

**ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING
WEDNESDAY 29th APRIL 2020**

Officer's and Group Leader's reports



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ST. MARY'S CHURCH, HIGHLEY

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St. Mary's Highley Rector's Report 2019

'Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.'

Hebrews 12:1

Last year I drew my report to a close using the analogy of the Captain of a ship steering the correct course by turning the wheel to move the ship in the right direction. It takes some time for that change to take effect. So, what signs can we see from the last year that will help us to steer into the way of God for our times, even if that means into a headwind?

Gatherings

There is no doubt that we have two very different congregations in Highley, one that is fairly traditional and comprising in the main, older people and meeting in the parish church of St. Mary. The other using more contemporary forms of worship, currently meeting at the Severn Centre. However, somewhere in between are meeting places that connect across these gatherings and act as a kind of bridge: Home Groups, Messy Church, the Charity Shop, Friday Event and our 1st Sunday services reflecting, in the main, the worship of the place in which that congregation normally meets. Finally there are the larger gatherings where we can come together with the whole people of God in our fifth Sunday benefice services. Beyond that are the diocesan gatherings for celebrations like Maundy Thursday and farewells or welcomes to our bishops.

What are we to make of this – where are you in it? I have the care of souls in all five of our gathering places, but most of us really only focus on the one or two that seem most relevant to us and our children and where we feel comfortable with people we know and may have grown up with. Often when we meet or look at social media we only catch a glimpse of the wider world and feed on our personal preferences; it's much harder and a big step of faith to embrace the bigger picture and celebrate what it really means to support each other and worship and celebrate what we have together in God: '...so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others' (Romans 12:5). Somehow we need to own our responsibility to each other before God in love and grace and one Sunday a month we shouldn't find that impossible, giving way to our fellow Christians.

One way we have found to develop this is through the Holy Habits series of studies, begun in 2018. There are now three home groups dedicated to the study of Acts 2:45-47, that characterised the early church and now inspires our own response as the body of Christ across that bridge. These are ably led by Mervyn Smith, Val Smith and David Poyner. You will find some interesting reading from the group pages later in this report. We have also been blessed through this when eating together, originally every Sunday, mainly for families, but wanting to increase the attendance for us all as a mark of unity. For most of the year this has taken place on 4th Sundays, but considering 1st Sundays, extending our Church Together times. Please consider making this a priority going forward as it's great to share fellowship over food (when we are once more able to do so safely).

One of the positive developments over 2019 has been a closer working relationship between those of our PCCs across the benefice. We are consolidating with a joint meeting together in Spring and Autumn and this brings 30-40 people together with subjects of common interest at the heart of our evening. In November 2019 we invited Chrissie Pepler

from the Diocese who talked to us about Eco-Church, a theme that has been prevalent during much of the year. Alastair MacNaughton has become our lead on this. We also welcomed Dave Lewis who spoke about church security after some items, along with a tank full of oil, had been stolen from Billingsley Church.

Buildings

Another aspect to this apparent diversity rests in the responsibility we have for our buildings, the PCC as trustees and especially the Rector and Wardens (see their report). At last, in September, the work of restoring St. Mary's began and this meant the closure of the building and greater use of the Hall for a period of nearly three months with all that entailed. By the end of the year much of the floor had been replaced, we had new chairs to replace pews at the back and are in the process of developing a new audio-visual system. In addition we now have a functioning heating system (late December). As you will see, this was by no means plain sailing, but we recognise the generosity of many of our people in making this work possible.

Following on from Delphine Brown's generous bequest, we have also been considering how we might develop a Garden of Remembrance in her memory, as suggested by Keith Smith. Roy Adlington has been spearheading the initiative, having invited several landscape gardeners to develop plans for us.

Whilst we're on the subject, discussions with the Council continue as to the future of burials in Highley after the churchyard is full. We estimate around 70 plots are still available, but we can't wait until they are all used before we make decisions. Buying a contiguous piece of land next to the current churchyard may sound sensible, but in fact would make the area even bigger and it is also unlikely that the Council would pay the amount being asked by the owner.

Sadly we continued, periodically during the year, to field complaints about the mess made by dogs in the churchyard. The PCC has been meeting (early 2020) to consider the best way forward and reiterate our desire for access for all, but under stricter notice that anyone found abusing these rights could face a large fine.

The Parish Hall needs extensive work on it and our wardens, with others, have been making some headway on identifying the structural challenges along with a report put together by Tom King. The good news is that regular bookings have risen considerably and this has become a useful flow of income, but has also meant updating our hirer information and ensuring best practice with regard to Health & Safety with the help of Richard Thomas.

Finally on buildings and land, we are continuing to research the sale of the land called The Triangle and currently standing as an empty field, following the PCC decision to sell it. With charity status we are obliged to obtain the best price for it and it appears this comes with the development of affordable homes. We hope to have Planning consent for this during 2020 and the plot does have the benefit of being on the edge of the village with relatively easy access.

So, you will have seen already that this has been a year of transition and change on a large scale. We couldn't have managed this without the commitment and energy of our churchwarden, David Rayner, and now, of course, Roy who responded to my appeal in last year's report to become our new churchwarden, at last year's APCM.

So, what of the output of God's love through us, in the community?

The Charity Shop has continued to serve the people of Highley, but in the summer we were made aware that the property had been sold by Bob Cowley to Perry & Philips Funeral Directors, who want to set up a new base in Highley. After some discussion they generously offered to include the shop in their development plans and, although the footprint will be smaller by some 15sq.mtrs, it will mean that we can continue to serve people locally once it is up and running, sometime, we hope in 2020 (but as this goes to press we live in uncertain times).

