

# The Parish of Sedlescombe with Whatlington

## St. Mary Magdalene, Whatlington

### Churchwardens Report for the Parish Council, May 2021

#### Overview

The church has been open on Wednesdays and Sundays for private prayer throughout the periods of lockdown, when church services were suspended. This has continued now that services have resumed continuing with the extended hours of 10am to 4pm introduced in January of this year. Whilst the church may once have been regularly open in the distant past, this opening is the first time that access has been possible at other than service times in at least the last forty years. Opening has proved to be successful and is something we hope to be able to maintain in the future.

We were very pleased when in 2020 John Crouch stepped forward to fill Churchwarden's vacancy which has remained unfilled since Ken Jones stood down in 2016. John has long standing family connections with the church.

Church services were suspended in line with HM Government lockdown requirements, then again earlier this year at the request of the East Sussex health authorities, resuming from March. Throughout the periods of lockdown our Vicar, Revd. Kevin Mepham has said the Communion Service in Sedlescombe Church every Sunday, whilst at Whatlington one of the wardens has read the appropriate section each Sunday from the Book of Common Prayer, in this way the continuity of worship has been maintained, a continuity stretching back for over more than seven centuries. A series of videos were posted on the church Facebook page during lockdown, made while the organ was playing from its recorded database as another means of connecting people with the church building.

From the start of lockdown in 2020 the church has been running a weekly 'Order of Service' emailed out to 'subscribers' on our email list, this list has grown considerably since the start. The Order of Service has the Bible readings for the week, the Collect and the Creed along with Kevin's sermon and in the periods of lockdown pictures of the church. We are for the time being continuing with this arrangement in conjunction with the church services. As a church we are very grateful to our Vicar, Kevin for his support and unstinting commitment which goes far beyond what we may expect from a Non-Stipendiary Priest-in-Charge.

Whilst we are still not allowed to sing in church our organist plays the hymn tunes, we hope singing will be allowed again soon.

The Whatlington page on the Church of England website 'a church near you' records 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.

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. Giving to the church relies heavily on: weekly collections (mostly by standing order); Legacies; and fundraising activities. In order to facilitate greater support, the church now accepts donations via a QR code posted in the porch, or through the recently acquired card reader. We would welcome any support or ideas for future fundraising activities.

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## **Churchyard:**

John & Fran Crouch are in the process of making a new and much more comprehensive plan of the churchyard, detailing all the graves and as far as possible including details of those interred. The previous plans have been piecemeal reflecting the additions to the churchyard over the years and dating back to a 1925 plan.

A new improved hasp and staple has been fitted to the churchyard shed, together with a new close shackle padlock so as to enhance security in the light of last year's break in.

We seek to maintain the churchyard with a mix of grass cutting and designated areas being left uncut for part of the year to encourage wildlife and wild flowers. This policy is yielding some success, with more variety of wild flowers becoming evident, in addition to the snowdrops and daffodils. The Parish Council grant allows us to employ a contractor for the main grass cutting and is much valued.

## **Car Park plans:**

An appeal has now been lodged by Mrs. P. Butcher against Rother District Councils decision to refuse outline planning permission for a new car park with enabling development. All submissions have now been made and we await details as to when an inspector will be appointed to take the case forward.

## **Fabric:**

We were able to arrange our Quinquennial Inspection last summer with our Inspecting Architect, Richard Andrews. The inspection, which is a Church of England requirement for the care of Listed buildings did not show up any areas of significant concern, there are however some areas of the building which will require attention over the next five year period.

It has been a challenge to accommodate the pews and seats which are out of use due to the need for socially distanced seating. The revised seating layout has however worked well, allowing two aisles and a one way system. We operated a pre-booked seating system for Christmas and Easter services both of which saw the church at almost its full socially distanced capacity. Attendance in general since the restarting of services in March has been very good.

We have been able to continue to ring the bells as we have two swing chime bells, these can be managed by a single ringer. The Tenor bell is separately operated by an electro-mechanical hammer and an electronic timer.

The gas heating boiler is of the Combi type with a sealed system, this started to be problematic around Christmas and after the annual service it became clear a new pressure vessel was required, this has now been fitted at a cost in excess of £230.

A wet patch in the churchyard led to the discovery that a leak had developed on the main supply pipe through the churchyard. Morgan & Morgan have attended and found a split in the pipe near to the 'T' piece for the churchyard tap, this has now been repaired by them, kindly at no cost.

Jeffrey Bridges & John Crouch

Churchwardens, Whatlington