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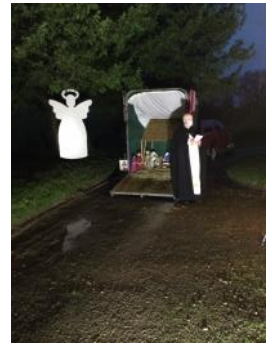
A record of the past twelve months in the life of our church

Vicar's Report

What a year this has been! Seven and a half months into a new post and we entered the first national lockdown in response to Covid19. I had only just begun to get to know the congregation, let alone the village, and we were left trying to maintain our sense of community with only the telephone, Zoom, and YouTube. Now, at twenty two months in, that short period of normality before the crisis seems like a fading, and distant, memory.

But there have been highlights in the past year.

In November 2020, in response to the early suggestion of a second wave, we arranged with the Parish Council for a very restricted number of representatives of the Community to gather at the War Memorial for a live streamed service of prayer and thanksgiving to mark the National Remembrance Sunday. Churches and Royal British Legions all around the country were wrestling with the same question of whether, and if so how, to meet to mark the day. Unbeknown to me, more than 200 separate devices across our village tuned in to the service, often in family groups gathered at garden gates to mark the silence alongside their neighbours. It was one of the most remarkable experiences of my ministry.



Christmas Eve

In December 2020, as the Kent variant (latterly renamed Variant Alpha) took hold in neighbouring areas, we took the reluctant decision to cancel our outdoor events for Christmas Eve. This was devastating. However, there was much good news in this period. We had, through a combination of generous donations, collaboration with our neighbours in Benson and Ewelme Benefice, and some hard work stuffing bags, provided our school with Christingle kits to make in class assemblies, which we streamed online. There was also an opportunity for us to do some gentle outreach in the form of our online Posada (<https://maryandjosephvisitchalgrove.wordpress.com>), in which Mary and Joseph stayed with a different household in the village every night in Advent, before arriving at Church in time for Christmas.

But it was Easter that lifted my spirits. Unlike Easter 2020, in which we were all confined to barracks, on 4 April 2021 we gathered outside for public worship on Easter Day. The Government had recently permitted outdoor singing, so we had Chris providing music and the choir gathered to sing. We had our first public Communion for some time, and Bob Heath-Whyte our LLM preached a fabulous sermon. Kirsty, Heather, Wendy, Louise, Claire and the flower team, Andrew, and several others, had worked hard in shifts (for safety) to create an outdoor Easter Garden which was the focus for our worship that morning. And people in the village kept reminding me for weeks about how beautiful they found the Easter Garden: what a comfort it was to have a visible sign of continuity among all of the chaos of this never-ending emergency. It was a vivid picture of the way the sufferings of the world were summed up in Christ's cross, and drawn together into a sustaining beauty that was deeper than the horror that sought to overwhelm it.

Looking forward, as we open up more fully, we have a job to do. First, I think we must *pray*, giving thanks for God's mercies, praying that we recover. Second, I think we must *plan*. The experience of Christmas shows that people will get involved if we ask them. How are we going to involve them? Finally, we must *praise*, for Jesus Christ really is the same 'Yesterday, Today, Forever'.

God bless.

Fr Michael

Special points of interest:

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Balanced and Positive - Financial Report

"During the 2020 Covid-19 restrictions the money paid in by church members by standing order each month has kept the church income in good condition"

The year 2020 was my first year as Treasurer for St Mary's Chalgrove. The church now has its own bank account, St Mary's Chalgrove PCC, at CAF (Charities Aid Foundation) sort code 40-52-40, account No 00033407. The old NatWest account sort code 60-22-19, account No 65281020 is now the 'Friends of St Mary's' account still named St Mary's Chalgrove PCC.

During the 2020 Covid-19 restrictions the money paid in by church members by standing order each month has kept the church income in good condition, even when weekly church collections and fund raising could not take place. Donations paid in via the 'GiveALittle' donation on the church website chalgrovechurch.org (please take a look) are also helping. As with our church and Friends' donations, I collect the Gift aid/GASDS 25% from HMRC every 3 months for all Gift Aid donations and GASDS (Gift Aid Special Donations) of £30 and under via cash in the church or 'GiveALittle' donations on the website.

Churchyard general maintenance is funded 25% by the Chalgrove Church Estate Trust. The Parish Council donates £1,400, regular donations come from relations of deceased and the rest from church funds. Any major projects will be funded from the CCLI Churchyard fund account.

