

ANNUAL REPORT

2020 - 2021

St John the Baptist Church, Boldre

PRIEST IN CHARGE

Rather more exhaustive than usual as it is of some historical interest, being the report for a most unusual year.

This must be my forty third AGM report. You might expect it, therefore, to be a tad off hand, cliched and formulaic. Not so though. The past year has been too different, unusual, challenging and rewarding for that. The dread virus has encouraged us to push boundaries, take calculated risks and adopt new ways of doing things. It's been a stimulating year.

The saddest part was the enforced and total lock-down of churches, for three whole months, this time last year. In such challenging and frightening times this was a mistaken overreaction, the white notices on church doors symbolic of an un-Christlike timidity, white flags of surrender. There was good cause to call a halt to physical gatherings for public worship, perhaps, but church doors should have been kept open for private prayer, quietude and solace. This is a lesson I trust our leaders have now learned.

At St John's and St Nicholas' we have coped with all thrown our way, positively and creatively. Our splendid organist and director of music, Timothy, suggested, initiated and helped enable the production of fine and widely appreciated recorded services, while we were totally locked down. These, combined with the weekly and widely circulated newsy pewsheets, with its positive, personal, weekly article, have proved a cohesive force and bond, helping the family remain a family. The few folk not online have had a printed pew-sheet delivered to them.

Diana and I have prayed our way through the roll each month, informing those for whom we've prayed on the particular day that we have done so. Pastoral care has been given mostly by phone calls, though more practical offers of help and care, within government guidelines, have been offered by many, and sometimes taken up. Necessary face to face interviews have taken place in the Vicarage garden, or in St Nicholas' chapel when the weather has been inclement.

This year's Lent Group involved a much appreciated and close look at a particular poem, a commentary upon the poem with discussion points. It was then talked over and discussed with a partner on the phone, or with a spouse at home. The weekly Bible Study as well as PCC Meetings have continued by way of the dreaded Zoom.

Given my venerable vulnerability, the assemblies I used to take at William Gilpin are temporarily in abeyance. However the new headmaster, Simon Croutear, judging from his newsletter, is doing a fine job with Religious Education. Furthermore, our congregation has provided three new and most effective members of the Board of Governors. Simon Croutear at William Gilpin and Jonny Timms, the new headmaster of Walhampton, both participated in our Nine Lessons and Carols services this year, attending with their families and reading a lesson each. I have also been to see Jonny Timms at Walhampton and will be preaching at a Chapel service there in May. We hope to reestablish the close links between Walhampton and St John's.

Church Services have continued without a break throughout the year. During the first, total lock-down, no Sunday passed without an 8.00am Eucharist in St Nicholas' Chapel and a 10.30am Matins in St John's. Nor did a Wednesday pass without a Eucharist at 10.30am in St Nicholas'. In attendance were only Diana and myself, and sometimes Diana's sister, staying with us at that time. Public services were resumed as soon as they were allowed, on 5 July.

From the first Sunday in January to the mid March lock-down, there were 11 Sunday morning services at St John's. The average attendance was 65. At only one of those services were no children in attendance. At all the rest numbers of children varied between 1 and 9.

When services resumed on 5 July 2020, after the first lock-down, it was considered important that no pressure or obligation to attend was even hinted at, let alone applied. Moreover, those who did attend needed to feel safe in doing so. A careful risk assessment was undertaken and Sally and Diana worked out a safe-distancing seating-plan and a felicitous way to implement it. A willing sanitising group was gathered together and our regular cleaners and workers continued to play their part.

St John's began again to be opened daily with the back half of the church barricaded in order to cut down the area in need of sanitising. Because the numbers we are able to accommodate at worship are more than halved by distancing, we ceased to advertise our service times in the newspapers. Even so attendances quickly jumped back to normal and then above normal. From July to December attendance averaged 70. Only on one

Sunday were there no children present. On others, child attendance varied between 1 and 11. The children's talk has been discontinued, but a pew activity is provided for any children attending. The choir returned to sing and gladden our hearts at the end of the first lock-down, for safety reasons split into two choirs singing on alternate Sundays, in a variety of combinations. Pre-recorded services ceased and were replaced by the actual Sunday Service recorded live, edited a little later and put on line. All those on our data base were sent a copy each week.

