role.

### **Music**

The prohibition on congregational singing has been a sadness, but many thanks to John Cartwright who has played during our live services, when these have been permitted, and also provided musical support to our online services. Thanks also to Chris and Gina who have provided a wide variety of songs for our online services and who led Angel Voices at 'carols by Zoom' and also the Churches Together carol service.

**Mens Breakfast** has continued to run online with conversations across a variety of topics with the opportunity to provide a 'faith perspective' to what have been some thoughtful discussions.

**Buckden and District Churches Together** has been largely in abeyance this year. However, we jointly ran the service of commemoration on Remembrance Sunday, the online Carol Service and also Footsteps in Prayer where more than 20 of us committed to prayer walk the streets of Buckden, in effect covering our community in prayer. We will continue to run more combined activities online in 2021.

### **Outreach**

Many of our normal activities have, sadly been unable to run but we have tried to be God's hand and feet in our community during the pandemic.

**Social contact** the sense of community and mutual support has long been one of the strengths of St Mary's. It has been great to hear about the ways we have kept in touch with each other over the last twelve months, through the Zoom get togethers, phone calls and so on. Many thanks to everyone for the way they have supported each other over the last difficult year.

**Friends in Deed** led the community volunteer scheme set up with St Mary's and the Parish Council to provide

support service to members of the community who needed practical help with e.g. shopping during pandemic. Friends in Deed are continuing to provide this support mainly through their volunteer 'taxi service'

### **Charities & Pastoral Care**

We have continued to support Godmanchester Foodbank through the pandemic and encouraged the village to do so with collections points advertised at the Vicarage and at NISA who kindly allow a collection box in their shop. The amount of food support from both the church and the village has been amazing. I am very grateful to the many people in St Mary's who are regularly donors.

**St Mary's PCC** continued to meet during 2020, albeit less frequently and on Zoom. The PCC has provided valuable assistance, guidance and support as we have sought to navigate this difficult year. We have vacancies for new members, so please do prayerfully consider if you would be able to serve and support St Mary's during the forthcoming Vacancy.

### **The Future**

In the 2019 report I wrote this; 'as we thought last year St Mary's will need to adapt and change to appear relevant as well as a faithful worshipping community'. The pandemic has brought those words into sharp focus. Life has irrevocably changed. The church, including St Mary's, has to change quickly if we are to continue to 'appear relevant (and) faithful'. Some people will drift away from church, others will join either in person or online. It is clear that online worship is here to stay, and our services will need to adapt to an online as well as an 'in person' congregation. The PCC will have to address this and other big issues in the next few years and they will need your support and more importantly, your prayers.

### **Finance & Giving: Peter Mount**

I took over as Treasurer during the year and have therefor exercised little influence beyond recording payments and receipts and finalising year end accounts. The obvious conclusion from the figures is that the Church 's accounts are healthy.

Nevertheless, the excess of income over expenditure for the year, amounting to £15,809.32, is not sustainable in the long term. Without the donation of £50,000 which I will refer to below, there would have been a net loss of £15,290.76.

Hopefully things will improve as we come through the present health crisis. Ian Carter has done wonders in maintaining planned giving through this difficult time, but other income has declined significantly, and the church still has expenses and must plan maintenance and improvements for the future. One thing which I hope to do sooner rather than later is to prepare a budget which will give all of us a clearer view of expected income and expenditure.

### **Funds**

It is probably important to understand that parts of the available funds are tied or regarded as tied for particular purposes:

Current Account: This can be used for any reasonable purpose connected with the maintenance of the Church and the ministry.

Savings account: Parts of this account are specifically reserved.

- The donation of £50,000 received earlier this year was for the specific purpose of projects to improve the fabric of the Church. A further £10,000 is also regarded as dedicated for this purpose.
- A further £13768 in the account is the organ fund for repair and/or replacement of the Church organ.
- The remainder of the fund has simply been placed on deposit to earn some interest and, like the Current account is generally available.

CCLA Account: This is linked to the "Fielding Legacy", which I will explain below and receives income from the investment currently representing the legacy and earns some interest in its own right.

The Fielding Legacy: When I took over as Treasurer, I was informed of the existence of "the Ely Bond", but initially had difficulty in obtaining more information. I will try and keep this short; it is the distillation of very helpful information provided to me by the Ely Diocesan Office. Basically, the late G. Fielding died in 1949 and left a fund, then valued at some £3,000, for "the general maintenance of the Church and Churchyard" of Buckden Church. The fund is invested by the Diocese in a bonded investment and is currently (year-end 2020) worth £13,890.39, so it has done reasonably well over the years. Income from the bond is transferred to the CCLA account, but growth in the investment remains with the bond. The Diocese is the custodian trustee of the bond and our Church Wardens are the managing trustees. On that basis, the Diocese must allow the release of funds from the bond for any purpose falling within the terms of the original bequest.

