

The Parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington

St. Mary Magdalene, Whatlington

Churchwardens Report for the Parish Council, May 2021

Overview

It is now sixteen months since Revd. Kevin Mephram retired, we are thus into our second year of 'Interregnum', the period without a Priest-in-Charge. The advertising contract with the Church Times allows for the advert to be repeated without additional charge, but the initial cost was in excess of £1,000.

It is acknowledged that a clergy post of 'House for Duty' will appeal to a limited number of applicants and unfortunately we have thus far had no success in finding applicants. The Benefice was suspended on the departure of the last full time Rector, this suspension having now expired the Bishop has decided the post will revert to that of Incumbent. This change, whilst leaving the post as 'House for Duty' and part time does have the advantage of giving greater security of tenure. It is hoped that this change may make the position more attractive.

We have been very fortunate in having retired local clergy coming to take our church services, with their expenses paid by the diocese. Revd. John Hawkins has led the majority of services, but with Revd. Stephanie Prosser also taking some services. We are most grateful for the help and support given by both John and Stephanie. On the few occasions where a Priest has not been available the two churchwardens have led worship.

The church has continued to offer the usual full range of services, including those for Easter, Patronal, Harvest and Christmas, along with some special ones such as Songs of Praise. The church has also been able to hold weddings and funerals with Kevin having returned on occasion for the latter.

John Crouch has now succeeded Jeffrey Bridges as Vice Chairman of the PCC, this church council continues to meet regularly maintaining the day to day running of church.

Whatlington church continues to be open on Wednesdays and Sundays, usually between 10am to 4pm, this has proved successful with a number of visitors looking in. This opening allows much greater access to the building and we do encourage local people to make use of this. We would like to extend the opening times, but it is a matter of people being available to open and lock up, our insurance is specific that the building must be locked at night.

The church maintains an online presence through the Whatlington page on the Church of England website 'a church near you'. This consistently records quite a high number of 'hits' or visits. As I write this, the statistics show 7180 visits this year, with 624 in the last month and 188 over the last week. This interest aligns with our commitment to growing church attendance and welcoming not only practising Christians, but all who may doubt but seek. The church also has its own Facebook page which, whilst less frequently visited, does promote our services.

The Wardens, PCC and congregation review regularly our engagement with the community and are always open to new ideas and suggestions. In these challenging times we also look at ways to improve our income streams in order to meet ever increasing overheads. A new acquisition towards the end of last year has been a contactless 'CollecTin More' giving device, this has a small annual charge to enable its Sim card. The device was acquired following an application made to the diocese in response to a number of such devices being made available without cost, excepting an annual charge for the Sim card to enable wireless connection. This device gives four optional amounts and quickly proved its worth. The church relies heavily on weekly collections, for which we encourage the use of standing orders. We also benefit from and encourage Legacies. In addition donations can be made using the QR code posted in the porch, or through the link on our webpage.

A new fundraising initiative is a Table sale, to be held in the Village Hall on Saturday 22nd April.

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Churchyard:

The churchyard is maintained using a mixture of paid and volunteer labour, there is always plenty to do to keep everything tidy. We draw peoples attention to the Churchyard Regulations posted at the church, these set out various conditions associated with the churchyard. We are grateful to the Parish Council for their grant towards the cost of grass cutting. We are pending having a tree felled due to its poor condition, work is also pending to repair damaged areas of the perimeter fencing. Both of these have required consent from the Diocese.

Fabric:

In the past year we suffered the expense of having one of the original beams treated for an infestation of Death Watch Beetle. Whilst the treatment appears to have been successful there is ongoing work pending to deflect water from the roof so that it falls well clear of the beam ends. It is also planned to have further detailed investigation work carried out to determine the condition of the concealed ends of the beam. Ideally we would like to see the beam, which looks rather fragile replaced, but we are bound by consultations with various heritage bodies, the diocese and our architect. The heritage bodies, SPAB and Historic England have a default position to retain historic fabric, unless it is no longer structurally sound. Work in getting thus far has entailed considerable time spent filling in forms, writing letters, emails and making phone calls.

Other recent work on the building has included the application of specialist 'Earthborn' paint to walls in the kitchen and WC to overcome damp problems. As always with an ancient building there is always something in need of attention.

Jeffrey Bridges & John Crouch

Churchwardens, Whatlington