Christmas Day and Easter Day are 'days of obligation' to traditionally minded Christians and so it was deemed important to enable everyone who wished to attend a service, especially Holy Communion, to do so. With this in mind we laid on two Nine Lessons and Carols services, two Midnight Masses and two Christmas Morning Eucharists. It made for a happy Christmas with no one turned away, and was most marvellously presaged by a splendid outdoor 'Crib Service' on Christmas Eve, culminating in a procession, behind Fleur the Donkey, Churchill and Dawkins the Alpacas and Moussaka the sheep, into and through St John's, past the Crib and so out and home.

After Christmas came the gloomiest of Januaries and Februaries of 2021, with dreadful Covid statistics and the voluntary closure to public worship of many local churches. We, however, remained resolutely open, Carefully though. All too well aware of, and sensitive to people's vulnerability and sensible caution. Our choir and organist arranged to sing for us from home, cleverly recording themselves as individuals and sending the recording to Timothy to be spliced into a harmonious whole. I myself learned how to download hymns onto my phone from a variety of sources and to play them through the St John's sound system. The priestly part of services are prerecorded in church, with Diana's help, on my phone and sent to Timothy to be processed. Photographs and film clips from Diana and Annie King help to make these prerecorded services local in flavour and universal in appeal.

Gloomy January's church services began with a modest attendance (in the 30s) but soon grew back to normal and beyond. Vaccinations helped people to feel happier about coming along, but as important, for isolated folk, it is a boon and blessing beyond words simply to be with fellow Christians in a much loved and lovely church, participating in ancient rituals and patterns of worship that console, comfort and breathe hope. I myself have found our church worship latterly more than usually moving, peaceful and strengthening.

In spite of severe limits on those permitted to attend baptisms, we have had 4 during these difficult times, made more than usually memorable for parents by they themselves doing the pouring of water and the anointing. Wedding ceremonies have been limited to 30 guests and so most of those booked were postponed. 7 went ahead, all of them surprisingly lovely, not least for an intimacy impossible in larger ceremonies and all with a compensatory bespoke verse from the priest, to honour each occasion. There was a similar limit in numbers applied to funerals. Although these are impossible to postpone, there have been fewer services in church, more people opting for private cremations, some hoping later to hold memorial celebrations of one sort or another. There have been thirteen interments of ashes and I've officiated at ten cremations, five graveside burials and five church funerals followed by graveside interments.

Financially we have held our own remarkably and for the first time in some years have been able to pay the Diocese our full assessment, without drawing upon our reserves. This is an excellent thing because a good and mutually appreciative relationship with our diocese is the surest way to a secure future. Our finances have been helped by widespread gratitude to and love of St John's, by our staying open when so many neighbouring churches have not and so attracting folk from elsewhere not only to enrich our worship but also, incidentally to contribute to our collections. Added to this has been the superb and creative work of our Stewardship team, prior to the pandemic, which encouraged many more folk to participate in our planned giving scheme.

In short, the worst of times have also been the best of times.

THANK YOU. I am keeping particular thanks to the barest of minimums. Generally though, and from the heart, thank you one and all. It has been a wonderful team effort. It is a joy to be a part of such a parish.

Our Benefice Secretary, Karen Ashurst resigned in April. For five years, hugely competent and effective she has performed quietly and efficiently to my great benefit. Many thanks Karen. Sally has stepped into her shoes, for the time being at least, for which many thanks. Felicity has been a wonderful backstop, colleague

and friend, thank you. Churchwardens Sally and Graham have been hugely supportive yea-sayers not nay-sayers, willingly toiling away on our behalf. Thank you indeed. Simon our Vicar speaks my language, has a great sense of humour and is a joy to work alongside, he's a very good friend of St John's. Thank you Simon. Finally, where would we be without Diana? Where would I be? Fumbling blindly about in the wilderness, doubtless! Thank you Diana.