Apart from the stalled work of the shop and the increased use of the hall, baptisms, weddings and funerals have been an important part of our church's life which we often overlook in reports like this. During 2019 there were 23 baptisms, 13 of which were for Highley. I say 'were for Highley', as the closure in the autumn meant that occasional offices were transferred to Chelmarsh for which we are most grateful to Derek Arnold and folk there for making us welcome, especially for the flurry of funerals of which there were 23 held at St. Mary's and 8 weddings in the benefice, mainly Highley. Think of all the people we touch when by God's grace your Staff team are involved in these life events. People remember their brush with God during a service – please pray for us and them when you see a request on the notice sheet – you are the spiritual bridge for more than those you already know.

Messy Church continues to bless many people outside our Sunday church gatherings, drawing families in with a rich array of crafts and food together (see report). Friday Event Committee has a new Chair, Rachel Williams, ably supported by Lisa and Mary H. That, too, has gone from strength-to-strength this year with an average attendance around 30 (see report). We are looking at ways to strengthen the ties between church and young people, so watch this space. Another form of reaching out to the wider community is through the Forum. A regular print run of 350 copies enables them to go into homes throughout the benefice informing people of a wide variety of events both within and outside our churches.

Then there is the Pastoral Care Group, meeting regularly to discern the needs of our people and, sometimes beyond our church family. During the year we split the Electoral Roll into manageable collections of people we each knew best so as to pray for and support them (see report). We've been involved with people in their struggles and sometimes in their passing, recalling our ministry to Pat Janes for instance, as well as hers to us – she is missed.

Other assistance continues in the community by way of the Food Bank for which Stewart & Shirley Page, sometimes with the help of Roy, take the items left in church or Severn Centre into the store in Bridgnorth each week. Stewart and Shirley have a good network here in the community having been working with the Food Bank in Bridgnorth for some time and knowing more about the points of need in Highley.

Also a mention must be made of the Coffee Mornings which continue despite some being no longer able to attend, whilst others, like Dot, find this one of the moments of their week as it comes at a time she can manage with the help of Roy, Yvonne or Thelma, with transport. Moira and I have found it a pleasure to host these periodically and thanks must go to Yvonne for consistently ensuring they happen.

In addition, of course, the Catalyst Men's breakfast provides a monthly escape in the Church Hall and attracts a good number of the church's men to a cooked breakfast, thanks to Gay & Shirley with Stewart setting up and compering.

The Church, as we recognise from Romans 12:5 and from the crowd of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1f is about people and their relationship with God as we attempt to: ‘...continue to work out (y)our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.’ (Philippians 2:12, 13.)

The Body of Christ

So, it is the people of the church who can be the most amazing blessing to us. But when things don't work out these can also be the most difficult times for the church and especially for those with responsibility for the whole body under Christ. So it was that our curate, Tom, so full of promise, decided that he didn't want to remain in Highley under my authority as his training incumbent. The relationship between us became conflicted during Holy Week last year. Unfortunately Tom had not felt able to talk to me or those of the support team in the diocese before this came to a head, along with other things, which led to Bishop Richard being reluctant to authorise his ordination to the priesthood. Tom wanted a style of ministry and pastoral care from me that I was unable to give, with already a ministry team to support, major changes and challenges in one of the other churches and another curate to train. But there was also an unhelpful clash of temperaments developing. After a lot of meetings with Tom and with the diocesan ministry team and Bishops Richard and Alistair, it felt right to let him develop the latter part of his curacy in Bridgnorth where the larger team had more opportunities to support his ministry as well as his PhD studies which were by then taking up two days of the week. The farewell took place in December 2019 with a lunch overseen by Val Smith. Notwithstanding the difficulties, Tom was in many ways an asset during his time with us, especially with ministry to some of our families and children's leaders and we wish him, Vikki and family well as they physically move back into Bridgnorth, sometime, we expect, in 2020.

It is rare that retired clergy move into our patch, but one such did so at the end of 2018 and Canon Rose Lawley has been a great addition to the strength of our team, especially now in the light of Tom's departure. Rose, retired Team Rector in Kidderminster, has been taking services around our patch and led our Good Friday meditation last year. She is also helping in mid-week Communion. We're so grateful that she and John have come into the village.

David Poyner and I have a good relationship; one in which we both benefit from each other. David is keen and his involvement in the world of tertiary Education leaves him well placed to communicate with his extensive knowledge of science, history and faith, in a very down-to-earth style in his preaching. He is developing his pastoral care and nurture when able, leading a home group, but primarily in Billingsley, encouraging those on the edge of church life to look a little closer. He will soon be completing his second year since ordination.

Val and Keith continue to provide invaluable insight into the church here from the past as it informs the present. Val leads the Wednesday morning home group, offering pastoral care and taking services on a Sunday here twice a month as well as helping others in the deanery when available. Keith continues to assist the Hereford Diocesan Readers Association at their meetings. Both are also often called upon to take occasional offices and have struck up good contacts over the years in the village.

This year Mary Nelson answered God's call on her to ministry through USPG at Msalato Theological College near Dodoma in Tanzania. Later in the year she was discerned to have a calling to ordination and the bishop wasted no time in doing the deed in

November. It was all something of a surprise for us in its suddenness (when you consider how long the process takes over here), but we can recognise that discernment and celebrate it.

