

Churchwardens' Report on year ending 31st December 2023

St. Mary, Worlingworth Church and Churchyard.

Security.

As of March 2017 our lead roof is fully covered by an alarm system installed by E-Bound AVX Ltd. This system is serviced every year and monitors movements on the roof 24/7 all year round. The roof alarm system is a costly strain on our finances, but this protects our lead roof which basically covers the building and contents from damage that may be caused by ingress of bad weather. It is a very sensitive system and strobe lights are functioned before an audible message warns off lead thieves.

The Church is locked from dusk until morning.

Our sincere thanks to Nick and Stephanie Westwood for carrying out this task daily for many years!

Although the Church was locked for a few months during 2023 for Organ repairs, pipes and parts of all sizes stored all over the pews needed to be kept secure and public safety exercised. We are grateful to Graham Bentley, who also lives in a property neighbouring the churchyard, for taking over the unlocking as needed for work to be carried out on the organ and locking straight after work for the day was finished.

Health and safety.

Health and safety has been and will continue to be a priority. Risk Assessments are regularly made.

Access for the Disabled is provided on ground level through the Priest's door into the Chancel. A ramp enables access from the Chancel into the Nave. Warning signs alert visitors to steps and uneven floors.

We have a hearing loop integrated into an effective sound system and large print hymn books for those with sight challenges. Public access has been kept as safe as possible with vegetation kept under control with regular cutting. Bat droppings and urine are potentially a health hazard. These bat droppings, especially in the porch continue to be unpleasant and are cleaned up regularly, a task that Graham is doing his best execute. Many thanks to him for that, and to Charles Plowman for being our H and S Officer.

Safeguarding.

Safeguarding of Children and vulnerable adults. The Church is very aware of the need to be vigilant and safe-guarding is reviewed as an item on the agenda at every PCC meeting. We are guided by the Church of England and have adopted the St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocese Policy and Guide Lines.

Our Lay-elder has qualified to leadership Safe-guarding standard and passed DBS scrutiny checks.

Information and Notices with Safeguarding contacts are displayed on the Notice Board in the Church.

Jackie Turton at Laxfield serves as The Four Rivers Benefice safeguarding officer responsible for our parish, and any issues should be reported and considered in confidence with her.

Church Fabric and Architect.

Mr. Philip Orchard is our Architect at Whitworth Partnership.

The PCC and Churchwardens continue to prioritize the most urgent issues with the Grade 1 listed building and the contents.

Maintenance of drains and covering protection to internal items from Bat waste is demanding constant attention.

The roof hatch onto the Tower roof is now in good condition, but the bituminous sealing between roof and walls is high on the agenda for jobs to do.

Top of the list of big jobs to do now is repairs to the East Window and the east wall, which are noted by the PCC as requiring substantial fundraising.

The South porch windows also require strengthening with support bars. This is regarded as a secondary project for the near future.

Positive tasks accomplished during 2023 are the Organ restored and now attracts a number of talented organists to come and play.

The Village Fire-engine, which for about a hundred years has been housed in the Church has been restored under the leadership of Mr. Geoff Robinson and the Worlingworth Local History Group, following approval from the Parish Council. This restoration was completed by the BBC TV programme "The Repair Shop" personnel. (Due to shown on their programme later in 2024).

Churchyard maintenance.

Mr. Matthew Hammond agreed to contract the grass cutting on a reduced basis again this year. Larger areas were left as natural habitat, with only regular cutting on paths and lawns near the church. The dry summer helped to keep growth lower than expected and the mowing was kept within budget.

We thank the Parish Council for a contribution of 50% towards the cost.

Fly-tipping has not been a problem this year! Neighbours are aware that if dumping of garden waste in the Churchyard happens it will be regarded as an act of fly-tipping!

We note that pedestrians use the Churchyard as a shortcut, a safer route than using Church street bend where there is no public side walk. While using the churchyard as a public space everyone needs to be aware of the uneven surfaces, grave kerbs and footstones which may be hidden by vegetation. The walks in the Churchyard need surface maintenance to assist wheelchair access.

Thanks to the Worlingworth Local History Group members on a volunteers day, brambles were cut and removed from within railings around graves and a general tidy-up made. We look forward to other volunteers coming forward to achieve even better public access and enjoyment of this green space.