Revd Canon Andrew Neaum

VICAR's REPORT

'May you live in interesting times' is apparently an English translation of a Chinese curse. 2020 has certainly been one of 'interesting times' - and from China too!

I write this report on 23rd March 2021 – a day of national reflection and the anniversary of the beginning of the first National Lockdown. The following prayer is on the National Church of England website:

Gracious God,
as we remember before you the thousands who have died,
surround us and all who mourn with your strong compassion.
Be gentle with us in our grief,
protect us from despair,
and give us grace to persevere
and face the future with hope
in Jesus Christ our risen Lord. **Amen.**

We have all lost so much. Such loss does not just include loved ones, but also more subtle things such as time spent with family and friends; important events and activities we value and enjoy; freedoms previously taken for granted. There is also anxiety about the future particularly around the economy and the inequalities that the pandemic has exposed in our society – the ways in which some groups have carried the cost of the pandemic far more than others.

And yet as we mourn there is also much to give thanks for:- the ways in which communities pulled together; the rapid development of a vaccine; the care provided by our health and social care workers; the willingness of some to risk their own health in the service of others; and those who continued to lead and serve our church communities.

If I had told Andrew a year ago that he would be producing virtual services played out over the internet he would have thought me slightly deranged (and I dread to think what else he might of said!). And yet it's been amazing to see how he has risen to the challenge - with the wonderful support of Timothy, Diana, Sally, Graham and others - to keep a worshipping community together, fed, encouraged, supported, prayed for and open (when so many others had closed). As we slowly come out of Lockdown it's easy to forget how uplifting these services were in some of our darkest moments.

So I would like to say a huge thank you to Andrew and all of you who kept worship and our church community going through a difficult time – it has been much appreciated and valued by so many.

I would also like to gently challenge you to reflect on lessons learned and what we can take with us into the future. Our use of digital communication must continue in some form and our willingness to embrace change with such a positive, creative and 'can do' attitude was so refreshing to behold – normally change in the Church of England is something resisted at all cost! Our inclusion and reliance on others to be involved in helping to deliver worship and the good news of the gospel is also something we need to remember and learn from and I think very much at the heart of how I see the future of the South Baddesley, Boldre and Brockenhurst Group – what can we better do together?

As we move into that future I am reminded of a promise of God given to us in the Book of Revelation, 'Behold, I make all things new.' (Rev 21:5). It's been a difficult year with many challenges and many things to mourn and grieve – as we mourn and grieve we also need to remember the promises of the God who journeys with us through the darkest times and can bring new life and new hope and new ways where and when we least

expected them. Although in stating that I must also admit to hoping that the coming year is a less 'interesting' time.

Revd Simon Newham

CHURCHWARDENS – including Fabric

The past year – I write this on 23 March 2021, the first anniversary of the start of the first lockdown – has been a difficult one for churches. However, St John's, led by that inspirational couple, Andrew and Diana, ably assisted by our gifted organist and technical whizz, Timothy, has risen to the challenge triumphantly. Following the end of the first lockdown in July, when churches were allowed to re-open and hold live services in church, if this could be done safely, St John's was one of the few churches in the area to conduct Sunday services, with face masks and social distancing, and alternate pews being used with place cards indicating where singles, couples and families could sit. At present no singing is allowed, but recorded music is played. The current seating has reduced the church's capacity to about 70 worshippers. Subject to this restriction, live services have been well attended. The Christmas services were duplicated to accommodate all who wished to attend, as will the Easter Sunday service. In addition, Andrew, assisted by Timothy, records the Sunday services in advance and circulates the recordings on YouTube, to be viewed at home by those unable or unwilling to attend in person.

