

Great Brickhill Annual Parish Meeting, Tuesday 2nd May 2023

Parochial Church Council Report

I am pleased to report that things are very much back to normal after the disruption caused by Covid-19.

The Annual Church Meeting was held in the church on Thursday 19th May. Julia Turner was re-elected as Church Warden. Margretta Smith stepped down from the PCC having served since 2014. Diana Williams was elected to the PCC to serve alongside the current members, Phillipa Cook, Clare Hankins-Lewis and Joy Wilson. The Accounts for the year were adopted and reports presented on the services/events/activities held throughout the year.

This year's Annual Meeting is being held in the church on Tuesday 16th May at 7.30pm. A photo presentation will be given showing the various events, which have been held throughout the year. The annual elections will be held - we would welcome new members to join the PCC.

The Rector arrived in the village in February 2003. To acknowledge his twenty years in the Benefice, Drinks and Canapes were enjoyed by people from all four churches after the Family Service here on Sunday 19th February.

In the autumn the Rector went on a trip to Israel. During a coffee morning being held in the church on Saturday 13th May, the Rector will be showing the photos he took during this walking trek over rough terrain amongst the Palestinian people.

Last June we received the sad news of the death of our previous Rector, the Reverend Stephen Toze (incumbent here from 1994 to 2001).

As the church keeps much cooler than ordinary buildings, we kept the building open for a longer daily period than normal over the days of the heatwave in July, from 9.30am until 8.00pm. Drinks were available in the refreshment area providing a place of refuge during the hot weather, a place to cool down, relax or even to do some work.

SERVICES:

REVIEW OF SUNDAY SERVICE PATTERN:

In September the new service pattern had been in operation for twelve months. The pattern was reviewed within four parishes. After the extensive period of consultation, it was agreed that the current service pattern would continue.

To make it fair for all four churches the pattern is complex. The services will continue to be publicised widely to enable everyone to easily access the information through all the various channels of communication.

SCHOOL SERVICES:

We were pleased to host High Ash services throughout the year:

- The Leavers' Service on 13th July when the Year 6 pupils (with Year 5 supporting) came to the church for an opportunity to reflect on their time at High Ash, as well as to look forward to their future at secondary school.
- In October pupils in Years 3, 4, 5 & 6 came for their Harvest celebration, a lovely service with some joyful songs. Years One and Two visited the church as part of their themed week; the children enjoyed identifying symbols in the church.

- The snow and ice prevented the younger classes from coming to church for their Christingle service. Instead, the service was held at the school where there was some lovely singing and words from the children, and we were given cards for us to distribute to residents in Stoke Hammond, Little and Great Brickhill. The weather improved for the Carol Service for the older pupils to go ahead in the church. It was lovely to hear the children sing so many traditional carols.
- Last month we welcomed staff and pupils for their Easter services - on the last Wednesday of term for Key Stage 1 & Foundation children and on the Thursday for the older Key Stage 2 children.

SPECIAL SERVICES:

During 2022 we had one wedding, five baptisms and seven funerals. A number of special services were held. In addition to our annual services such as Harvest, Remembrance Sunday, Nine Lessons and Carols, all of which were well attended, the highlights were probably:

- On Sunday 31st July we had a special outdoor service for the Benefice here in Great Brickhill. With the theme 'God's Creation', we congregated outside in the churchyard, 5 dogs among us. It was indeed a service with a difference, very much enjoyed by those who were there. The second part of the service involved an activity to do while strolling around the cemetery across the road.
- The Village Nativity on Sunday, 18th December. The Cricket Club kindly hosted this event, providing the sound system and mulled wine. The snow made it very scenic. It was another fantastic enactment of the Nativity with live animals, a wonderful opportunity for us to pass on the real meaning and message of Christmas.

At both the Nativity and the Carol Service the young children were encouraged to come forward to sing the first verse of some of the carols with the choir / music team, something that we wish to build on.

JUBILEE WEEKEND:

What a lovely four-day weekend it was with all the wonderful local and national events. We had a steady stream of visitors in the church on the Thursday afternoon and the Saturday morning to view the photographic exhibition and a much larger gathering on Sunday afternoon. There were many photos and memorabilia to go alongside the display of the old photos taken around the village from as far back as the 1850s! Michael Turner brought a wonderful array of artefacts from the farm, there were documents on show from the Great Brickhill Charity and a display of the Great Brickhill WI Heritage Project in 1982. A lovely addition was the letter of invitation and Order of Service for Westminster Abbey marking the 50th anniversary of the coronation attended by Sue and Roger Blofeld.

A digitalised video of the Great Brickhill Silver Jubilee celebrations was a great success, with thanks to Pat and Barry Thorne for the original cine footage. What a wonderful procession they had with so many villagers taking part with floats of all descriptions. The children had great fun with their games on the cricket field and the Great Brickhill tug of war team got quite wet - twice!

Refreshments were provided over three of the days. The donations came to £373, which were given to the Ukrainian Fund to add to the amount raised at the other village Jubilee celebrations.

The Benefice choir sang the Jubilee anthem in the church, which was recorded and then played just ahead of the lighting of the beacon at the cricket field.

