

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

WEDNESDAY 9th May 2022 7pm

OFFICERS AND GROUP LEADER'S REPORTS

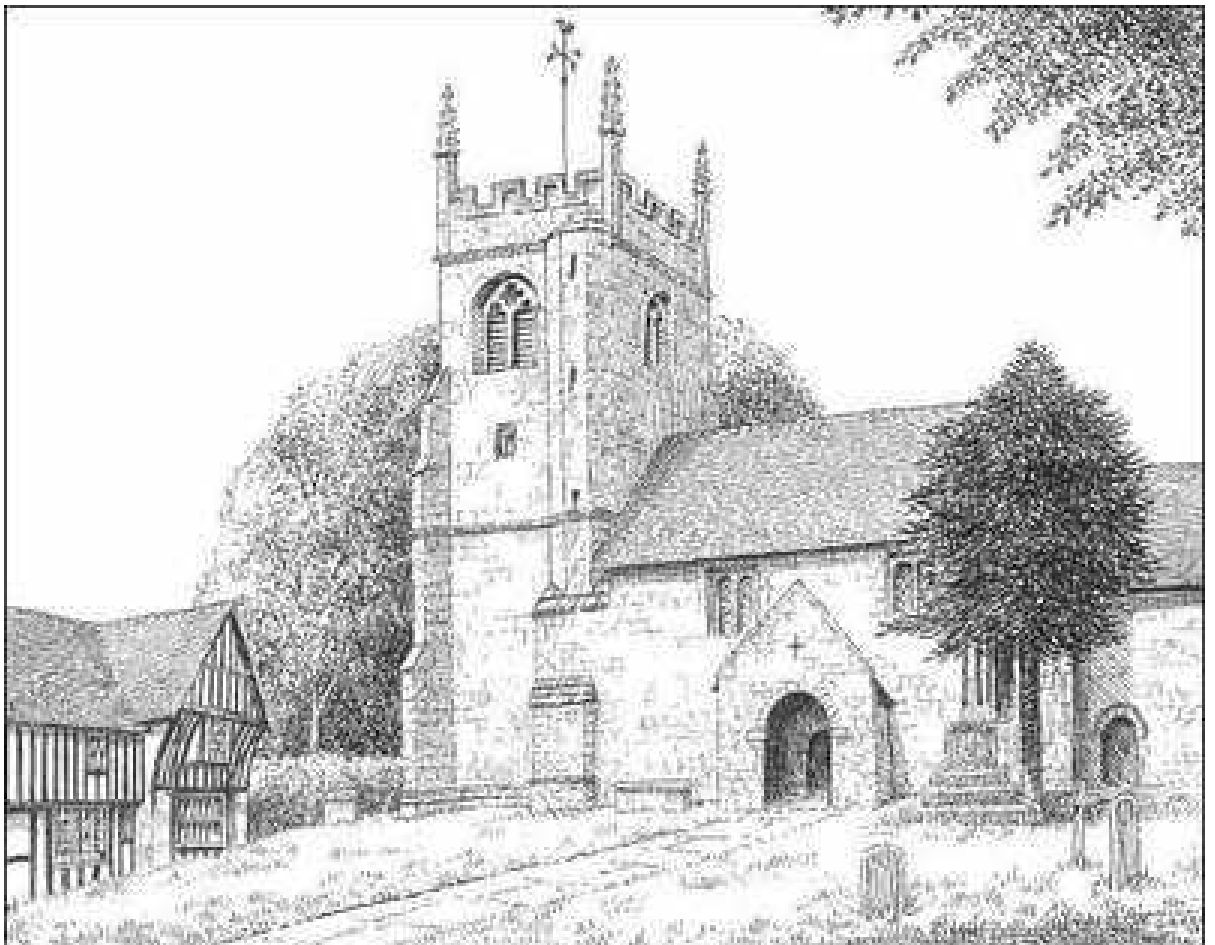


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ST. MARY'S CHURCH, HIGHLEY

CONTENTS

PAGE No:

- 3. MINISTRY TEAM REPORT**
- 4. REVD DAVID POYNER
SECRETARY'S REPORT
CHURCHWARDEN'S REPORT**
- 5. TREASURER'S REPORT**
- 6. PARISH HALL REPORT**
- 7. ALLSORTS REPORT
CHARITY SHOP REPORT**
- 8. DEANERY SYNOD REPORT
WEDNESDAY MORNING GROUP REPORT**
- 9. THURSDAY EVENING MEETING GROUP
SAFEGUARDING REPORT
ELECTORAL ROLL REPORT
REPORT: AMY AND MARK WILLIAMS**
- 10. ANGIE FORSTER – ORDINAND
THE FRIDAY EVENT REPORT**

Ministry Team:

The last twelve months have seen the church emerging from the restrictions of Covid and re-shaping our activities to accommodate that and also the retirement of our incumbent, Revd Mike Harris, in September.

After 18 months of online services, we re-commenced meeting together in church in May/June, with a reduced service cover across the benefice, to reflect the depleted Ministry Team from September 2021. Whilst this has meant a reduction in services across the benefice, it has encouraged people to travel around our 4 churches each month and form stronger relationships with all the congregations.

Inevitably there are still a few members of our congregations who have felt unable to return yet, due to the risk of infection, but we have not suffered to the same extent as other churches across the Diocese. This reflects the commitment of our congregations to their faith and to the communities around us. God was still God during the lockdowns, just as he is still God now and will be in the future. Lockdown proved that, although we are grateful for physical places to meet together, our faith is not dependent on buildings.

Technology has provided us with fresh ways to keep in contact with some of those who are not with us in the church building. We have learnt to connect with the wider community through social media, the Forum magazine and even the good old telephone, not to mention those we encounter in the fresh air!

During the year people have used a variety of ways to keep in touch with each other and also keeping an eye out for those who from time to time have 'dropped below the radar' due to ill-health and other reasons.

Whilst we have been living in strange times and always on the brink of the possibility of infection, we have often seen the best in people as they looked to help those in need. That is what being Christ in the community is all about.

As we continue to move forward, we also want to respond to the things we heard God saying to us during our time of isolation. He promises to do 'a new thing' (Isaiah 43) and we must be careful not just to slip back into the old ways, because they are familiar and comfortable.

Mike's retirement has however, placed a heavy burden on the remaining clergy and licenced individuals, all of whom are volunteers. Not only are there fewer of us to cover Sunday services, weddings, funerals, baptisms, but also the work which goes on behind the scenes, which is normally dealt with by an incumbent. In addition, the process of seeking a new incumbent creates its own pressure. The ministry team is grateful to all who have taken on extra responsibilities during this time.

Despite the pressures, (or perhaps because of them!), we look forward to being able to welcome our next incumbent, hopefully in late autumn, if everything goes to plan. May we allow God to fulfil that prophecy from Isaiah

'Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up, do you not see it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.'

United we stand, divided we fall.

Revd Val Smith, Revd David Poyner, Revd Canon Rose Lawley,
Keith Smith (Reader).

Revd David Poyner:

I have now been licensed as an "associate minister", having completed my training as an assistant curate. In practice nothing actually changes in the work I do in the benefice, which is to lead services, a home group and online compline on a Friday evening.

Revd David Poyner

Secretaries Report:

During the year 2021/22, since the last APCM the Parochial Church Council has met four times, following a decision to meet every two months instead of monthly. Items covered apart from the usual business of finance, Parish Hall, Charity shop (all covered in other reports), included the provision of a War Graves Notice, further work required to the church building (kitchen and toilet provision), churchyard extension, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, and the vacancy following the retirement of the Rector Revd Mike Harris. A Parish Profile (Statement of Needs) and advertisement needed to be produced along with the other parishes. Meetings were arranged including a Section 11 meeting, however, a Section 12 meeting was not deemed necessary. The process continues.

I would like to thank the Churchwarden, Ministry Team, Treasurer and PCC members for their help over the past 12 months.

Revd Canon Rose Lawley
PCC Secretary

Churchwardens Report:

The year commenced with most covid restrictions still in place.

David & Mary Rayner announced they were going to live closer to family members in Gloucestershire. They have both contributed enormously to the way St Marys has moved forward in their five years here. David project managed the building contractors with the tower repairs and St Marys is no longer on the at-risk register.