The recording of electricity via our 3 phase meter is being sent monthly to the electric company but will soon be replaced with a smart meter. This will allow the correct readings to be used for our weekday and cheaper evenings and weekends use of the building (much lower during Covid-19).

In January 2021 Father Michael's online 'Greek lessons' started, and voluntary donations the participants have made to church funds (half for Chalgrove and half for Berrick) are very beneficial.

Bob Kuyper
Treasurer

The John Hampden Hall

"... the Chairman and Caretaker spent hours adapting the building and compiling notices."

In common with all public venues the John Hampden Hall was required to close under the Covid restrictions. With many different rules and regulations coming down from the Government the Chairman and Caretaker spent hours adapting the building and compiling notices. Here 'Oxfordshire Community First' were of a great help.

Eventually restrictions were eased and our chiropractor took up residence in her room. Gradually small children's groups were allowed and the Ballet Classes and Little Masters returned. The Quilting Group hopes to follow in June with the promise of many others in September.

My undying thanks go to Gill Spicer, our Caretaker, who not only kept the premises clean and sanitized but took charge of the gardening.

Gill Lester

St Mary's House Group

The House Group has not formally met during the year as we did not feel that Zoom would work sufficiently well for our discussions. Some of us were also dealing with a number of Zoom meetings for other reasons. Having met together and studied a range of topics for some time we hope to resume once life returns to a degree of normality and group meetings are allowed in our houses again.

If anyone would like to join us as a new member or just come for a while to see what we do, then please contact me on 890650 or heather.topping13@btinternet.com so that I can let you know when and where we are meeting. We would be delighted to see you.

Heather Topping



Non Events Report

We would normally have a column or two here about all the social events of the past year, but there haven't been any, so I'm going to use this space to record those other contributors to the annual Yearbook who are in a similar position of having little or nothing to report.

Marian Shaw, on behalf of St Helen's Church, writes "The relationship between St Helen's at Berrick, and St Mary's at Chalgrove remains as committed as ever, though for obvious reasons the last year has brought us no opportunities to collaborate. However, things are starting to look up, and we hope to be able to contribute to the Yearbook in 2022."

Chalgrove Age Concern's representative, Judith Bennett, reports that "We closed on 17 March and remain so. We are reopening with luck in September. I think we need to be omitted this year sadly."

Bob Heath-Whyte

"... I'm going to use this space to record those other contributors who are in a similar position of having little or nothing to report."

The Friends of St Mary's

Like many aspects of life during this reporting year, Friends has had to adjust and reorientate activities in line with Covid 19 requirements and recommendations.

The 2020 Quiz night proved to be the last Friends' event for considerable time. However, despite the absence of our social events, membership has remained remarkably steady and loyal and currently numbers 46. Age Concern has a corporate membership and donates on behalf of all their members, but they are counted as one member on our database.

The annual income generated by the membership was £2,080. As there are seven life members, this income was generated from 39 donations which makes the average donation just over £53. This is wonderfully generous, and we are very grateful indeed for it.

The absence of our events felt like a real loss to Friends, and I think to the wider village communities around us as well. And of course, we were unable to contribute any financial profit from events to the life and work of St Mary's. In these unusual times of social restrictions, the Friends' Quarterly proved an invaluable way of keeping in touch with all our members. The editorial team worked very hard to produce and distribute regular newsletters and I would like to thank my co-editors Candida Hunt and Geoffrey Searle for their cheerful (mostly!) commitment to the task. Thanks are also due to Jeanette Barrington and her helpers for distributing the newsletters to Age Concern members who received the weekly Friday lunches.

Our other main activity has been to update and improve the Friends' section of St Mary's website. Both Bob Heath-Whyte as website guru and Bob Kuyper as Treasurer have been enormously patient advisors in this task. Our Membership Application leaflet can now be accessed and downloaded from the website and one-off donations to Friends can also be made electronically. This is a great and positive outcome during a year when it has seemed that 'nothing much has happened'. So please enjoy looking at the website and the Friends' section within it and encourage your friends and family to do so too.

Finally, we are grateful that we can look ahead to better times. Indeed, as I write this, we have already enjoyed holding the first Friends' event since February 2020 – an outdoor Plant Sale in the village. But reporting on the success of this will have to wait until the next Yearbook!

