



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

**Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich**

Earl Stonham with Stonham Parva

Parochial Church Council

Annual General Report
2020



**EARL STONHAM WITH STONHAM PARVA
PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of the above presents the Annual Report for the year 2020. The report has been prepared in accordance with the Charities Act of 1993.

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

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The PCC is a charity exempt from registration with the Charity Commission.

THE PARISH TEAM

Priest in Charge: Revd Philip Payne

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Lay Minister: Mrs Frankie Wicks

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Churchwarden: Mr Mark Parry

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SECRETARY'S REPORT

The PCC has 10 members (ex officio and elected) and the electoral roll had 43 names on it for 2020. The PCC held 3 meetings during the year, in addition to the Annual Vestry Meeting and the Annual Parochial Meeting, which was held on Wednesday 21st October 2020.

Discussions at PCC Meetings included: Covid, Outside services between all parishes in Benefice, Growing in God, Little Stonham church, unification of Deaneries.

RECTOR'S REPORT – NORTH BOSMERE BENEFICE

When Jesus was asked 'what would be the signs of the end times', he replied 'As it was in the time of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man; people will be going about their normal business and they will see nothing untoward until it happens (Matt 24:37 and Lk 17:26, paraphrased). An exchange worth reflecting on as we look back over 2020.

The annual 'Rector's Report' tends to be a cut-and-paste job; with the numbers revised and the odd one-off inserted for good measure. 2020 is different and as this report is more for posterity than for the immediate record, it strays from my usual format.

The year began normally enough. The news from China and Italy, in particular, was disturbing but I think it would be fair to record that, except for medical and political specialists, most of us were blissfully unaware of what was coming. It was, as I began in my opening paragraph, business as normal in blissful ignorance.

Parish life continued in this way for the first two months of the year. By late February/early March it was becoming clear that some sort of shut down was imminent. Mothering Sunday services planned for 22 March were cancelled at the last minute as large swathes of economic, social and spiritual life were deemed inessential and shut down by government decree. Churches were included in this inessential category; our buildings were closed and all public worship (unless on-line) was banned. At this stage most of us expected a short closure followed by a swift return to 'business as normal.' Life in the parishes continued.

Worship and Fellowship

Thanks, in the first instance, to Rev Helen and to Ruth Dennigan (Reader), we were able to quickly establish a regular pattern of on-line worship using the facility ZOOM. What started as a short-term solution quickly settled into a weekly pattern of worship on Wednesday and Sunday mornings and Friday evening. Other special services being added as required. Regular congregations settled longterm to around 6-12 for a week-day, 40 to 50 for Sundays (more for special occasions). The breakout facility in ZOOM also supported a welcome opportunity for social interaction around service and study-group meetings.

By June we were able to reopen buildings for private prayer at least one day per week. In August we recommenced regular, physical services, albeit with limited numbers and no singing. Social distancing became a recurring mantra. The first service of Holy Communion (distribution in one kind only) in the Benefice since March was celebrated at Coddendam on Sunday 9 August. From then onward, weekly Sunday Eucharists, together with morning and evening prayer at least once each per month, continued until shut-down again in November. Remembrance Sunday saw small, private acts of Remembrance only, at those locations where War Memorials were positioned in the Churchyard or public space, not inside buildings. Physical services recommenced for December and included Christmas Eve/Christmas Day Eucharists at Stonham Aspal and Earl Stonham respectively. Throughout this period, ZOOM services continued. As we entered 2021, a worsening public health climate led to the voluntary cessation of all physical worship and meetings across the Benefice once more.

Two other services worthy of note; in September Broughton Hall Farm played host to a successful and well received Drive-In Harvest service and the formula was repeated for a drive-in Carol Sing at Gosbeck Village Hall carpark in December. In addition to the 2 Eucharists mentioned, Christmas also saw a number of church-yard services to overcome the constraints of indoor activities, particularly numbers and singing; the drive-ins enabled people to sing in their cars.

Occasional Offices

Weddings

Weddings were banned for much of the year (in all locations, not just church), then subject to severe constraint on numbers and singing. One wedding was celebrated in Earl Stonham in July, 2 in Crowfield in December.

Funerals

Funeral ministry continued, albeit under constraints on numbers and with no singing. For much of the spring and summer, funerals were either grave-side or crematorium only, not inside the church building. Whilst this placed additional constraints on all concerned at a particularly difficult time; there was something especially moving about many of these graveside ceremonies. Across all 8 parishes we conducted a total of 31 funerals and/or interments.