My purpose in listing this information is to ensure that the PCC and Church Wardens understand what is available and for what purposes, not to encourage a spending spree! The results for the last financial year urge a measure of caution. Nevertheless, I have already agreed spending for the very necessary purpose of steaming services from the Church and I am aware that there are plans to do serious work on the vestry and to replace the current boiler and that there is also health and safety work which must be done sooner rather than later in the tower. I am satisfied that all of this is affordable and, hopefully, when I construct a budget, this will back me up.

### **Ministry Share**

As I think most of you know, this is the single major annual expense for the Parish. The Diocese has played very fair with us this year. Last year the share was £51850.50 paid in ten equal instalments over the year. This year the figure is slightly reduced at £50,181.92; normally there would be some negotiation, but I think not in the present case!

### **Conclusion**

Very sincere thanks are due to my predecessor, John Wells, who looked after accounts for many years and left me to take over well organised and healthy funds. At the moment there is no reason not to look forward to the financial future with reasonable confidence.

### **Safeguarding: Sammy Riley**

As most of regular church activities have regrettably been put on hold during this COVID year; there have been fewer new applications for DBS checking.

However, there has been continuing dialogue with the Diocese of Ely; and note fresh changes to the application of a person becoming Safeguarding Compliant:

As of April 2021, there will be fewer roles necessitating the C2 course (now called Leadership course) and it is currently available as a 'virtual meeting' via Zoom; dates are on Ely's website; under Safeguarding.

Note: C0 and C1 will remain on-line training, with the possibility of some face-to-face courses; once these current COVID times are at an end.

As we look forward to a resumption of activities, there will be a number of DBS renewals which will be required and a number of new applicants still to complete their applications. I will be in contact with each volunteer to complete the necessary checks to remain / become Safeguarding compliant.

A reminder that all Group Leaders are responsible for maintaining accurate member records and sharing these with me, so that we remain fully compliant.

Whilst I am aware that everyone is busy and Safeguarding procedures may seem time consuming and not that important, the reality is that Safeguarding is very important for us all – all children, vulnerable adults and all volunteers within their roles, with these people... important, for keeping everyone safe!

May I finish by thanking all, for the roles which you kindly undertake and understanding the importance of Safeguarding to us all.

### **Events & Fundraising: Carole Coram**

The two teams of volunteers who organise events for St Mary's who ordinarily work incredibly hard in their joint aim of encouraging people to use St Mary's socially while raising funds to keep the building in good repair as a fitting place in which to worship God, sadly this year due to the lockdowns have been unable to hold our normal events.

The fundraisers were able to sneak in another successful church auction just before the first lockdown occurred, once again it proved to be very popular and greatly enjoyed by both parishioners and the wider community. Thanks must go to Patsy Gray and her team for organising this event.

Hopefully this coming year will see a return to some sort of normal in our society and we will once again be able to enjoy such events.

Thank you to all those people who do so much to organise and support the events, but special mention

must be given to Patsy Gray who chairs the Fundraisers, and Chris Bylett who chairs the events team.

### **Buckden School: David Riley**

It has been a unique year in so many ways with what I can only describe as an extraordinary response from Alison, Michelle and the entire staff at Buckden School.

Lockdowns, home schooling, key worker and vulnerable school places, social distancing, Microsoft Teams, a phased return to work, constantly changing government guidelines and staying safe, as just the backdrop to maintaining remote learning and on-premise education for every child on role. As a stand-alone academy, we have faced additional scrutiny and had to share risk assessments, plans and admittance criterion to local authorities and other government agencies.

And, despite all this, when many would have caved in under the enormity of it all, the school stayed open throughout many holidays to ensure that those who needed to be at school were able. It has been tough, really tough for the staff and as a congregation; we offer our heartfelt thanks for the role they have played in putting our children's education first.

On top of this, the school has been remodelled to allow class bubbles to enter and leave from their own doors, thereby minimising the risk of transmission across classes. The expense is funded directly by the Academy, using up most of its reserves in doing so, to allow our children's education to continue.

So, there haven't been the usual visits and seasonal services in church with the children, but the church has still been with the children, with collective worship continuing in differing forms.

As we look forward to the year ahead and to cover Jes's departure, David Pickavance has agreed to step in and be an additional Foundation Governor, alongside Michelle Jazwari and I, at least until the next incumbent is appointed.

OFSTED rated Buckden School as outstanding and as a community we have in this COVID year witnessed just how outstanding they are!

Thanks again to all the staff for leading Buckden School through the pandemic and for keeping themselves and the children safe.

### **Deanery Synod**

DS has met only infrequently this year, and all meetings have been on Zoom. Sadly, the Rural Dean, Rev Grant Flower, had to resign for health reasons and has been replaced by Rev Nicki Bland. Ian Carter and David Pickavance have kindly agreed to attend meetings as our representatives.

### **Conclusion: Revd. Jes Salt**

As Jane and I leave, we are very grateful to you all for your support and friendship. We leave with both sadness at leaving good friends and that there is much still here to do and joy that God has blessed us with such good friends and the privilege of serving among you for last five and half years.

Blessings and best wishes for the future. Jes