As David concentrated on the urgent church repairs, I have specialised on the churchyard. A faculty application for the purpose of generating more burial space by uprooting trees is being considered by the Diocese. The Parish Council have agreed to pay the full costs of clearing the site so a feasibility study can determine whether the area is still subject to waterlogging as it was in 1990 when the decision was made to allow the area to go wild.

The Justice Service has kindly chosen us and allowed a youth to work his community hours along with his case manager. Between the three of us we have tidied up not only Highley churchyard but Chelmarsh & Billingsley also.

Mike Harris retired in September 2021 & vacated the Rectory in February 2022 when the purchase of a house in Scotland was completed. Finally, but most important – I wish to thank the team of ladies who have helped me to survive the loss of 3 major members of St Mary's within this year. Thank you all.

Roy Adlington
Churchwarden

Treasurer's Report:

This report covers the full year ended 31st December 2021

Again, this year we have been blessed with gifts from individuals as well as time from many of the congregation, friends and family who have given their abundant differing talents to the upkeep of the parish hall and church.

The receipts from planned giving were slightly elevated this year due to the church services commencing, last year we received £1073 this year £2112, this is due to us only having services on a rotation basis still due to restrictions during COVID.

We haven't been able to hold any fundraising events, but the shop did have a stall at the Severn Centre Christmas Light Switch on.

The Shop opened fully in May due to a lockdown at the beginning of the year. Funds totalling £2934 were donated to local charities for August through to December, of which £1,500 was given to the Parish Hall Fund. The rent is £216 per month, and we have questioned the charges for other utilities but have not received a response from Perry and Philips with regards to these bills.

Income from Parish Hall lettings is still low in comparison to pre COVID bookings, hopefully local groups will begin to run again during next year. The £715 that has been received was mostly for Stretch, Highley Companions and Pilates classes. The outgoings have evidently been less due to it not being used, although the amount for the year was £682 on electricity and £425 for gas, which exceeded income.

We were unable to pause the collection of the bin from the Parish Hall, so the PCC made the decision to have it collected. We are still being billed so far but I cancelled the Direct Debit in October, so they are showing as unpaid, Veolia hasn't contacted me regarding this.

Advertisers for the Parish Magazine recognised an amount of £2058 and sales were £1559. The total expenditure was £2628 so we have an excess of nearly £1000.

The magazine is a very good part of outreach to the wider community.

Our Parish Share to the Diocese this year was £30,000 and this has been paid in full. The PCC also gave financial help totalling £1800 to the following international and local missions, Father Edward £600, Embrace £150, UCB £150, Friends of the Holy Land £150, Lifewords £150, Operation Christmas Child £150, Open Doors £150, Bridgnorth Churches Together £150 and Young Minds £150.

As last year, we still haven't run any Alpha courses and we are still undertaking some meetings and groups online. A few groups have begun to meet face to face, but this is still significantly lower than normal.

We continued employing RJM Contracts for the churchyard maintenance. We received half of the funding from the Parish Council in the sum of £3500.

This last year has been a learning curve for myself, as I took over the position of treasurer from Mary Rayner, we only had a brief meeting when the handover took place, but Mary has been forever by my side on Zoom, which thankfully neither has let me down. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their understanding and patience with me as I have worked my way through this interesting year.

Thank you, Lord, for your continued blessings that you have bestowed on us. You have provided us with more than we could imagine. You have surrounded us and cared for us and blessed every day with kind words and actions. You lift us up in ways that keep our eyes focused on you and make our spirits soar.

Mandy Homer
Treasurer

Parish Hall Report:

During lockdown, the toilets have been painted, insulation has been put in the ceiling of the refreshment area, the windows have been replaced in the main hall, the light fittings cleaned, the tubes and numerous ceiling tiles replaced. Outside the overgrown hedge has been cut back by the council.

We are going to paint the main hall, and the floor in the toilets and the main hall is to be replaced. There is still a lot that needs doing both inside and outside the building when funding is available.

At the moment, a stretch group uses the hall every Wednesday lunch time. Every other Thursday, Highley Companions have the hall from 10.00 until 15.00pm, and every Thursday evening a palates group meets from 19.30 to 20.30. The hall is also used for birthday parties and Allsorts will soon be up and running again.