The Churchyard is open for burials and interment of Ashes. Enquiries to the Churchwardens please.

Services.

Accounting for all services, 58 were held including 1 Wedding, 1 memorial service and 2 funerals. 32 were lead by Clergy and 26 by our Lay Elders, Bert Stanford and Val Swallow.

We have a 'Let's Celebrate' format of service, which we hold usually once a month. This is a relaxed type of service, ideal for anyone wishing to sample the experience of coming to worship and meeting our community.

Mr Charlie Abbott continued as our regular organist until the end of April when the organ repairs started. Charlie took this opportunity to retire and we are very grateful to him for many years of gifted service to the congregations.

The local Primary School here in Worlingworth decorate the font with such lovely craft and written work, decorations and produce at our festivals. Parents and pupils donated generously to the local Food Bank. Twenty-four people attended the annual outdoor 'Act of Remembrance' with wreath laying at the Village War Memorial when the parish pays tribute to the fallen of two World Wars.

Four Rivers Benefice.

About 7 or 8 of our congregation regularly joined the Benefice services on fifth Sundays in the month and supported Tannington Church when they had a service (usually bi-monthly).

The Benefice has a Priest-in-Charge; Reverend Enid Pow (currently on sick leave[April 2024]). Supported by Rev. Chrissie Smart SSM, Rev. Rebecca Artiss SSM, Rev. Clive Mobbs SSM, Rev. Ron Orams SSM retired and three Lay-elders.

Fresh Expressions of doing Church.

Two members of our PCC were involved in the steering group of new 'Lightwave' programme in our Four Rivers benefice.

The Church is working closely with the School.

'Light-wave group' will be present in the School with Messy Church.

Mrs Lois Sheard was elected as a Foundation Governor.

There is currently one vacancy for a Foundation Governor.

A social group of Church members regularly supported the re-opened village public house, 'The Swan'.

We were devastated when the Swan was victim to an electrical fire on 12th September 2023 and had to close. It will be memorable, as one of our members planned her birthday celebration there that evening!

Also, for the fact that visible presence we were making in the community and hopefully making progress with witness as well, has been postponed until re-opening, soon we hope!.

Deanery.

Our representatives and Churchwardens have attended Synod meetings, meetings with the Archdeacon Rich Henderson, Archdeacon Sally Gaze and training via zoom and normal meetings.

There were special meetings to learn how to be a Generous Church, helpful ideas and resources for fund-raising and outreach.

Inventory.

The Churchwardens carried out the inventory check and everything was reported to be as it should be.

The list of Key-holders was checked and noted that; Graham Bentley would share Nick Westwood's key so that he could let Tim Artiss into the Church for organ repairs as required.

Val Swallow gave up her key to Mr. Charles Plowman so that he had a key for Health and Safety access.

A list of key-holders is advertised on the Church notice board for emergency access by the Police and Fire services etc.

Two new flags were generously given by two of our PCC members.

A St. George Flag to celebrate our Patron Saint and national days.

The Union Flag to Celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

We record with sadness the passing of Mr. Ian Lochhead on December 27th 2023, a generous benefactor to St. Mary's Church and donor of the Flag pole and the now well used and worn-out original flags!

Finance.

Our Church has to keep to a very defined Budget as funds are not abundant.

Regular Out-goings are in the region of: Four Rivers Administration - £1,300 p.a. Church and Village News - £400 p.a. Insurance - £2,300 p.a. Roof Alarm > £1,000 p.a. Electricity - £500 p.a. Churchyard maintenance - £1,000 p.a. Priest-in-charge and Diocese (known as Parish Share) £13,000p.a.

The essentials have to be paid, then the Parish Share (Priest and Diocese) from what we can afford.

2023 - £8,000. A short fall of £5,000. We were shocked to be told we were a failing business and bankrupt!

For Fabric repairs we have to launch special appeals and apply for grants to be able to finance the work, there is never any money in our general funds for major repairs!

Many thanks to everyone who have given in so many ways, and generously to the organ repair fund.

Your Churchwardens appreciate your continued support in every aspect of Mission and Ministry.

Some fund-raising and social events were held this year, Open Gardens and a Wedding Festival. We thank everyone who contributes to maintaining our wonderful medieval Church. Thank you to the small band of cleaners, Guild members and our PCC for making our Church available to the wider parish through the year.

Thank you all very much.