Lynn Baker

"The absence of our events felt like a real loss to Friends, and I think to the wider village communities around us"



Bell Ringing

".... we will not be ringing until the lockdown restrictions are lifted"

Sadly the bells have remained silent since the start of the pandemic and at the time of writing we will not be ringing until the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Margaret Coombe's passing came as a shock to us all; the Covid lockdown had five of us in a little group on Facebook where we had shared our thoughts, fears and jokes. Margaret's experiences and timely advice were a great way to keep a level head when anxiety had been high.

Andrew Davis

Caretaker and Steeple Keeper



Whilst the church remained closed it was checked regularly; in the depths of winter the heating was on for a short while each morning to keep the fabric dry.

Throughout the closures the church clock has been wound twice weekly and is adjusted by the odd minute forward or back depending on the weather.

Andrew Davis

Jonathan working in the bell chamber of the tower

Prayer Group

"It is hoped to be able to restart the prayer group in some way when we can"

Obviously we have been unable to meet during the pandemic and all its restrictions but we have continued to pray within our own homes for all the needs of the church family, village, our nation and the world during the very difficult times that we have been through.

One of the group members, David Viall, sadly died on 5 August 2020, and is greatly missed.

It is hoped to be able to restart the prayer group in some way when we can, but no decision has yet been made.

May God bless you all and do let me know if you would like anything or anyone included in prayer.

Wendy Poile

Private Prayer

"I feel that every moment should be documented"

It was lovely to step back inside the church and wonderful to introduce Dotty to a place that has already meant so much to Jonathan and I. Such an unusual time and I never thought that would be her first appearance at St Mary's - I feel that every moment should be documented for Dotty and also from a social history point of view.

It'll be interesting to watch her grow up in the church and us to remember and reflect on her first time here. I'm looking forward to the day when we can introduce her to the old normal rather than the new.

Faye O'Hara



Jonathan and Faye with Dotty

A Quiet Year for the Choir

Well, what a year this has been! We celebrated the arrival of our new Vicar in 2019 and then he takes us into lockdown, that'll go down well on his CV.

The Choir as you can imagine has done very little. As I said in my last report, diminishing numbers made it very difficult for us and then of course lockdown happened and in a way that saved Chris and I from making some very tough decisions. We had hoped that we would be singing at an outdoor Crib service on Christmas Eve 2020. It was planned that a few singers would sing Carols as Father Michael blessed the crib, but a second lockdown commenced and that put paid to that idea. At Easter we did manage to have six singers and Chris playing the keyboard for a short service, again outside by the beautiful Easter garden. It was really nice to have the garden outside where it could be viewed by everyone, instead of in the normal position in Church where only people attending services could see it. This is an idea that I would like to see continued into the future (a personal opinion, not necessarily supported by the PCC).

After much discussion and heart searching, Chris, Michael and I have arrived at the conclusion that for the foreseeable future we will, like so many other small parish churches, have an 'Occasional Choir', a choir that meets to rehearse and sing at Festival services, eg Christmas and Easter. Sadly, we do not now have enough singers available to sing weekly, age is catching up with many of us, and other commitments mean that even if one voice is missing, that voice can mean the difference between a good sound and a poor sound. On many Sundays, we will have in the congregation enough voices to have harmony singing during the hymns, but what I do feel is that we should be able to hold onto the memories of a good choir rather than a poor one. You never know, if they do build more houses around the village, it may attract more folk into the Church and subsequently into a reformed Choir, but singers are never attracted to a tired group just hanging in there. But hopefully in the future someone will come into the village and be persuaded to take on the challenge as I did in 1984 to reinvigorate the Choir. Let's hope so.

In the meantime, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris for his continued support.

*Peter Hunt,
Choirmaster 2021*

Traidcraft

Traidcraft is the original Fairtrade pioneer in the UK and offers sustainable fashion, home and garden goods and handmade ethical Fairtrade gifts.

There is a wide range of groceries including Fairtrade tea, organic coffee, organic chocolate and biscuits.

Last year we were not able to have a display in church, though some people did order from the catalogue. A small display is now in the south aisle and I welcome ideas for the future.

Carole Heath-Whyte

Artweeks Exhibition

In May 2021, we were delighted to be able to play hosts once again to the multi-talented artists in our community, who gave us a grand exhibition of their recent works.

A one-way route was prepared around the nave so that visitors could view all the art while complying with the coronavirus restrictions.

Amongst those exhibiting were Jim Robinson, Jonathan Knapp and Janet Dunkley and our thanks go to them and to Kashmira Patel and her team for arranging the event.