During lockdown, St Mary's Charity Shop used part of the hall to sort clothes, along with the local 'food share', who used the other part of the hall to distribute food to the people of the village.

As with most things, it would be good to have more people available to help with the upkeep of the hall.

Pat Whitefoot

Allsorts Report:

Because of Covid restrictions we have very little to report again this year. We have continued to stay in contact with our lovely ladies by telephone on several occasions throughout the year. At Christmas we gave everyone a card and lovely book marker.

We will meet together for the first time in May thanks to the lifting of Covid restrictions, to enjoy some vocal entertainment and a cream tea.

St Mary's Charity Shop:

2021 has been a relatively good, if trying, year for the shop. In March, with the help of Roy Addlington's shop fitting skills, we opened our doors after eighteen months closure, following the sale of our former premises to Perry & Phillips, who kindly provided the new shop.

Our biggest challenge, as the new shop was much smaller, was receiving donations and storage, so, as it was not being used, a portion of the Parish hall was sectioned off for this purpose. It was ideal, with donations arriving on pre-arranged days, but as time went on, the PCC wanted the parish hall back and it was obvious to us that the arrangement with all the work involved in running backwards and forwards to the shop, would not be a long term solution. Rev Harris contacted The Bache public house, who offered their top room for us to use but this proved impractical and was damp. Unfortunately a lot of good stock had to be passed to the recycler as we could not accommodate it all.

Since then and through selective acceptance of donations, we have been taking things directly into the shop. This is proving workable, but as the premises are around half the size of our original building, we are not able to hold as much stock. This in turn results in less income and less footfall! However, we have a turnover of approximately £900.00 per month, which after payment of rent, gives around £300.00 each to our charities and the parish hall fund.

Our charities this year have included: Highley Brownies, Friday Event, The Shed, Highley School, British Legion, The Companions, Top End Friendship Group, Bowling Club, First Responders.

We have made a huge effort to raise funds for the people of the war in Ukraine and decided to dedicate March for this purpose, collecting clothes and medical supplies and packing what amounted to 25+ boxes full which went to Poland by truck. We have also sent a total of £2000.00, £500.00 to Samaritan's Purse who have set up field hospitals in Rumania whilst spreading the Good News of Jesus and £1500,00 to the Disasters Emergency Committee for their distribution where needed through mainly Christian organisations. We also have several boxes of clothes which will go to Shropshire Refugee Trust for the people who escape the war and more medical/sanitary items are still arriving and will be sent off. For the future we are considering using social media more and for a Facebook presence, but we still want to keep our outreach to the village. We must thank all our willing volunteers for their efforts and help during what has been somewhat of a learning curve for us all, most especially Thelma

Baxindale and Roy Addlington.

We now have ten permanent volunteers and three people who will come at very short notice, but we are always grateful for people to volunteer, especially church members.

Gay Lilley

Deanery Synod:

Due to Covid there were no Deanery Synod meetings during 2021.

Wednesday Morning Prayer and Study Group:

Since concerns about Covid and the spread of infection were still very real throughout the first 6 months of the year, communication was limited, most of it taking place over WhatsApp or other social media. In July we began to tentatively meet outside, starting with a lunch at the Larch Barns and then socially in the garden throughout August.

September saw the start of meeting in St Mary's Church, where we revamped the Prayer Corner and in November we began an Advent Study. Eventually, due to winter making itself known, we began meeting in our homes once again. On reconvening in September we welcomed several new people into the group and the Advent study was well received.

Post-Christmas and into 2022, we began a study on the Letters to the Seven Churches in the book of Revelation. This will take us to just beyond Easter. It has been a revelation to us all to discover that the problems those churches faced were very similar in essence to our issues today. Even more challenging has been Jesus' response to them (and to us!)

We aim to be a group which is supportive of each other, in life and in worship. We often have music and prayer, in addition to the bible study and are known to go 'off piste' when discussion takes over. The time goes far too quickly! We welcome fresh blood (not literally)! If you would like to join us, contact Val Smith 861966 or Pat Whitefoot 861155 to find out more and where the group is meeting each week.