The pandemic led to the postponement or cancellation of a number of weddings booked in 2020, but 8 still took place, with reduced attendances. 23 funerals and memorial services also took place, with 9 burials and 10 interments of ashes.

Quinquennial Inspections of St John's and St Nicholas Chapel were carried out by a chartered surveyor in June, and his reports, whilst acknowledging that both buildings were generally in good condition, identified a number of items requiring attention; the most urgent and serious is the need to replace the lead roof covering the tower of St John's. Our fabrics team of Tim Farquhar and Bob Barlow will organise and supervise this work. Three cypress trees were felled in the churchyard during the year, two of them dying and dangerous, and the third felled to allow additional space for new graves and overflow car parking. David Ridout has played a major part in tidying up the churchyard, assisted by Chris King.

G Edmiston and S James

SOCIAL AND FUNDRAISING

Whilst the pandemic and lockdown and consequent inability to hold any social and fundraising events has placed a severe strain on the finances of most churches, St John's financial position is sound. The stewardship campaign, launched by our treasurer, Richard, in autumn 2019 and ably led by Simon Derrick, proved to be well-timed, and led to a substantial increase in income in 2020 through regular donations, made through the centrally-administered Parish Giving Scheme. This enabled St John's to pay its parish share of the diocesan budget, the Common Mission Fund, £46,183, in full for the first time for some years, having paid £37,000 in 2019.

The Boldre War Memorial Hall has been booked for a fete, at the same time as the Boldre Produce Show, on 11 September. We hope to be back to something approaching normal by then.

G Edmiston

ST NICHOLAS CHAPEL

Apart from the period of the first lockdown from March to July 2020, when churches were obliged to remain closed, the chapel has continued to be used for Holy Communion services on Wednesday and Sunday mornings, with masks worn and social distancing observed. However choir practices and Vintage Fitness classes have been suspended for the past year.

The Quinquennial Inspection of the chapel by a chartered surveyor took place in June, although he did not produce his report until December. He reported that the general condition of the building was good, for its age and type of construction, but that some of the roof shingles, which are curled and lifting, require attention and may need replacing. Tim Farquhar, chairman of the Fabric Committee, is proposing that this work should be done this summer. The surveyor also pointed out that roof shingles have a limited life and full replacement of the roof should be programmed for the future.

Our benefice administrator, Karen Ashurst, has been shielding at home over the past year and only making brief visits to the benefice office. She has now resigned, after 6 years' service, for which we are most grateful, and has been succeeded by Sally James, who will combine this role with her work as churchwarden.

G Edmiston

MUSIC

Wishfully thinking it could only possibly be for the short term, a suggestion was aired as to whether we could/should offer an online service during an enforced period of "lockdown"; St. John's opened its doors to the world of online services on the 29th March 2020 – with little warning, no past experience nor time for a crash course. Twelve months later, and with hits of over 100 per week from an audience quite literally around the globe, we're still there – having achieved a pot-pourri of in-church and online services for the duration, as rules and restrictions have permitted. We were so fortunate to be able to hold Christmas services in church, complete with live music and a split choir covering a duplication of services. To keep the voices in action, members of the choir have made recordings of hymns from the safety of their own homes; these have been pieced together and balanced to produce our own sung offerings. A rural community such as this should give itself a worthy pat-on-the-back for all that it has overcome and achieved during the last 12 months – thank you to everyone for their willingness and support!

Timothy Rice

FLOWERS

2020 was quite an eventful year despite the Covid restrictions.

We discovered the arch at the entrance to the church and enjoyed using items from home to decorate it whilst the church was sadly shut. When the church was allowed to reopen we had to become more inventive and economical due to the lack of weddings so our funds were down. My ladies and I used our gardens and managed to provide lots of the flowers throughout the summer that way.

This meant we kept costs low so we're able to use the saved funds to have a joyful Harvest and Christmas which we felt was important to do to keep spirits raised.