Baptisms

All postponed due to pandemic constraints.

Social Welfare

It is important to record that, although no new social welfare/support ventures were initiated in the name of the parishes; in all 10 villages, church members played an active part in a variety of village community-based social support activities. From delivering food and medicines, to on-line social meets and much more beside.

A weekly e-mail shot containing the Parish pew/notice sheet, a weekly Rectorial reflection and other relevant material is widely distributed.

GPO mail ministry

The internet provided vital connectivity for many, but not everyone is connected. Since April 2020 a weekly hard-copy mailing has distributed news, reflections and other material to around 24 individual addresses.

Hayzel House

The Hayzel House church community (Service & Soup) continued their network of communication and met in small groups as and when national restrictions allowed.

Schools

The challenges faced by schools during this pandemic are well documented elsewhere and our 2 primary schools are no exception. Physical access to the schools has not been possible but I have maintained regular contact through my work on the governing bodies of both schools; through occasional video inputs, and through a short appearance at Stonham Aspal School for a leavers event, and a short, pre-term time of prayer for the staff of Creeting St Mary School.

Rev'd Philip Payne

Rector

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding continues to be on the PCC Agenda for every meeting with prominent notices with contact details displayed in the Church and the Parish Room.

During the year all the members of the PCC have completed their basic training and those with specific roles have attended appropriate courses.

Frankie Wicks has continued as Safeguarding Officer and keeps a record of training done.

The diocese changed its system of Safeguarding Training in October 2019. There are now 3 levels:

- Basic Awareness
- Foundation Course
- Leadership Course

Both the Basic Awareness and the Foundation Course are easily available online at the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich website.

PCC members are expected to do both the Basic and the Foundation Courses. The Leadership Course is for clergy, ministry team members, churchwardens etc.

Although PCC members have done training previously we have to do the Basic course every 3 years as a minimum so some need to get updated. The recent editions of the courses are said to be more informative than before.

Frankie Wicks
Safeguarding officer

FABRIC REPORT

Because of the delayed date of the 2019 APCM due to the pandemic, some elements of this report were included in last year's edition.

2020 was an unexpectedly challenging year for the community but we have endeavoured to make the building and churchyard as accessible as possible whilst keeping people safe by our all following government and CoE guidelines and restrictions. It was sadly necessary to temporarily suspend the car park to discourage gatherings that were not permitted in the graveyard, but it has been subsequently reopened. The periodic village emails I have sent on behalf of the church have been used to gently remind recipients of the prevailing guidelines and restrictions, as have our ACNY pages.

Prior to the pandemic we had conducted a walk round of the church to identify items from the Quinquennial for further action but this has been put on hold for now. None of these items were immediate and will be reassessed in due course.

During both lockdowns, in line with CoE guidance, and since given the paucity of services, I have visited the building weekly to check on the internal and external condition including - thanks to Colin Edgar's advice - "exercising" the organ, as well as running the water. In the colder months during the Sunday opening hours the heating has been on, to the mild chagrin of our estimable Treasurer, to ensure "preservation by operation" as much as the modest warmth of our visitors. On my solitary visits I have felt humbled to be in this special place and am glad everyone can once again visit, albeit less frequently than we have been used to. The church remains open for private prayer each Sunday afternoon and periodically on other selected occasions.

A full risk assessment set by the CoE was carried out prior to the church being opened for private prayer and then services. Whilst the current physical distancing measures constrain capacity they do not reduce maximum attendance below either what is normal for our regular services or what is currently permitted under government and CoE guidance for weddings and funerals. Access is still

restricted outside service/prayer time to manage the risk of disease transmission, so thank you to our cleaners and flower arrangers who kindly work within these new guidelines.

The fabric and services remain in good working order, bar a small section of plaster at the top of one of the clerestory windows which fell to ground. The DAC advisor recommends that our architect inspects it as there have been a number of apparently similar incidents during the lockdowns, possibly due to a lack of heating and moisture. However, given the volume of fallen plaster versus the remaining gap, it was not the first time this has happened at St. Mary's and indeed previous Quinquennials have noted what my predecessor calls "the plaster of Damocles" as an item to be aware of and informally monitor rather than requiring immediate action. That being said I will investigate whether there is the opportunity to combine an architect's inspection with a scheduled visit. For now there are two more pews out of use than distancing would require, which has no effect on current capacity given the church layout and would have only have a modest impact pending restitution once all restrictions are hopefully lifted this summer.