Liz Smith continues to serve us as well in reader ministry and there is a depth of spiritual wisdom carried in her talks. Mary Rayner is limiting her service-taking role to once a month as she continues to find ways to sharpen accounting procedures and develop a proper budget for our work as a church going forward. What a difference this makes, though it comes at the price of the restrictions it places on her calling to minister to others. We are most grateful for her time, commitment and energy.

Finally, it is good to see further developments in the worship team. Angie Forster has been testing her vocation to ordained ministry through meetings with Neil Patterson, the Diocesan Vocations Officer, and growing her experience of ministry around the benefice. In January 2020 she was to take up a placement until Easter with Matthew Stafford in Much Wenlock. Whilst Mark Williams has been recovering from cancer, his ministry has largely been put on hold, but he and Amy are now in a much better situation (praise God) as we end the year. We are looking to give some consistency to the 10am services (currently at the Severn Centre) as we look to the future.

There are so many people who make up the body in this place and I can't thank them all individually for their service within the confines of a report which may already be too long! It is often the small acts of kindness to each other and to those around us, our neighbours, through which God speaks. Some things like cleaning the church and the provision and display of altar flowers (thanks especially to Gay, Jackie and Bev) have been on hold during the restoration and in the current situation, Spring 2020, we are not at all sure when we can return.

So, what can we see from all this that inspires us to move forward in our ministry? To my mind the ship is heading in roughly the right direction, though in all truth we are losing people due for some to disaffection and others to the ageing process. These are big factors statistically and in terms of people's lives. However, things are not static and though we sometimes grumble, we need to consider effective ways forward. In most areas of our corporate life we are consistently listening, learning and acting as a result as in Holy Habits related initiatives. The challenge Bishop Alistair gave me when I came was to develop a sense of unity and consistency after a rather distressing time for the body. This I have sought to do, not without some obstacles, in order that in due course, someone else can steer the ship into more adventurous journeys across the sea. I have tried to be faithful in that.

My sense, announced by Stewart Page in his excellent work keeping the web site up-to-date, is that we 'live as community'. We might enhance that to inspire us towards: 'Unity to Serve the Community'. Jesus came amongst us as one who serves and the Church began through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit giving unity of purpose that overcame the trip-hazards on the way; that is the mind-set we also ought to have, strengthened by worship and love of God.

Be in no doubt that we are very much still in business and a not insignificant voice in this community, thanks be to God.

Yours in Christ,

Mike

CURATE'S REPORT 2019

Over the last 12 months my main activity in Highley has centred on running a home group; see report already submitted under that section. Beyond that, I continue to conduct Sunday services according to the rota. A new challenge for me has been doing communion; I am still working through the various options for the Eucharistic Prayer. Ministry continues to be rewarding.

David Poyner

Associate Minister's Report for APCM 2019

With annual events, it's hard to remember back 12 months to what was said at a meeting. Sometimes I can't even remember what I did and said the day before! This time last year, I encouraged you all to spend some time with God, trying to discern the following:

- What is God asking of me /us as a church? Do I/we need to change and if so, how?
- What gifts/skills has he given me that I can use?
- What is God saying to me/us to do or be in this moment, today?

These are not one-off questions; I think we should be embedding them into our daily lives. We are more effective when we understand ourselves and what we believe God is calling us to do. He has a purpose for each one of us, as individuals and as His people collectively.

When I baptise (mostly) children, I emphasise that they are joining a world-wide family; God's family. Our journey of faith involves relationships – with our local church and congregations, the other churches in our Benefice, churches in our Deanery, the Diocese, the 42 Dioceses of the National Church and all the other Anglican Dioceses across the world. And that's not including all our Christian friends and acquaintances from other denominations and free churches. God's family is vast and we need each other for encouragement and support as well as just enjoying sharing our faith and being together.

One of my favourite films is 'About a Boy' in which the young protagonist, who, in a reversal of roles, is desperately trying to support his mother who suffers from depression, says,

' Suddenly I realised – two people isn't enough. You need backup. If there are only two people, and someone drops off the edge, then you're on your own. Two isn't a large enough number. '

As John Donne wrote, 'No man is an island'. We all need each other and are a part of something bigger and greater. It's very easy for us to get so bogged down with what is going on locally, that we can't see the wood for the trees. God calls each of us to look beyond our own perceived desires and reach out to those who are beyond the boundaries of our close family and friendships.

I have been privileged to spend time this year beyond our parish boundaries when I was asked to oversee the Brown Clee Group of Parishes during the summer. This resulted in growing new friendships and relationships, at the same time as helping out a colleague. I see this 'cross benefice' working as happening more and more in the future. God doesn't call us to be static and insular. We are all children of the same Heavenly Father, with a huge extended family to meet and enjoy.

Sadly, sometimes people are in our midst for only a short time and it is with great sadness that we said 'goodbye' to Rev'd Tom King and his family in December. Tom brought many gifts to us and he and his family are greatly missed, but our loss is Bridgnorth's gain. We

hope that he and the family will be very happy as he finishes his curacy as part of the Bridgnorth Team Ministry.

On a happier note, I have been encouraged by the 'fruit' emerging as a result of the Holy Habits material that we are using as a church, to remind ourselves of the breath and depth of discipleship. Becoming a Christian, being baptised or confirmed, are just initial steps along our journey of faith. It's not the end point, it's just the beginning. We need to grow and mature and multiply.

