

Annual Parish Meeting 2021 - Church report

The past year at St. Mary's has been a very strange, almost surreal experience, with the church being closed for public worship for the first time in its almost 1000-year history. However, The Rev. Martin Percival has worked very hard to maintain a degree of continuity, with weekly prayer and reflection sheets, on-line Morning Prayer from his home and on-line Holy Communion services, recorded in rotation from the six churches in the Benefice. When the lifting of lock-down permitted, there have been two live services each Sunday in the Benefice, but no singing in church, which was greatly missed.

The church has been open for private prayer and a place for quiet reflection each Wednesday and Sunday.

One of the highlights of the year was the Harvest Thanksgiving Service on the first Sunday in October, when we asked for donations of tinned and packaged goods rather than fresh produce, so that these could be sent to the Waveney food bank. The response from the village was amazing and the donations received filled the back of a large 4 x 4 with the seats folded down.

Obviously, income and fund-raising have been hit very hard and before the outbreak of Covid important happenings in St. Mary's year had been the events organised to support different charities in this country and abroad. Before lockdown last March, Eleanore Fitzgerald organised a very successful "Pancakes and Coffee" morning at the beginning of Lent, in aid of the British Heart Foundation. None of the other scheduled events were able to go ahead but, although the church income was down, the PCC decided to donate money to the Hospital in the Gambia and to TEAR fund for famine and disaster relief.

Sadly, August saw the funeral of one of Sweffling's best-known and much respected residents, Leslie Holden, who was a great supporter of all things Sweffling. Government restrictions limited to number of mourners at the funeral to 30 and, by careful planning, the church was able to accommodate this number of family members. The service was relayed into the churchyard and friends and colleagues who could not be in church stood outside to remember Leslie and to support Veronica and the family, or lined The Street as the cortege made its way to the church.

If the Covid Road-map goes according to plan, we hope to resume the regular pattern of two services each month, on the first and third Sundays at 9.30 a.m. from the beginning of July, and to hold fundraising events later in the year, including the Christmas Market in Framlingham, Christmas Brunch in Sweffling Hut and the Brass Band Christmas Concert in Church. We are not sure yet about the Harvest Lunch at the beginning of October.

"The Bridge" magazine continues to be sponsored by the Church and has been produced bi-monthly, either on-line or in print version, when it was considered safe to do so. It is circulated free of charge to every house in the village, and thanks are due to those who deliver it. News has been scarce during the lockdown but, as things hopefully begin to open up, this will change, please send in any information you may have regarding any items of interest to the village to the editors.