The small cracked pane in one of the nave leaded lights remains and whilst a recommended craftsman has provided a quote for repair, further reflection suggested access needed to be further assessed before proceeding. It might be that use of a cherrypicker could be combined if the missing plaster is to be inspected at close quarters.

The organ has been tuned and a minor repair carried out as a result. As noted above I "exercise" the organ weekly. The bell clappers were repaired during the first lockdown, and to the foundry's credit returned on a special trip that they turned into a short holiday. A valve in the kitchen water heater was noticed to have failed, thankfully without causing any damage, and has been replaced at modest cost.

The Heard family kindly fettled the Parish Room paintwork, replaced the nearby pedestrian gate and also the bird netting inside the church porch. Tony Fowler kindly repaired the roadside noticeboard which had developed an unhelpful tendency to open in windy conditions. He has also allowed us to retain his temporary Christmas floodlight to provide a beacon of light for all passing whilst restrictions on everyday life remain - he and the Treasurer doubtless doubly await their final relaxations. John Jones and I cleared the downpipe on the south transept that had become blocked.

Following the ending of the contract with MYGroup to carry out an annual check and clean of the roof, guttering and drains we need to consider an alternate provision going forward.

The annual inventory check will be carried out and the inventory updated if needed subject to distancing and other constraints.

The churchyard has been kept tidy particularly by John Bull, ably assisted by John Jones and others, all of whom have given kindly of their time for which we are in turn grateful. Mike Dawe has recently sourced and planted a new hedge to fill the gap by the rear gate. Recent work by UK Power Networks on the power lines on the northern boundary have resulted in a beneficial haircut to some of the laurels.

It remains a matter of concern that Stonham Parva is still not able to be used for our occasional services nor receive visitors due to a roof problem. I met the Churches Conservation Trust architect when he carried out a full assessment of the damage and it is hoped repairs will be carried out as soon as possible so this special place can once more be enjoyed, though we have been warned a lack of funding means this is not imminent. Thank you to Mary Hamilton for continuing to cultivate a positive relationship with the CCT field officer.

I have continued to expand the content of our A Church Near You page, and that of the Benefice. Despite its best efforts to frustrate it contains details of all Benefice services, Philip's weekly reflection and Liz Ince's pew sheet, a reminder of Zoom services and other seasonal pages. More recently we have been able to add a link for donations, though as you might expect the site does not help by not allowing us to have both a general donation and one for our monthly chosen charity. The latest stats suggest show continued growth in views to 250 (120) weekly, 700 (470) monthly and 6,400 (4,600) views this year (last year's numbers in brackets) so I believe it is worth persevering with. We have reserved the St Mary's Earl Stonham.org domain name so that we might have our own website one day, but for now I feel it best to sit within the widely visible and Diocese promoted ACNY umbrella.

It remains an enormous privilege to serve as Churchwarden and fabric person and I would like to thank everyone in the Parish, Benefice and beyond who have been such a great support.

Mark Parry
Churchwarden

THE CHURCH IN THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

2020 started off just like previous years with services in our church on Sundays, Coffee and Cake every 4 weeks and Library Lunches too. Visits were made for pastoral reasons by many people and plans made for the forthcoming year.

The first Covid lockdown hit in March and we stopped in our tracks. At first we were all in shock of some sort. It seems unbelievable that schools closed and so did churches. Had there ever been a time when the church was locked before?

It was time for prayer and for thinking 'outside the box'. Worship went on line and many people became adept at using Zoom. We discovered that attending church in the comfort of our homes had its advantages and some people joined these services who were not regular attendees in 'normal' times. Mary Payne posted paper copies of readings, updates and a letter from Philip each week. Phones were vital for keeping in touch with one another but we all missed being able to actually get together.

Our community leapt into action with offers of help with shopping, collecting prescriptions and anything else required. New friendships were made and sharing worship with the other parishes within the benefice helped us to get to know our bigger church family.