Over this year we have covered Biblical Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking Bread and Serving. Home groups are once again thriving. I believe it has given us all a hunger to spend more time with God, more time together and, also, to live out our faith in a more purposeful way. We have seen a renewed interest in helping the Foodbank and considering ways in which we can be of service to the community.

My challenge to us all for the coming year is to look beyond ourselves and our own likes and dislikes, to seek out the bigger picture, a glimpse of God's bigger plan, so that we can play the part he has designed for us, as individuals and as a church. We will only know what that is, if we ask.

We often hear quoted the words from Jeremiah 29:14 as an encouragement, particularly in times of difficulty.

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.'

I would encourage everyone to read on and take on board the words which follow.

'Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all of your heart.' (my emphasis)

Many of us find inspiration from music, and the words of a song from the 1980s by Mark Altrogge resonate with those verses.

I want to serve the purpose of God, in my generation

I want to serve the purpose of God, while I am alive

I want to give my life, to something that will last forever,

O I delight, I delight, to do your will.

Chorus

What is on your heart, show me what to do

Let me know your will and I will follow you

What is on your heart, show me what to do,

Let me know your will and I will follow you

Those words echo my heart and I pray that they will echo yours too.

Rev'd Val Smith

March 2020

ST MARY'S SECRETARY REPORT 2019

Over the last year we have seen God's provision for us with the start of the building work, our new church warden Roy Addlington, who has been a welcome addition, the generous bequest by Delphine Brown and plans for a garden of remembrance. There have been encouraging numbers attending Messy church and also an increased use of the Parish hall. There have been concerns over future finances and a possible shortfall, but I feel, especially in our current situation, that we all need to look up to God to find the solutions. The words in 'Look up Child' by Lauren Daigle resonate with this and couldn't be more relevant at this time. Have a listen!

I am now stepping down as the PCC secretary for St Mary's, to be succeeded by Canon Rose Lawley. Being on the PCC has given me an experience of the church family that I had not yet seen. I would encourage anyone who feels that God has put something on their heart for the church, to become involved. The PCC is the powerhouse for change and new ideas and needs a representation of the whole church family of St Mary's. I hope to put my energies into building on relationships in the community with my Pilates and health promotion skills which I believe I am far more gifted at than my secretarial skills!

Jane Macnaughton

CHURCH WARDEN'S REPORT 2019

We continue to be surprised at the number of rotas there are that keep things working; many thanks to those drawing up the rotas and those serving on them. Without you very little could happen. But this is only part of our amazingly complex organisation that includes music, children's activities, setting up for and running services, home group leaders, and the organisers, helpers and donors at the various events, shared meals and many others. At the same time we remain concerned at the workload on the clergy team and on the Wardens that could be shared if more people were willing to volunteer and commit to doing things. The need for a second churchwarden was answered by Roy's willingness to take up the role; but we remain in need of a hall management group to look after the hall, to manage bookings and maintenance and to report to the PCC. With two curates to look after for much of the year the load on Mike has increased rather than decreased. Please think and pray about whether there are areas that you could take on; whether you have any knowledge that is not being used etc. and talk to Mike, Roy or David.

Particular thanks to the group of folk who turned up to help clear the church for its internal works, and to those that helped put things back into the building when services restarted. We would also like to thank those who helped in the shop, this provided an important resource and form of outreach in the village until its closure; we hope it can reopen in its new location during 2020. We also thank those who provide outreach through the pastoral care team and in other ways.

The joint Severn Centre/St Mary's series over the summer school holidays was very well received, and gave an opportunity for the two congregations to worship together. We feel the first Sunday of the month joint "best of both" service whilst reasonably received has yet to develop a real character of its own. We feel this transformation should be a focus in 2020 and deliver a different way to joyously worship the Lord.

We are at last making good progress on restoration matters, please see the separate report.

On financial matters as Churchwardens we remain concerned that we spent in the order of £2500 more than the donations and other income received in year 2019, and that this is very close to the deficit budget set at the start of the year. What is more we are concerned that the budget agreed by the PCC for 2020 has a deficit of some £6000, and this of course cannot take into account any cost increases due to Brexit or the adverse effects of the Coronavirus situation. The PCC had been tasked to produce ideas for fundraising throughout the year, but this is clearly on hold. The issue is one that everyone attending or using the church needs to address by reassessing their own giving and by supporting events when some level of normality returns. Whilst we have limited reserves, they are already below the suggested 3 months level this shortfall will severely eat into this and may leave us vulnerable in future years. As Churchwardens we feel that current PCC members will be negligent if they leave this problem for future PCC members to resolve. To stop the downward spiral will be difficult, and then to replace the loss of funds used during 2019 & 2020 will require an even greater sacrifice affecting our ability to support good causes from 2021.

David Rayner and Roy Adlington, Churchwardens March 2020

FABRIC REPORT 2019

There were no changes to the fabric of the building until 9 September when the contractors started the work on the interior of the church. A working party cleared the building over the weekend of the 7th and 8th and a last service was held in the building on the 8th before work started. Initial clearance of the pews and floor was amazingly rapid but we found that in many areas the rot in the old floor was much worse than expected. It is lucky that someone had not gone through, or the pulpit collapsed through the floor.

In parallel with this work started in July to get the gas supply installed. Cadent the regional gas installer sat on the request for 3 months and did nothing. Their complaints team then told us about GIRS, a scheme that allows others to install supplies. After seeking tenders Adroit Utilities went out of their way to get the pipe installed before Christmas. Again we were let down by the utility providers who install the meter who took from early November to the end of January to fit a meter. After all this delay the heating system was finally commissioned on 5 Feb.

