

## **ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, WINGHAM CHURCH ANNUAL REPORT FOR WINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL APRIL 2023**

During 2022, as the official Covid 19 pandemic restrictions lifted, St Mary's gradually relaxed social distancing and mask wearing and the pattern of worship resumed as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday, lay-led Family Worship
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, Holy Communion Healing & Wholeness
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, lay-led Morning Prayer
- 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Holy Communion
- And any 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, a united Little Stour Benefice service

Also, refreshments after each service, fund-raising and outreach activities were reinstated. In February, the Little Stour Benefice expressed their heartfelt thanks to The Revd Prebendary Gillean Craig and his wife Linda at a celebration service and lunch in Littlebourne as their time with us had come to an end. Revd Gillean had steered the church through a very difficult period during the pandemic. Without a minister in place for the foreseeable future, the churches of the Little Stour Benefice now continue to work together and to strengthen ties, under the guidance of our Area Dean, Revd Stefan Thomas. We are very thankful for those retired members of the clergy who regularly led services for us through 2022 and who continue to do so.

Through our outreach activities in 2022, St Mary's endeavoured to engage the wider community, to engender a feeling that the church belongs to everyone in Wingham. In this way, we also hope to continue to raise much needed funds to repair and maintain a cherished building. In the meantime, the small congregation are all active in one way or another in services, music, fund-raising and outreach, creating a strong community of worshippers who keep the church going. In the same way, the cleaners and flower arrangers all contribute to life at St Mary's. We are very grateful to all these volunteers. We also thank Bettina Braun and the team for continuing to produce and circulate the Parish magazine. We are grateful to Gareth Winters for publicising our activities and events in the Wingham Community News.

The weekly Meeting Place get-together resumed in April and proved very popular. This is a friendly, secular space garnering conversation, group discussion, poetry readings, raffles and much more over coffee, tea and biscuits. We are very grateful to the small team from the church who continue to organise and run this.

The church is also used every Tuesday by the Health Walk group for their refreshments. St Mary's continued to support the Foodbank through the year, and Catching Lives with the Harvest donations.

The Sunday afternoon concerts proved very successful and we are very grateful to all those who have performed and helped raise funds for the church.

St. Mary's joined in the village Scarecrow Trail to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June with a busy open day of children's activities and the entrance pathway lined with scarecrows of Her Majesty, a soldier and lots of corgis all made by the children's groups Tiny Tots and Messy Friday. We are very grateful to the 'Messy Ladies' who organise these monthly get-togethers for pre-school and primary school children. The children's creative efforts are always on display in the church.

St. Mary's thanks all those who helped with the Annual Church-yard Tidy, in-particular the local Scout group. The PCC is also very grateful for the grant of £2,128 from Wingham PC towards the maintenance of the burial ground, enabling the grass cutting and annual boundary hedge trimming.

Sadly, Angela Newton moved to Littlebourne and could not continue with her church activities, so the congregation celebrated her many contributions to life at St Mary's after a morning service in February.

In addition, we were sad that Sheila Woolliscroft decided she was unable to continue with her work at St Mary's and the church held a special celebration in September to thank her for being such a valuable part of life at St Mary's over so many years.

The builder Eric Colman and his team have worked hard over the year to help maintain and repair the fabric of the church: from the roof to the flooring. This included resurfacing the small carpark area, replacing rotten timbers in the clock room floor and resolving the drainage problem by the Oxenden Chapel. We are also very grateful for the professional help from our architect Nick Lee Evans.

Financial problems are ongoing and we are very grateful that fund-raising could resume this year. The Friends' have worked very hard to organise and support events and their contributions to the finances are invaluable. Despite this, monies are still severely depleted and the next big project which needs to be addressed is the antiquated heating system.

We remain, as ever, very thankful to all those who support our fund-raising events, who donate when they can and to those who give regularly.

It was very pleasing that popular festival services could resume after the pandemic, with some new additions. The Salvation Army returned for two services this year, raising much needed funds for their good works: a Harvest festival celebration in September and the Carol Concert in December. The East Bridge Chorale led a traditional service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

The Remembrance Service was well attended and the Crib Service made a welcome return.

During the period of national mourning after the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, St Mary's hosted a Book of Condolence.

In September, HE Ambassador of Peru visited St Mary's and was joined by children from Wingham school and representatives from Wingham PC.

Thanks to a very generous donation from a member of the congregation, we have newly purchased, purpose made cushions for the pews.

Finally, we always welcome new faces in the congregation and new volunteers, so please be in touch if you would like to join any of our activities and check out the St Mary's Facebook page.