

St Peter's Church and The Friends of St Peter's

Review of the Year: 2020

2020 was quite unlike any other year we have experienced at St Peter's. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of church life.

In October 2020 it was announced that 'The Revd Canon Ian Andrew Wilson, Priest in Charge, The Benefice of Nacton and Levington with Bucklesham and Foxhall with Kirton and Falkenham, and the Benefice of Waldringfield with Hemley and Newbourne, will be Rector of The Orwell and Deben Rural Benefice due to the Mission and Pastoral Measure on 30 July 2020'. The Rector was licensed by the Archdeacon of Suffolk, Jeanette Gosney, in the presence of all the benefice churchwardens at Kirton church on Wednesday 17th December.

On September 30th we held our Annual Parochial and Church meeting, postponed since the Spring. This meeting was chaired by Revd. Sarah Jenkins on behalf of the Rector. There are now 33 on the electoral roll. Elizabeth Courtauld and Margaret Angus agreed to remain as Churchwardens, our Deanery representatives are once again Ali Bailey and Janet Stalker. In addition to the Churchwardens and Deanery Synod representatives the PCC members are Ian Angus, Rosanne Girling and Caroline Young. In June, David Gilkes resigned as church treasurer because he and his wife, Edith, moved to Bristol. David Gilkes was our treasurer for two decades and fulfilled this role with immense professional judgement and wisdom. Peter Allan, kindly agreed to take on the responsibility. He joins the PCC as an ex officio member. The PCC now comprises eight members. A working party meeting of the PCC was held on 5th March, but since then there have been no face to face meetings. Any resolutions that have needed PCC approval, such as applications for faculties, have been dealt with via electronic mail.

Services since the end of March have been heavily curtailed. Our service on Sunday 15th March, was the last we were able to hold in church until Sunday 13th September, a gap of six months. Once the churches were open again for services it was necessary to limit the numbers attending each service to twenty one (one quarter of the church's normal capacity), and seats had to be pre-booked. We celebrated Harvest, All Saint's Day and Remembrance Sunday on November 8th a service held entirely outside by the war memorial. In Advent we were fortunate to have a 'Service of Readings and Music' led by The Revd. Harry Stalker, which took the place of our normal Carol service. A candlelit Holy Communion service as held at 6.30pm on Christmas Eve where the celebrant was The Revd. Sarah Jenkins. We have been very grateful for the immense efforts made, and commitment shown, by our Rector, Rev Sarah and Rev Harry and members of the ministry team as they have navigated their way through the anxieties and complications of lock down and have tried to appease and reassure those who have been critical of the C of E's overall response to the pandemic. Since late Autumn the church has been open for an hour of private prayer each week when this has been permitted. Few, if any, come, but the church is at least open and available for quiet contemplation.

Once the first lock down started the Rector sent a weekly written and recorded service and address by e-mail to all churchwardens, who forwarded it to the worshipping community. Those without e-mail received a printed version through the post. A two sided weekly benefice newsletter was faithfully prepared and despatched by Janet and Harry Stalker. Whether or not the church is open these services are circulated every week and are received very gratefully.

We hosted two funerals and one wedding. There were no baptisms this year at St Peter's. The planned Benefice relay walk to the cathedral was postponed – it is hoped that it can be revived for 2022.

One serious problem for St Peter's has been a drop in regular giving through church collections as the number of services has been considerably reduced and the numbers attending what services we have held have been heavily restricted. (The church had to spend a significant amount of money to provide hand sanitisers, spare masks and alcoholic spray cleaners to uphold the standards of cleanliness required to enable the church to be open for services.) Parishioners have been encouraged to make regular donations via direct debit. We have been very fortunate to receive some 'one -off' gifts this year which have proved particularly helpful; however the idea of donating via direct debit did not receive much support. Much of the planned giving comes from a very small number of individuals.

The church however has given away some significant sums to charity. We sent £500 to FIND, the Ipswich Food bank, £350 to Christian Aid and £83 to The Suffolk Association for the Blind. Without the usual Carol Service collection in aid of The Salvation Army, a village collection was initiated by 'The Friends'. Astonishingly, the sum raised reached £2,500, including £250 from church funds. St Peter's has also been pleased to be able to support our curate, the Reverend Sarah Jenkins, by paying tuition fees (£1,897) for the second year of her on-line degree course from one of our restricted funds. The church finances are reasonably secure - for now: the coming year will be considerably more challenging.

A few members of 'The Friends of St Peter's' have been very active during the year. The churchyard has been well looked after and changes were made to the repair and refurbishment schedule to allow re-decoration of the interior of the church to take place while the church was closed. The beams were treated for death watch beetle, the interior walls were re-painted and the woodwork polished with beeswax. Deep cleaning was carried out by volunteers.

When it became obvious that we would not have our normal Christmas services, it was decided that Christmas should be 'turned inside out'. A booklet produced by the C of E entitled 'Comfort and Joy' containing nine lessons and carols was distributed to every household in the village. The Christmas tree went into the churchyard and was lit up at night and the crib scene on the font window sill was turned to face outwards and illuminated so people could enjoy seeing it through the window. The pièce de résistance was the erection of a huge Bethlehem star on the west side of the tower by a team of Friends. All these initiatives were made possible by hard work from members of 'The Friends'. The aim was to make the church a central and visual part of the Christmas celebrations in the village at a time when the size of congregations was limited.

Members of St Peter's and the Friends have been pro-active in support of residents of the village during the pandemic, helping to organise the www.levingtoncoronavirus.info team and a 'buddy' system, to assist those who have had to shield. Rev Sarah with others telephoned those living alone on a regular basis and kept an eye on those whose relatives are not close by.

Looking back over the year, St Peter's has been an active church and maintained its place in the heart of the village. While opportunities for worship in church have been curtailed there has been plenty of instances where members of the congregation have been able to reach out to help and support their neighbours.

May we thank everyone who has supported the church this year by giving of their time, their talents and /or their much needed financial support.

Elizabeth Courtauld

Churchwardens

Margaret Angus