THE QUEEN:

As soon as we heard of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, we put in place certain things which we hope were helpful for people at this sad time. During the period of Royal Mourning, until seven days after the funeral service, the church was open for a longer period of time, from 9.30am to 6.00pm – an opportunity for people to enter the church to pay their respects and have a quiet time for reflection and prayer.

On the eve of her funeral, we held a Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of the Queen. Around 80 people attended the service to commemorate the life of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with a time of reflection, prayers and hymns.

THE BELLS:

David Middleton, our Tower Captain, arranged for special ringing of the bells for the Jubilee and at appropriate times during the period of mourning for the Queen.

As part of a national bell ringing campaign ahead of the Coronation, David Middleton put out a plea for new bell ringers. He has been training a few people including some children. Sinead Carroll arranged for some filming of our bell ringers for BBC South Today, to highlight the need for new bell ringers. The item was featured throughout the day on the local News on Thursday 2nd March.

ACTIVITIES:

A new monthly midweek evening Bible Group is held at The Rectory. The sessions led by the Rector started in June and focus on readings which will be coming up in the Sunday services.

"Link to Hope" Shoebox Appeal - again, the shoeboxes were sent to Romania, Moldova, Ukraine or Bulgaria.

"Feed The Hungry" Knitting - knitted goods are sent to the "Feed the Hungry" charity.

Occasional Saturday Coffee Mornings, including one in May when donations were collected for Christian Aid. (We no longer hold a Christian Aid House to House collection around the village but encourage people to donate online).

The Monday Morning Coffee Club is held every Monday in the church during term time, between 9.30am and 11.30am. Anyone is welcome to call in for a coffee and chat.

The Food Box is available in the church porch for anyone to help themselves if they find themselves in need, either in an emergency or in the longer term. There has been a varied amount of call for items since the introduction of the Food Box in 2019. In recent months the demand has increased. We are grateful to those who leave suitable items for inclusion to the Food Box.

Parish Newsletter: A printed copy of a scaled down version of the Parish Newsletter, including just the news items, is being delivered each month to those known to us in the village who are not able to receive the Newsletter any other way.

EVENTS IN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS:

OPEN GARDENS, SUNDAY 3rd JULY:

The Gardening Club organised an Open Gardens afternoon on Sunday 3rd July. Our thanks go to the Gardening Club for again giving us the opportunity to do the teas in the church, which raised £462.

CHRISTMAS:

Advent Windows lit up the village again from 1st to 31st December.

The Christmas Coffee Morning was held in the church on Saturday 3rd December, from 10.00am - 1.00pm. There were a variety of stalls, tombola, lucky dip, and much more. It was a lovely occasion with a great atmosphere, and everyone appeared to be having a good time. £1,108 was raised.

Carol Singing took place around the village on two evenings. The collectors did a wonderful job and they reported back the comments they received saying how lovely the carol singing was. The two evenings raised £724.

THE SNOWDROP WALKS:

What an amazing two Sundays we enjoyed for the Snowdrop Walks in February. After the disappointment of the last three years, we were blessed with good weather and a large number of visitors on both days. The snowdrops looked wonderful, and the church was buzzing with atmosphere as everyone enjoyed the delicious tea and cakes. Over the two weekends an amazing £3000.40 was raised. Thanks go to Sir David and Lady Sally Duncombe for allowing us access to their grounds.

PLANT FAYRE, SUNDAY 16th APRIL:

After the three-year break due to Covid restrictions, it was wonderful to be able to hold the event again on Sunday 16th April at the normal venue, the Parish Hall and cricket field. For a variety of reasons there were fewer nurserymen able to attend this year but, with the village plant stall, there were plenty of plants for people to buy.

As one of our two big fund-raising activities of the year, we were delighted that an amazing £2472 was raised.

FINANCE:

We struggle to pay our Parish Share to the Diocese. Last year our allocation was £21k and we paid a mere £8k. This was not helped as we received a very large heating bill following a change in supplier. Following the successful start to this year with the Snowdrop Walks and the Plant Fayre, we are hopeful that we should be able to pay a more realistic figure for the Parish Share this year, £17k having been paid in recent years.

BUILDING WORKS:

For various reasons, the defects in the New Facilities project will not be remedied by the original contractor. A third-party builder will be completing the work in the next couple of months,

The Roof. All permissions have been granted for the permanent repair of the roof. The cost including the professional fees and VAT will be £127k. The work will start as soon as the funding is in place. Multiple grant applications have been submitted and we await the outcome. If we do not obtain the requisite amount, the South aisle will be done first as the ceiling panels are in a worse state and likely to come down, followed by the north aisle. But this will not be the most cost-efficient way of doing it and, as water comes in every time it rains, it is possible that the church will have to close until the repair is done.

AND FINALLY, we are looking forward to the Coronation service on Sunday – it is a joint service at 9.30am for everyone in the four villages of the Brickhills & Stoke Hammond. It will include special prayers and readings for the Coronation.

Ringling of the Bells for the Coronation. David Middleton is planning to have a quarter peel of the bells rung for the Coronation during the afternoon this Sunday, 7th May.

Phillipa Cook
(Great Brickhill PCC Secretary)