The delays to the gas supply meant that we had to continue to use the portable radiant heaters together with a gas space heater in the absence of working permanent heating. Apart from an earlier funeral we started to use the building with its new floor, pews in only the front half of the building and chairs to the rear and the non-working central heating for the Christmas carol service on 18 December and services after that date.

Unknown at that time the very wet autumn, lack of a French drain to the north of the building and the lack of heating was resulting in very high moisture levels which was causing the new oak floor to swell, and this would lead to boards lifting in January 2020, and other damage – but more about that in the report next year!

We also tendered for and let a contract for updating the sound system and installing a projector and screen. The sound engineers managed to fit in a day before Christmas to get the basics working, and will revisit in the New Year to complete the work.

We have also let the tender for the work on the tower and porch to the same contractor as did the internal work and plan to start the work in late January 2020.

We have also been trying to get ideas and tenders for creating the garden of remembrance, but contractors either seem to want to gold plate their ideas, or fail to send ideas or costs. We will have to try and progress and design to a final proposal in the new year, prior to faculty application.

This year the mowing contract for the churchyard was tendered and awarded to RJM Contracts who performed very well.

The Parish Hall continues to be a very useful resource to the church as the parish office, for meetings, meals, the Friday Event etc. We now have regular bookings with the Highley Companions, the stretch class and the Pilates classes. A low level of other lettings also provide some assistance with running costs and so whilst the hall is still run at a loss this is lower than previously. However the hall is generally looking rather tired and could benefit from some decoration, some cleaning of chairs and recovering of others to make it more attractive to users. Last year we reported that Tom King has been tasked with looking at the maintenance needs and how to finance them, but this did not progress ideas to a useful state. A number of the windows need urgent major repairs or probably replacement, and this needs to be addressed with urgency. We need someone to take the lead on hall maintenance, volunteers needed!

We continued to be grateful for the use of the premises for the Charity Shop until the site was sold. The new owner has offered a smaller area of the site once building works have been carried out though we have no clear indication of timescale. The shop provides an important community facility, and is much more than just a cheap second hand goods shop as it provides contact with others for people who could become very isolated. We hope to be able to restart this important work in 2020.

We would like to thank everyone that has helped around the church and churchyard including in particular those helped empty and them move back into the church around the building works, as well as those on an ongoing basis who clean, prepare for services, and who lock and unlock every day.

David Rayner and Roy Adlington, Churchwarden

RESTORATION REPORT 2019

Towards the end of 2018 the PCC received notification of a substantial bequest for spending "on the fabric of the church or churchyard in accordance with proposals approved by Keith Smith". It has been agreed that some of this money can be used to carry out the work on the tower and porch. The faculty for this work has been obtained, tenders received and the work programmed to start during the last week of January 2020.

As previously reported, we were also lucky enough to receive a donation of £30k towards the heating. Having obtained costed options it was agreed that we should go for a gas fired radiator system and essential companion work to the floor and electrical system carried out to enable its installation. The faculty was obtained, work tendered and the work started in early September. The work was substantially complete by mid-December. We were however severely let down by the regional gas installer Cadent who effectively did nothing for 3 months despite repeated chasing. Another company subsequently worked hard and installed the gas pipe in December. However at the time of writing (end Jan '20)

the energy provider and their meter installer still have not managed to fit a meter and so the heating remains un-commissioned.

In association with the other internal work we had 6 sample chairs for nearly 3 months, and based on the feedback from congregations and visitors we purchased the chairs for the rear half of the church. Donations and the sale of some of the spare pews have currently covered around 75% of the cost of the chairs. We have also progressed the upgrading of the sound system. This was part-installed to allow use of the building over Christmas and will be completed in February. Again we are grateful for the generous donations towards this work.

We would aim to do the other essential work as a series of smaller projects approaching other grant bodies for specific elements; for example repairs to the windows.

We continued to be grateful for donations from the shop until its closure and hope that this will be able to reopen in new premises later in 2020. We are also very grateful for the significant donations mentioned above. We hope that making a significant step forward internally and on the tower and porch will invigorate efforts towards completion of all necessary work

David Rayner
Restoration Project lead and Churchwarden

ST MARY'S ALLSORTS REPORT 2019

Allsorts is going from strength to strength, at our February meeting there were thirty seven ladies present. Throughout 2019 we had lots of interesting speakers including one of our own members Chriss Corfield who talked about her holiday to Hawaii, another person who shared her extensive world travel experiences was Pen Quiller.

Laura Dalton (Hill) a previous resident in Highley, came and gave us a insight into her new life as a vicar in the Church of England.

We also had a craft evening which everyone took part in and seemed to enjoy.

In June we had our annual outing, We went to Halfpenny Green Vineyard, we had a very interesting talk about the process of wine making, afterwards we tasted the wine and also enjoyed a cream tea.

In December we had our Christmas meal at the Severn Centre where Mark and his team did an excellent job providing us with lovely food and good service. I feel very privileged to be part of Allsorts and look forward to having fellowship and fun with our lovely ladies in the coming years.

