

ST. MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, WINGHAM
ANNUAL REPORT TO WINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL
FOR THE YEAR 2023

St Mary's and the other parishes of The Little Stour Benefice continued into 2023 without a permanent incumbent until 1st August when we were very pleased that Revd Dr Lesley Hardy was installed as our new part-time priest.

We aim to enable people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the Gospel; and developing knowledge and trust in Jesus.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and Outreach work.

To facilitate this work it is important that we maintain the fabric of the Church of St Mary the Virgin and the furniture, fittings etc. within.

During 2023 we completed a programme of repairs to the tower and improvements to the drainage on the south elevation together with other routine work to the roof and guttering. Our Inspecting Architect, Nick Lee Evans, commenced his 5-yearly inspection and the report is expected early in 2024.

The Churchyard is maintained by Dover District Council. The PCC is responsible for the Burial Ground on the edge of the village and are grateful to the Parish Council for its financial support for the maintenance of the grounds and hedges.

Through our outreach activities in 2023, St Mary's PCC endeavoured to engage the wider community, to engender a feeling that the church belongs to everyone in Wingham.

Events and Hospitality

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

The church was also used every Tuesday by the Health Walk group for their refreshments. The church hosted a series of popular concerts on Sundays through the Summer months.

The Meeting Place

The purpose of this group, which meets every Friday morning, is to offer and enable outward-facing mutual companionship, accompanied by light refreshments. Any funds raised are for Wingham Church though that is not the purpose of meeting. For the Coronation a display of memorabilia from previous coronations offered a focal point of interest. Normally we find that participants naturally share their current interests and wide-ranging concerns without any formal prior arrangement. The reading aloud of poems - notably by Meeting Place members reading their own work - has been a distinctive and spontaneous part of these gatherings; a separate monthly poetry group grew from this shared interest. We have benefited from two singalongs with the Wingham Seekers, in August and December, the latter in December comprising carols.

Tiny Tots & Messy Friday for pre-school and primary school children, held monthly on a Friday afternoon. The groups met eleven times through the year and continued to prove popular with the children and their parents/carers. The Wingham playgroup came regularly to Tiny Tots too. The children played games, danced to music and enjoyed creative crafts used to decorate the large board in the church. The children decorated the church with crowns and bunting for the King's Coronation in May. We are very grateful to the small team of 'Messy Ladies' who run the group and provide refreshments. Members of this team also organised the children's Crib Service on Christmas Eve which was very well attended, and the collection raised £120 for The Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service in Canterbury.

The Parish Magazine

The PCC thank Bettina Braun, the Parish magazine editor, and Sue Willis who co-ordinates the circulation. We also thank all those who deliver and collect payment throughout the village.

Canterbury Food Bank

They were very grateful for our continued support and we regularly received their news. Their workload grows as the number of clients using their services grows and they signpost some clients to other support services when appropriate. As usual, we took our tinned and dry food Harvest gifts to the warehouse as well as passed on items left in our two yellow bins (inside St. Mary's and Wingham newsagents). Some of our congregation also send financial support, enabling CFB to buy urgently needed foods and toiletries when shortages occur.

The Flower Team

This had been a year of great change. Gillian Bradley retired from her long service in organising the flower displays and the flower team volunteers. We were very appreciative of her dedication and friendly encouragement, so happily marked her stepping down in August with cake and gifts on behalf of the congregation who had all enjoyed her floral work over the past 25 years. A small team took over, enabling each member to plan the annual flower calendar, in rotation, as well as being responsible for extras such as weddings and funerals. We can call upon about a dozen volunteers, with mixed levels of experience but are always happy for more to join us.

Music

The congregation continued to enjoy and be grateful for Patti Whaley's church organ playing each week. The Music Group continued to provide music in Church, when needed. We have also led more contemporary music on several occasions at the Meeting Place, as the Wingham Seekers. This included singing carols at Christmas. All members of the group continued to enjoy worship and fellowship through music.

Concerts

Throughout the summer months we continued to host music events, highlighting the exceptional acoustic of the church that all musicians appreciate. The first two concerts in the continuing Wingham International Concert Series were held, featuring the London Handel Players and the Dutch cellist Pieter Wispelwey. We are grateful to Ben Bevan for this new initiative, which is continuing in 2024.

The PCC thank all the team members and volunteers who contribute their time and enthusiasm to St Mary's, bringing all these groups to life and thereby extending our outreach into the wider community. Many who attend these groups are not part of the regular congregation but have come to see these groups held in and organised by St Mary's as an important and enjoyable part of their own lives.

Finally, we always welcome new faces in the congregation and new volunteers.

You can find us on: Facebook as St Mary's Church Wingham, UK and St Mary's Church Messy Friday, and on www.little-stour-benefice.org.uk