I think there were 6 weddings in the end and we managed to provide the flowers for 4.

We were fortunate that the brides wanted plenty of flowers and the team really enjoyed the chance to do some wedding work. To keep our funds up we made the bride's bouquets for one wedding and did flowers at a reception too. This bought in some much needed extra money for the fund and we were very fortunate to have a Christmas bride who also made a very generous donation to the flower fund.

One of our major costs this year has been candles but we now have a good supplier and a brand new Advent candle wreath. So we are able to start 2021 in quite good shape. We made a profit of £298.46 and still have the reserves from when I took over.

We hope to have a very busy calendar this year with lots of weddings when restrictions are finally lifted.

In June 2022 we will be having a flower festival at St John's to celebrate The Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Elaine Fenning Flower Guild of St John's

OVERSEAS MISSION REPORT

The PCC Mission allocation for 2020-21 remained at £3,000.

£500 was sent to the Church Mission Society to support our mission partners, Doctors Steve and Catriona Bennett, at Gahini hospital in Eastern Rwanda.

The remaining £2,500 has been used to support the King Saloman Academy, a nutrition project for families, and the Hannah Ministry in Byumba in Northern Rwanda. Sally James has also been raising funds independently for Byumba from private donations – amongst other things, to pay for the school fees of the three orphan children we are educating.

Early in 2020, Sally was allocated a refund of £29.02 together with £559 (supplemented by £441 in private donations) to travel to Rwanda in order to spend time on the ongoing projects in Byumba. Although she has been unable to travel to Rwanda since, Sally has maintained close contact with Bishop Emmanuel and Arsene, the Head Teacher at the King Saloman Academy. In April, £1000 was sent to the diocese of Byumba for Bishop Emmanuel to use for the relief of poverty and want arising from the impact of Covid 19. The £911.98 balance followed on 25th September. An appeal from Arsene for additional desks for the school was fulfilled by private donations.

The *Deanery Lent Appeal 2020* was once again in aid of the Kigali Anglican Theological College, which supports all the dioceses of the Anglican Church in Rwanda. Despite the first 'lockdown', the collection envelopes raised £432.50 inc. Gift Aid, but sadly we were unable to hold the Lent Walk to supplement this amount.

The Treasurer of the *Deanery Mission Group* has since launched another 'Covid' appeal resulting in a further £2620 being sent to Byumba.

C Nash

REPORT ON SAFEGUARDING AT ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, BOLDRE

The PCC has complied with its duty to have "due regard" to the House of Bishops guidance in relation to Safeguarding. A text was circulated to the PCC on 16 March 2020. At this time, there are no concerns of a safeguarding nature outstanding.

The Safeguarding policy for children and vulnerable adults is affixed to the notice board at the entrance to St John's. A briefer statement on our safeguarding policy can be seen on the St John's website where also the CofE Safeguarding handbook may be downloaded. www.bsbb.org.uk

A copy of our Parish Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy will be emailed to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser after approval at the next PCC meeting.

N Walford

SECRETARY

This is to give thanks to all those who have given their time and effort to keep worship in St John's parish going. I must mention Diana Neaum who amongst other things has organised a group of volunteers to sanitise the church each Saturday so that worship can take place the following day, so thank you also to all those on the rota. The flowers continue to give us joy and we appreciate all the flower people who decorate St John's and St Nicholas Chapel so beautifully. I very much look forward to the Flower Festival to be held at the church in June next year. Mention must be made of Timothy Rice our organist and music supremo whose IT skills as well as his musical skills, have ensured that St John's church services not only continue well 'in the flesh' but also get broadcast online far and wide. I must also mention the churchwardens whose work has had to increase to ensure everyone's safety. Lastly but by no means least, our thanks to the PCC members who give of their time, our Treasurer and the Stewardship Committee under the guidance of Simon Derrick who have worked hard to ensure that St John's remains financially secure and all the parishioners who have supported the church amidst the turmoil of the last year.

L Rolfs