By the Summer Covid infections had reduced sufficiently for lockdown regulations to lift somewhat and physical church services started again on a smaller scale than before. Rules still forbade singing and social distancing meant spacing everyone out, people having to book a place in advance and masks being worn. At least the Church was open for private prayer on Sunday afternoons.

Our shared Rogation service, walk and tea shared with the other parishes was just one of the many events cancelled but Harvest Festival had to be celebrated somehow. It was not easy to find our way through rules and regulations but eventually a Drive-In Harvest Festival took place on a meadow at Stonham Aspal with music provided by David Tydeman's band from a trailer. Amplification enabled the sound to be heard in individual cars and with them parked at suitable distance the congregation could join in and sing inside their cars.

As winter approached infections went up again and planning Christmas was the next challenge. We delivered 'Christingle kits' in bags to families so that they could watch the Christingle service on Zoom and build their own Christingle; assuming the sweets hadn't been eaten beforehand.

We joined in the benefice Drive-In Carol Service, with the band again, at Gosbeck. Brave volunteers coped with traffic although it was very cold.

We hosted a service for the 'Longest Night' especially for those for whom Christmas was being a difficult time for whatever reason, both in Church and on Zoom. Regulations changed at the last minute so that many families were prevented from meeting together. There were no 'Carols on the Green' or 'Carols by Candlelight' in our church. However, on Christmas morning there was one Communion service for the benefice and it was our turn to host that so at least we decorated the Church.

2020 was a year unlike any other so we went into 2021 praying for better things.

Frankie Wicks

ST MARY'S BELLS REPORT

No ringing.

Taylors Belfounders were able to return in the summer and refit six repaired clappers which were badly worn.

We look forward to ringing again when permitted.

DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

The Deanery Synod met twice during 2020, once in January as the final meeting of the Bosmere Synod. As at 1 October 2020, the Bosmere and Stowmarket Deaneries were formally merged under a Bishops Mission Order to form the new The Gipping Valley Deanery with Revd Diane Williams as the Rural Dean. Due to the pandemic, the first meeting of the new Deanery Synod was held via Zoom in October. Once physical meetings can recommence, it is expected that meetings of the enlarged Deanery will be held in Stowmarket.

As usual, the business of the Synod was preceded on each occasion by a presentation on a subject of interest.

- In January this was given by Richard Stainer, the World Development Adviser for the Diocese. He gave a very interesting and thought-provoking talk about his recent trip to Ethiopia with Christian Aid. Richard spoke about the problems the country is facing as a result of climate change and how due to the changing weather patterns, they no longer know the best time to plant crops. Richard encouraged us all to think about what we can do to care for God's creation. Richard said that he was willing to speak on behalf of Christian Aid to churches and other groups.
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- In October, Joe Hawes spoke on his work as Dean of the Cathedral and the work they carry out in support of the parishes in the Diocese: the focus for major celebrations and acts of remembrance; a place of pilgrimage, hosting major concerts, art exhibitions, drama and recitals, a place of retreat; resourcing music and liturgy; providing lifelong learning opportunities; resourcing children and young people's work; resourcing pastoral care best practice; providing Sunday Cover in parishes; providing a listening ear for clergy.

As Deanery Organiser for Bosmere, (including after the merger) John continued to report on financial shortfalls for the Deanery and Diocese.

There were updates from the Diocesan and General Synods.

TREASURER'S REPORT

In 2020 we incurred a deficit of £1,310 on our Unrestricted Funds, as a result of the wholly exceptional conditions caused by the national lockdown. Hardly any services were held between mid-March and the end of the year, leading to a fall of £2,000 in collections.

Coffee and Cake, parish room lettings and fee income were similarly affected by the lockdown.

Thankfully, nearly all of our income comes through planned giving, by bank standing order and the Parish Giving Scheme. Thanks to our generous and ever-supportive donors this income has continued unabated through the year and indeed was boosted by a one-off donation late in the year.

Collections for charities could not take place for most of 2020, with the result that we were able to raise only £1,072, far below the levels that we have achieved in recent years. At the beginning of 2021 we have set up a Give a Little account which enables donors to give online with their credit or debit card. .

What does the future hold? We are hoping to see a gradual resumption of normal activities in the coming months, but if this has to be postponed I am confident that, with your support, we will balance the books while continuing to make our Parish Share payments to the Diocese.

I should like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has again been so generous, supporting both our charity collections and the church's running costs, thus making the Treasurer's job easy and free from anxiety.