Revd Val Smith

Thursday Evening Meeting via Zoom:

A small group have met on Wednesday or Thursday evenings via Zoom. Our

topics have ranged from traditional Bible studies to "Living in Love and Faith" and the Advent Antiphons.

Revd David Poyner.

Safeguarding:

As the church no longer has its own Safeguarding Officer, all possible safeguarding issues are dealt with directly by the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer.

Electoral Roll:

The roll now stands at 71, reduced by six from last year, and made up as follows:

Died.. Mike Buckingham and Beryl Walker.

Moved away.. Moira Harris, Tony Fall and Pam Fall

Clergy member.. Canon Rosemary Lawley

D Crossley
Electoral Roll Officer

Amy and Mark Williams:

Amy and I have been very involved in the life of the church over the past 12 months with Zoom sessions and in the church itself particularly focusing on the 4th and (to a lesser extent) 2nd Sundays of the month.

Before we were able to fully enjoy church in its actual setting we were having regular online "Afternoon Zooms" with all sorts of people coming along. We had open discussions, visiting speakers, times of prayer and times of learning. We all found these very rewarding and a great way for us to stay connected as a church here in Highley and with those further afield.

As the church became available for us to hold real physical services, we found that the need for the virtual events was reducing to the point where we felt that they were no longer necessary in that format. Since then, we have been responsible for the services on the 4th Sunday and helped with the worship and a few techy bits and pieces on the 2nd Sunday which are covered admirably by Val and Keith Smith.

During both these services we have helped with some of the organisation around young people's provision over in the parish hall and have made sure that their time over there is represented within the church as well, so that we can all be part of their learning too, it's all part of being a family.

Amy and Mark Williams

Angie Forster - Ordinand:

Beginning my ordination training

In September 2021, I started on a very exciting and emotional journey, answering, what I felt, was a call on my life to train as a licenced minister in The Church of England.

Since starting, I have met some wonderful people from both Hereford and Gloucester dioceses and have the privilege of training alongside them. We have been away on residential weekends together, which are such a blessing as we can share our ups and down of the journey and have now set up a WhatsApp group for all the first years, which lights up most frequently when an assignment is due in☺. I am honored to call them my friends and know they are there with help, advice and prayers when I need them, as I am for them. I am also, so excited to see friends, who are in the third year, going off to be ordained this June.

I have experienced a mixture of services, led by both the students and staff and am still getting to grips with using "The Red Book" to lead morning and evening prayer, but have been reassured this will become easier the more I use it. I have found a new love for the Bible passages that were so familiar to me, as we are taught to go deeper into them but using commentaries and reflecting on how these stories made us feel when reading them, by asking questions about why the characters behaved or did what they did. It is fascinating, seeing these in such a different way.

We are just starting our new module on how to preach so I am sure I will be using you all as guinea pigs to try out the techniques I will learn. I look forward to hear your feedback.

I have found it hard to balance the pressures of getting all the readings and preparation done for each week, whilst still working and looking after the family but by the grace of God, I am managing to get work in on time, and the tutors are very understanding.

I would just like to say a huge thank you to everyone who is supporting me through prayer

Angie Forster

The Friday Event Report

At the beginning of 2021, in-line with government guidelines, the Friday event closed its doors once more, until after may half term. When we reopened in June it was with limited numbers of 15, this was a great opportunity to get to know the young people in a smaller setting and build relationships. We also got chance to tailor the evenings to those who had booked in.

This changed drastically when we opened in September, when our numbers grew beyond our expectations. With an average of 40 young people each week, this has been both challenging and exciting.

In February we took 35 young people to Airea51 on our first trip since

Covid.

The last 3 terms have shown the impact COVID has had on our young people and has challenged us to step up as youth workers and support them when needed. We are really grateful for the amount of young people coming to the youth club and using it as a safe space. We are beginning to see relationships growing and regularly seeing the same youths coming back week after week. After losing some leaders we have made a plea for volunteers and are pleased to have some new/returners join the team, but could always do with a few more pairs of hands.

Our finances are looking healthy after a generous donation from the charity shop and the love of our tuck shop.

As always we are looking forward to what God has planned ahead.

Rachel Williams & Mary Homer