

ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, WINGHAM CHURCH

ANNUAL REPORT FOR WINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL APRIL 2021

2020 and 2021 to date were marked throughout the country by the Covid 19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on life at St Mary's and in Wingham. On a happier note we were blessed to share with our Little Stour friends Revd Prebendary Gillean Craig as our Interim Part Time Priest-in-Charge from February 2020.

The church was open at various times throughout the year to allow public worship or private prayer, strictly following government guidelines and adhering to social distancing requirements. But as the pandemic progressed and the national and local lockdowns were announced by government, the PCC reluctantly decided that St Mary's should be closed and the planned services, festivals and celebrations should be cancelled due to the virulence of the pandemic locally and also taking into consideration the health risks to the congregation and community. This meant that in 2020 we were unable to celebrate Holy Week and Easter in the church, nor hold our traditional Christmas services. This was a great loss to the members of St Mary's and also the wider community.

The only live services Revd Prebendary Gillean has been permitted to take throughout the periods of church closure have been funerals, burials and cremations, therefore we remember before God, and pray for those who mourn them: Ruth Bond; Lois White; Carl White; Joan Poole; Anna Goody; David Curtis. This list is derived from the church register, so is not complete, and we also remember in our prayers all those in Wingham who have lost loved ones during the past year.

However, thanks to the wonders of the internet, services and celebrations continue via Zoom and You Tube and have been enjoyed by many. The churches in the Little Stour Benefice, which is the new Benefice currently in the process of being formalised, work closely together to produce the

online services and daily prayers. Despite there being no Harvest Festival service in the church, food donations were collected and distributed as usual. In November, a brief but poignant Remembrance Service was held by the War memorial, led by Archdeacon Jo and attended by representatives from the church, the PC and the Scout group. This was also streamed online.

St Mary's PCC is very grateful to all those across the new Benefice who have made this online worship possible, to Revd Prebendary Gillean for his unerring positivity, support and online services together with Linda, his wife, and especially to our Churchwarden Steve Sheath who, amongst other responsibilities, including that of Lay Chair for our Deanery, has worked tirelessly to ensure St Mary's follows all the ever changing Covid 19 protocols.

In addition the PCC has remained active via Zoom throughout the pandemic.

The PCC continues to struggle with the maintenance of the church building, in particular due to the pandemic's restrictions on fund-raising and church collections. Work on the church roof is still required to prevent water ingress and current plans aim to improve and update the heating system. The estimated costs are at least £34,000, a considerable sum and a huge concern for the PCC. The PCC is hoping to open a conversation within the village about the future of the church building as a community resource when pandemic restrictions allow. But we remain very grateful to all those who continue to support St Mary's financially with their regular giving. The PCC is also very grateful to Wingham PC for their grant of £1815.00 towards the maintenance of the burial ground which included grass cutting and hedge trimming and also for their grant towards composting and waste disposal at the burial ground.

Sheila Woolliscroft has had to step back from being a Churchwarden, after eight years, and also from her other duties, due to ill health and the PCC has promised a full celebration of all her years of commitment to St Mary's, once the situation allows. Happily she has stayed a member of the PCC. Also, we bade a very fond farewell to Maria Apps, our Assistant Lay Minister, as she had moved out of Wingham to live in Nonington and would continue her worship at Nonington Church. The PCC were especially thankful for her contributions to life at St Mary's as ALM, a member of the PCC and her help running The Meeting Place.

Sadly, due to the pandemic, all our usual activities have been curtailed: no bell ringing; flower arranging; Open The Book school assemblies; or Messy Friday and Tiny Tots children's groups. Also, there has been no opportunity for fund-raising events. We look forward to the time when these can re-start and to the fellowship they will bring.

The PCC thanks Brenda Tidy, Bettina Braun and the team for continuing to produce and circulate the Parish magazine, albeit on a reduced scale. We also thank the cleaners, who are still keeping the church clean when possible.

We have welcomed Revd Lesly Harding, curate in Barham, to the vicarage in Wingham.

And finally, please check our St Mary's Wingham Facebook page for the latest church news and also the current Littlebourne Benefice website littlebournebenefice.org.uk for an up-to-date source of information regarding the online services.