Lin Evans

WEDNESDAY MORNING HOLY HABITS HOME GROUP 2019

The group has met weekly during term time and has averaged between 8-10 regular members. Our base is mostly at the Rectory, although during the summer we moved to Severnside, where we watched the trains go by and waved to the passengers from Thelma's lounge. Strangely enough, being a group of ladies, (although not exclusively and men are welcome) we don't have any problem in finding something to talk about from the different topics!

The Holy Habits material offers a variety of media for use to stimulate our discussions and we have used art, film, 1960s music, as well as bible study. We have 'dug deep' into the subject matter and it has encouraged us to think about how we can live our lives as disciples of Christ in ways that better reflect the love of God through Jesus. We value the close relationships that we share and seek to be flexible and sensitive to the moment. We are always ready to pray for anyone or any needs which arise.

VAL SMITH

ST MARY'S CHARITY SHOP REPORT 2019

2019 would have been a bumper year for the shop. A very kind gentleman by the name of Stuart volunteered to paint the outside which was well received. However, in June we were informed that Perry & Phillips had bought our premises to use as an undertaker facility, including sales office, mortuary and chapel of rest. The company informed us that they were building a small shop on the side of Coronation Street, by the side of the chapel of rest, which would be for the charity shop to use if wanted. So it was with sadness that we had to close the doors at the end of September, with the attendant loss of income. Despite making extensive efforts to re-house the shop, no suitable alternative could be found. Our racks and some other bits have been stored at the Working Men's Club for the time being, but they could not accommodate the shop.

Our customers and donators were very upset and have since asked many times when we will be opening. The closure of the shop has been a devastating blow to some people who relied on us for clothing themselves and their families.

Since closing, Perry & Phillips held an open morning for people to ask questions, as they had not realised how important the shop was for the community. This was not particularly well attended by the village, but was supported by church members. Building is under way, but has been badly hampered by the wet weather and is now at a standstill due to the corona virus. We were led to believe that the builder was aiming at a March finish, but of course this will not now happen, so we have to be patient and rely on God.

It was planned to install a mezzanine floor in the building to provide more space, but due to planning regulations, this has been abandoned. When the building is finally finished, we will have to fit it out with racking, counter, flooring, mirrors, changing room, etc. the cost of this being met, we believe, by the church. It will be smaller than our original shop, but we will do our best to make it work. We will at least have a toilet and tea making facilities, which will be a great improvement! We expect to be inundated with donations when we do open, so may need help to sort that out and would propose the use of the Parish Hall as an accepting station for a week or so.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our lovely volunteers, who hopefully, will all return when needed. Otherwise we shall be looking for new people to join us. We would also thank Roy and David our churchwardens for their help during the dismantling and moving of the shop fittings.

The PCC kindly made a decision to carry on with donations to the planned charities until the end of December, and this has been carried out. Figures for the year are:

Takings to end September - £12,410.00 (this figure includes two small amounts taken at the fete day and Christmas lights turn on) and is improved from last year. Added to this will be the OXFAM money for the recycled bags.

Donations - £3,201.00 to various charities to end of December. The remainder, after overheads, being donated to the church renovations.

You will agree that this is a great effort by all concerned, including everyone in our community.

Gay Lilley

Catalyst Men's Group 2019



The Men's Group, known as Catalyst, met every third Saturday in the Parish Hall for a full English breakfast, a time of fellowship and generally a talk. We were privileged to have some speakers including Gareth Bolton from OM (Operation Mobilisation), Merv Smith on behalf of Open Doors. David Poyner shared his experience of a visit to an SAS base. For various reasons we had fewer speakers, but Roy Addlington organised a visit to Hobson Brewery which drew in a number of visitors. Several months saw us share our own stories as a way of recognising that God is at work in our lives despite the issues we may be facing.

We have also had visitors from Bridgnorth Baptist, and from Alveley church. Generally, we had between twelve and eighteen men attend, but when Gareth Bolton came, we had twenty-eight. The goal of building relationships between the men is being achieved. We began to learn the importance of our roles in God's purpose for our lives as individuals, as well as our roles in the kingdom of God.

Sadly, the idea of continental breakfast didn't really inspire folk to eat healthily so we have discontinued them.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of Gay Lilley and Shirley Page who get up at 6:00am ready to cook the breakfast and have it on the plates at 8:05am. They work quietly in the kitchen, cooking and washing up because not only do they enjoy it, but they see it as part of their service of God's family. A wonderful example to us all.

Stewart Page

FRIDAY EVENT REPORT 2019



This year The Friday Event has had a big shake up. At the end of last Term (July 2109) Chris Smith stepped down as Chairman and John Prockter as Secretary. We are grateful to them both for their many years of service and their invaluable input. Chris is still on the rota to help out occasionally and John has now moved on to other projects in Bridgnorth. He has assured us we can still call upon him for any help and advice.

Rachel Williams has taken on the Chairman position, Mary Homer remains the vice chairman role and Lisa Scott has taken on the position of secretary. All three of them have decided to work closely and pool their talents. Jeremy Lloyd continues to be our amazing treasurer!

We have a steady team of around 13 helpers, plus 3/4 young leaders. We continue to attract around 30 youngsters a week. Every week we have a minimum of 4 adult helpers. We have regular craft/cooking/pool and table tennis tournaments. We have also enjoyed a trip to see a Christian rap band at All Saints church Telford and a trip to Area 51 for a disco and food. In the summer we joined in the community carnival where we had a jungle theme. We handed out sweets and bubbles to people along the procession. It was wonderful that so many children took part and helped make a wonderful banner for the procession. We took 13 children from The Friday Event to Spree in the summer for the annual gathering. Lots of fun and little sleep was had!

