

Church Report for Parish Assembly

St Mary's Church 2020.

2020 began with a very leaky roof. The lead had been stolen in September 2018 and although we got planning permission quite quickly from South Northants District council for the roof to be replaced with terne coated stainless steel, we also needed permission from the Diocese – and they took their time! Therefore in January 2020, through no fault of our own, we still had a tarpaulin covering which, after 18 months, was not as efficient as it had been initially. A very wet winter meant that the rain poured in every time it rained, and despite valiant efforts the pews and walls of the south aisle and the general deterioration of the paint and wood work in the whole church was most depressing. The pews were eventually removed when it got too bad.

We carried on with our normal services until 15th March. Gerald Cadogan took the last Evensong on that day before we were forced to close the church entirely for the first lockdown due to Coronavirus.

The roof was repaired during this time. We were fortunate that the roof men carried on working during the lock down. Two of them came from near Bedford, a journey of over an hour every morning. They started the preparatory work on 6th March. Fortunately, for much of the time after this, there was little rain, because the roof was completely open to the elements.

At Easter, although the church was closed and boarded up with scaffolding all round, Amanda put up an Easter message and display, the weather was lovely and the primroses looked magnificent.

The roof is bright, hopefully will mellow with age and also will deter any future thefts. We were fortunate to have had the support financially of many people in and out of the village to whom we are extremely grateful. The Parish Council were able to give us grant and thanks to Phillida's diligence we were able to get grants from other sources. We have as yet not been able to hold a service of thanksgiving but hopefully we will be able to in the not- too-distant future.

The church remained completely closed due to Covid restrictions until 8th June. We were then able to reopen it for private prayer and also open up the library. As you can imagine after such a long time and so much major building work, there was a huge clean up operation to be done. Jose rallied her troops, and John and Christine sorted out the books. Huge thanks go to everyone involved.

Services started again on 5th July and from 8th August face coverings were required.

We then maintained our normal services until the next lockdown – 1st November, Gerald took Evensong. The same day saw the final service taken by our Rector, Brian Fairbank, which was a benefice communion at Chipping Warden.

Brian Fairbank had been rector of Culworth for 8 years. Initially the benefice consisted of 6 parishes but last year Sulgrave and Thorpe Mandeville moved to the Chenderit benefice, leaving the Culworth benefice with four parishes, Culworth, Chipping Warden, Moreton Pinkney and Edgcote.

We held one wedding in 2020, no funerals and no christenings

We were expecting a long interregnum but fortunately we didn't have to wait long before we had a new rector. We were very lucky to get a new incumbent so soon after Brian left, as the process will usually take many months of waiting. Reverend Mike Chesher is our new rector. Culworth is now 'House of Duty' benefice which means the incumbent receives no stipend and will work Sundays and 2 other days. His appointment was announced on 10th January and Mike was inducted via Zoom on 7th March and I know many people in the parish were able to join in the service. We hope he will spend a very happy time here.

Back to 2020. The church remained open for private prayer and the library. We were able to reopen the church for December services, and although we held our usual services over Christmas, numbers were down dramatically. For example Christmas Day usually see a full church with about 150 in the congregation; this year we only had 35. We were fortunate to have the Ven David Painter, retired Archdeacon from Oakham, to take our Christmas Day Holy Communion. However the church looked magnificent with the Christmas decorations organised as usual thanks to Diana and her team.

However in 2021 we closed again. Gerald took Evensong on 3rd January and the services stopped until Evensong on 7th March – Gerald taking the service with Mike, our new rector there. We continued to keep the church open for the library and private prayer.

Hopefully all services will continue as normal from now on.

During this time Jose organised a short service every week from our Rural Dean, Rev. Carolyn Oley to be delivered or sent by email to anyone who needed it.

Much of our other activities came to a halt during much of the year. We were able to have our Lent Quiz and one of the Lent lunches before the first lockdown. The money from the Lent Lunch went to Banbury Citizens Advice which launched an appeal to help people isolated by Coronavirus get essential food and supplies. No village cafes or coffee and chats have taken place since March 2020, no fete to raise money for church funds. Plant sales and the Culworth 5 miler, along with the Christmas candles raised money for church funds. The collection from the Carol Service went to The Children's Society.

We have continued to be supported by a regular team who have helped to keep the church clean, and our annual Spring Clean this year took place in time for the Easter services. The churchyard has likewise been maintained by an energetic group of mowers and trimmers. And the efforts of the annual churchyard tidy up in August can be appreciated by the wonderful Spring flowers. Thanks to everyone.

Marion Bullock very kindly mended 4 of the kneelers in front of the altar rail and more recently some pew runners.

After many years as secretary of the PCC Phillida Walker has felt she must now change her allegiance to Woodford Halse, having moved there a few years ago. She has done an

amazing amount of work for our church over many, many years, especially in the last few years trying to find grants for the roof. Huge thanks to Phillida.

As usual the mainstay of our church as always is Martin. He is always there. He opens and shuts the church every day, keeps a check on all the maintenance requirements etc etc.

Thank You.