

St Mary the Virgin, Thornborough
Report for the Annual Parish Meeting
29 April 2021, 7pm

Background Information

Members of the PCC are either ex officio or are elected by the Annual Parochial Church meeting in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. The following served as members of the PCC during 2020.

Rector Designate of the Blackthorn Chase Benefice: Rev Jaqueline Dove (from 2/09/2020)
Associate Priest Reverend John King
Church Wardens Mrs Charlotte Moore and Mr Dave Bury
Treasurer Mrs Carol Vaughan
Other PCC members Chris Moore, Maggie Beach, Ray Goodger, Sue Kenyon.

In 2020 proposals were put to the Church Commissioners to split the current Buckingham Benefice (of which Thornborough was a part) into two separate Benefices consisting of a new Benefice of Beachampton, Thornton with Nash, Thornborough and Whaddon, which would be called the Blackthorn Chase Benefice, and the Buckingham Benefice, consisting of Buckingham and Radclive. It is envisaged that the Blackthorn Chase Benefice will become a legal entity on the 1st May 2021.

The Church and COVID-19

The Church was forced to close on the 23rd March due to the National lockdown, for the first time since 23 March 1208, when worship was suspended for six years by Pope Innocent III, to punish King John. The closure of the church resulted in the weekly production of 'Church at Home' which is sent to 90 people.

With the church closed the church porch became a valuable community hub where resources could be shared together and there was easy access to some food supplies. For example, when flour was hard to come by in small quantities Charlotte made up small bags of flour. Porch sales have become the primary source of essential income for the church during this time.

Monthly services resumed when Churches were allowed to open again in July but due to social distancing requirements, popular services such as Harvest, Remembrance and the Carol services could not be accommodated. The Harvest Festival Service took the form of a Harvest Tractor Parade organised together with the chapel. The church is very grateful to all the farmers who participated. It was a definite highlight bringing people together during a difficult time. Thanks also to the E-news administrators who enabled the event to be livestreamed onto the Village Facebook page. We were also able to hold a small service to commemorate Remembrance Day. Sadly, the proposed Carol Service, organised together with the Chapel had to be cancelled. The Church remained open every day for private prayer and around Remembrance Sunday there was the opportunity to light candles and place the name of a loved one on a 'Remembrance Tree'.

In January church services moved onto ZOOM, however, the Church was open for private prayer and for those browsing the book and toy exchange. Thanks to David Elliot for agreeing to organise the book exchange. There were some beautiful flower arrangements both for Christmas and Easter. Candles and prayer cards were also made available for the

National Day of Reflection and to commemorate the life of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip. The church bell was also rung 99 times on the day of his funeral.

The normal rota of services resumed in April.

The Tower

Unfortunately, the scaffolding is up again as the lime render applied late last year has failed. This was mostly due to the timing of the work which was delayed as a result of our main contractor needing to remove two lots of inappropriate render. Not wanting to be caught up in a lengthy legal battle we found a different contractor but unfortunately the optimum time to apply render had passed. So we were left with two choices by the end of September - render the parapet, knowing the time of year and the weather was against us, or leave the parapet vulnerable to the rigours of winter, with the risk of falling masonry very high. Thankfully, the render has done a great job of protecting the brick parapet, but its strength has clearly been compromised by the extremes of wet and cold weather. We are confident that this time the render will be applied in good time to be able to dry before the winter weather arrives.

The Churchyard

The Churchyard is a special place for many who appreciate being able to honour and remember their loved ones by spending time by their graves, tending them and leaving flowers. The Churchyard regulations determined by the Oxford Diocese set fairly narrow parameters for how they are to be managed by the individual parishes. There is a difficult balance to achieve between the pastoral needs of those grieving and the long term concerns (how will the Church yard still serve it's parish hundreds of years from now). After some concern was expressed on E-news, I wrote an article for the Parish Newsletter outlining the Churchyard regulations which are legally binding.

The Oxford Diocesan Synod has declared a climate emergency and set ambitious but clear targets for reaching net zero. With this in line the churchyard management plan recognises that the churchyard can become a sanctuary for the living as well as the dead, with an abundance and diversity of indigenous and naturalized wildlife. This is achieved by designating some parts as 'meadow areas', which are mown less frequently in order to allow wild flowers to grow and set seed. Wildflower meadows are increasingly being used to help with carbon offsetting. If people have any queries or concerns about the churchyard management plan they are welcome to speak to me.

Something Different

Scientific studies point to the benefit of nature on our stress levels and for improving our immune systems. Psychologists have proven that experiencing a sense of awe and wonder humbles us and helps promote altruism and loving-kindness. We are also never too old to play and have fun. With this in mind the church, together with the chapel, is hoping to start a new monthly service called, 'Love our World – Outdoor Church' which will provide the opportunity for all ages to explore discovering God through creation. It will take place on the third Sunday of the month at 4pm.

St Mary's PCC remains very grateful for all the support it has received over this past year which has been very difficult. It hopes it can remain a key part of village life and continue to play an important role in bringing people together.