We have a steady income which we use to subsidise trips, activities and buying new equipment.

We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead. Continuing to seek God and find new ways we can continue to bless our village and young people.

Lisa Scott, Friday Event secretary

ST MARY'S CHILDREN'S WORK REPORT 2019

Our children and young people have had a very up and down year with changes in clergy staff.

We have been following the Holy Habits course, as the rest of the church which was well received and engaged by the children. During Lent we have followed the lectionary and had some very good sessions with the children, who seemed to have learned well. Following the departure of the King family, who are greatly missed in the groups, we currently have six 3-10 year olds and three over 10's. The older groups have had lots of meaningful discussions and have requested to do more activities for the future. They have litter picked as a service to the community, whilst the younger group made sweet baskets to share with other church members. We have discussed what to spend the Lent £50 on with several ideas being put forward. We have decided to call our two groups by (up to 10's) LIGHTHOUSE and older group - SPOTLIGHT.

We are grateful to Mandy Homer and Alastair Macnaughton for volunteering, but are once again finding it difficult with not enough adult leaders/helpers and would appeal to anyone who feels called to please offer your help, to enable our children and young people to go forward and learn more of the love of Jesus in their lives.

Gay Lilley
March 2020

MESSY CHURCH REPORT 2019

Messy Church in 2019 was much the same as in 2018, that is - surprising, amazing, fun, noisy, creative, friendly, a blessing and time-consuming, demanding, challenging and unpredictable, but it's a ministry about God and about people, so how else would it be? There were, again, four Messy Church gatherings, in March, June, September and December, with new families coming each time. Statistics tell you something (but not everything), so over the four meetings attendance ranged from 20-42 children and 15-30 adults from 12-24 families, of which 3-7 were new, and 12-14 helpers. There is a good core of families coming regularly. We would like to build on this and were planning to have more Messy Church meetings in 2020.

Our themes were: 'The Bible....Light, life, food, guide, treasure', 'Pentecost – God's power to change', 'Drop Everything – Jesus calls the first disciples', and 'Messy Advent – Time to get ready'. Our crafts and activities exploring these themes have been many and varied, some messier than others, but there is always an edible craft!

This year we felt it was important to have a presence at the Highley Carnival in July so we had a Messy Church gazebo (or two) and invited folk to enjoy activities on the theme 'Loved by God'. A good number did and stayed to chat (and shelter from the rain). It was definitely worth doing.

Messy Church is a team effort. A huge 'thank-you' to everyone who has contributed in any way before, during and after each meeting, giving their time, talents and energy. Do have a look at the Messy Church website: www.messychurch.org.uk It will inspire you.

Moira Harris

ST MARY'S OPEN THE BOOK REPORT 2019

The team continued their weekly storytelling in Highley and Kinlet Primary Schools . In recent weeks a small group of children from Kinlet Family Playgroup are joining us and so bible stories are reaching more children.

This academic year we have followed the Year Three handbook which during Autumn and Spring Terms covered stories about Paul, David and some of Jesus' parables from the Gospels.

2019 celebrated the 20th Anniversary of Open the Book. During May four members of the team were able to attend a service in Gloucester Cathedral. We presented pictures from Highley and Kinlet to be placed in one of the books which have been compiled to represent each school nationally hearing stories from the bible. Bob Hartman , who wrote the stories in the Lion Storyteller Bible had all the congregation participating in one of his stories!

In July we held a fund raising event in the Parish Hall. Arthur Painting compiled a quiz and was assisted on the night by Dale Gould. Everyone had an enjoyable evening and £230 was raised for the continued work of Open the Book nationally.

The team told the story of Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine during the Christingle Service at Highley School in February 2020.

March 2020 has seen our storytelling curtailed due to COVID-19 outbreak. Both schools look forward to us returning when they can re-open and Open the Book advise us that it is safe to resume visits.

Jill Mansell

ST MARY'S PASTORAL CARE AND SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2019

We met six times in 2019 and our meetings are held on a strictly confidential basis. Our purpose is to bring to our attention any problems or concerns which members of the parish may be experiencing. There may be some practical help which we can offer, but mainly we arrange to visit and offer our friendship and support. As a group we also assist with the organising of our annual Memorial Service in November and help in the service it's self.

Gill Rees has been in contact with Angela Aycliffe at the Ludlow office with regard to the possibility of her leading a safeguarding training course here in Highley as has been done previously. Unfortunately, this cannot be done due to a shortage of staff and it has been recommended that, wherever possible, the training update should be done on line. The contact is:- <https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/>

You will need to register independently to create an account. For those not able to do this, Angela is working on producing a booklet as an alternative but this will not be available until August at the earliest.

Gill Rees

ST MARY'S COFFEE MORNINGS REPORT 2019

There have been an encouraging increase of new attendees to the coffee morning which members of the church have been keeping in contact with during the coronavirus lock down.

The voluntary money raised from the coffee mornings has gone towards the church building work.

This year risk assessments have been completed for each place the coffee morning is held at to ensure safety to all who attend.

We look forward to restarting the coffee mornings as soon as it is safe to do so and expand on the friendships we have started to develop.

Yvonne Shaw

BRIDGNORTH DEANERY SYNOD REPORT 2019

The Synod, meets four times each year in different parishes around the Deanery. Highley is represented by Clergy members and up to three members of the laity. The current Lay Representatives are Bernadine Thomas, Ruth Honeybourne and Gill Rees.

The programme for 2019 included a talk by an Agricultural Chaplain discussing "The Church and post-Brexit farming"; a discussion on "The School of Ministry" led by the Diocesan Local Ministry Officer; and a general forum with the title of "Celebration ! Sharing the Good News around the Deanery". The year concluded on the 3rd of December with "An Advent Reflection" led by the Archdeacon of Hereford

ST MARY'S TREASURER'S REPORT 2019

This report covers the full year ended 31 December 2019

We are ever grateful for God's abundant blessing bestowed upon us both as a church and as individuals. These gifts of time, talents and treasure underpin all that we are able to do and thanks are due to all those who give of these freely.

From the date of the APCM, held on 10 April 2019, a new treasurer was appointed and following the end of the second year of record keeping on a specialised accounting software package the accounts have now been prepared in line with standard guidance from the Church of England, and the Charities Act 2011.

During the year receipts from planned giving decreased from those in 2018 by £1,597 (4%). This follows a fall of 3% the previous year. In this year the decrease is due to several individuals or families having to reduce or stop their planned regular giving, whilst there has only been a small increase in planned giving by those already contributing. Collections

at services was also some £788 (16%) lower than last year. This was, in some part due to being unable to hold funerals in the church during the internal restoration work, but in the main is a result of smaller collections week on week at regular services.

There has been a significant increase in voluntary giving this year towards aspects of the internal restoration of the church. A single anonymous donation of £5,000 was made towards the new sound system together with other smaller gifts, and £1,510 was received towards the cost of the new chairs.

During the year amounts collected on behalf and due to third parties (Agency Payments) are excluded from the accounts as they are not part of the income which the church may use. Some £4,902 (£4,700 in 2018) was collected on behalf of the Diocese in respect of fees for funerals and weddings. This income varies from year to year as the numbers of funerals and weddings cannot be anticipated.

Until its closure, in September, St Mary's Charity Shop continued to generate income at a similar level to previous years and the surplus, after operating costs have been covered, was shared between local charities and organisations (25%) and the remainder (75%) has been held again this year as designated funds for the major church restoration project. Although the shop was closed for the last three months of the year donations were made to local groups and charities in each of those months, from the balance held. It is hoped the charity shop will operate again from late spring 2020 when space has been offered, by the new owners of the premises, on completion of building work.

Income from Parish Hall lettings has increased significantly to £2,600 in the year (£1,105 in 2018) as more groups are now hiring the hall on a regular basis. However, day to day running costs exceeded income by £3,372, and significant repairs will be needed within the next year or eighteen months. Income from advertising and sales of the parish magazine did not cover the cost of production this year by £750. A small increase in advertising fees was made this year, and the cover price will increase to try and ensure that this valuable means of communication and outreach can to cover its costs in the future.

Our Parish Offer to the Diocese this year was reduced to £38,000 (£40,896 in 2018) as we anticipated a deficit of income over expenditure in the year of £3,070. Overall for the year we have met the payments in full and the overall deficit of income over expenditure, for general funds, was £3,089, in line with expectations. This year the PCC decided to continue with its aim to give financial help totalling £1,800 to be shared between three chosen Christian charitable causes abroad. £1,200 was sent abroad whilst the PCC agreed that £600 should be donated to the local Bridgnorth food bank.

Other costs have been broadly in line with previous years and expectations but there were several items of note. Ministry costs, which include clergy travel and telephones, have increased further this year to cover the full year costs of two curates, who began working in the parish in July 2018. A one off sum of £1,033 was spent to upgrade the sound equipment used for services held regularly in the Severn Centre and a newly refurbished computer was purchased for the Parish Office at a cost of £260. We continue to receive a contribution from the Parish Council which meets half the cost of the maintenance costs for the churchyard. The contribution this year was £3,500, towards a total cost of £7,000.

This year the small sums held and spent by the various groups under the umbrella of the church have also been included following guidance from the Diocesan accountant. Bal-

ances held as at 31/12/19 are identifiable within the accounts and known receipts and expenses have also been included

This year we have received grants totalling £1,550 from the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme in respect of the VAT on repairs to the lightening conductor in 2018 and initial expenses in respect of the start of the church restoration incurred in the year. Further claims will be made as each phase of the work progresses.

The requirement for extensive restoration work to the church has been an ongoing financial burden for a number of years and whilst part of the shop proceeds together with other gifts has slowly increased the money available for the work this was still insufficient to cover the costs. Previous applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been unsuccessful. However, in 2018 the church received a most generous legacy from a former church member of £125,000 together with a second and final payment of £37,860 in 2019. Under the term of the will this bequest is restricted to be "spent on the fabric of the Church or Churchyard in accordance with proposals approved by Keith Smith" (former church warden). It has now been possible to begin the restoration work. The first phase to provide heating, a new floor and associated works began in September and was substantially complete by the end of the year. At the yearend £49,221 had been spent on this work. The second phase will be undertaken in 2020. Plans are also being developed to create a garden of remembrance in the churchyard using part of the legacy.

As we move into 2020 we pray that we may continue to be good stewards of all that God so generously blesses us with and to respond with generosity to his love, in whatever way he lays on our hearts, in order that his Kingdom may grow in our community and we may bless others in doing his will.

Mary Rayner
Treasurer for 2019

ELECTORAL ROLL REPORT 2019

As of the 12th of April 2020 there are 84 people on the electoral at St Mary's church Highley.