".... Chris, Michael and I have arrived at the conclusion that for the foreseeable future we will, like so many other small parish churches, have an 'Occasional Choir'"





Andrew and Jonathan working on WiFi

Communications and Website

In a time of Covid the main form of communication suddenly became Zoom! But the website had to be kept up to date too! Particularly as the Government's, and therefore the Church of England's, advice on how to conform to the Covid regulations kept changing (and still is!). At least 35 updates were required during the months from July 2020 to May 2021 inclusive. Recently this has included the addition of 'DONATE' buttons to pages for both St Mary's and the Friends of St Mary's, kindly provided by our Treasurer, Bob Kuyper.

There have been no group visits to the church during the past twelve months, and there is only a tentative booking for one visit later this year.

There has, however, been quite a lot of YouTubing on St Mary's YouTube channel, with regular Daily Prayer on weekdays and services on Sundays. This has meant some updating of technology, particularly for Fr Michael so that he can now stream services directly, provided there is a good enough WiFi signal. Apart from the additional cameras required for this, it also uncovered the fact that our WiFi system in St Mary's wasn't working. Fortunately, we have some expertise in the congregation, and Jonathan O'Hara, assisted by Andrew Davis and myself, managed to rectify the problem during some very chilly sessions in the bell chamber of the tower. Thank you, Jonathan and Andrew!

I began by mentioning Zoom, and the regular Wednesday morning Zoom Coffee mornings hosted by Fr Michael were an excellent way to keep in touch and enjoy some chat. We also used Zoom for the Lent course, as well as for PCC meetings. It will be good to get back to 'face-to-face' meetings, even if we have to be masked for them.

Bob Heath-Whyte

".... the regular Wednesday morning Zoom Coffee mornings hosted by Fr Michael were an excellent way to keep in touch"

Pastoral Care

Like most organisations, due to Covid we have been unable to gather for Lost for Words Teas. In the past they have been well valued and, being a Co-Founder of the teas, during the break it has given me a chance to reflect. So, together with the other members of the Pastoral Care Team, we have decided that it is time for change.

It is planned to open this up to the wider village, anyone who would like to come along for a cuppa and a chat, not just for those who have been bereaved. Further details will be in the Link in September and on the church website.

On Mothering Sunday, the Pastoral Care Team organised a home made cream tea for those who wanted a 'cheer up'. This was very successfully received and, if possible, we would like to make this an annual event.

The Pastoral Care Team comprises Jeanette Barrington, Gill Lester, Wendy Poile and Jane Reeve.

Jeanette Barrington

".... together with the other members of the Pastoral Care Team, we have decided that it is time for change."

USPG - United Society Partners in the Gospel

Founded in 1701, USPG is the Anglican mission agency that partners churches and communities world wide in God's mission to enliven faith, strengthen relationships and unlock potential.

For many years we have supported USPG by collections during Advent and Lent. These collections have been directed to the most urgent needs in their worldwide work. A prayer diary, their magazine Koinonia and study guides are available from me, and will be available in church soon!

Carole Heath-Whyte (01865 890442)

"For many years we have supported USPG by collections during Advent and Lent."

Ride & Stride

We have been taking part in Oxford Historic Churches Trust annual Bike Ride, otherwise known as Ride and Stride, for many years. It is a wonderful opportunity to welcome people to St Mary's, offer a drink and biscuit and to send them on their way refreshed. Each year a group of supporters sits in church as welcomers, and each year a few fit and hardy folk visit churches either on their bikes or walking. These striders are sponsored to raise funds, which are shared equally between the Trust and their local church.

In September 2020, Ride and Stride was very different. We were not able to open the church for Striders, so we had a sign-in table in the porch. Twenty one cyclists and walkers signed in, so OHCT did have good support. Lynn and Charles Baker and Jessie walked local churches and so did Patricia Hunt and Bob Heath-Whyte, though each pair followed a different route.

They started together and at Brightwell Baldwin diverged along their chosen routes: Lynn and Charles Baker made for Watlington (three churches) via Cuxham and Pyrton, returning via Easington to Chalgrove. Patricia Hunt and Bob Heath-Whyte walked from Brightwell Baldwin to Berrick Salome, Newington, Chiselhampton, Stadhampton and thence to Chalgrove (having got lost at Ascot!).

I should like to thank them for their efforts (each route was about 12 miles). They also raised a record amount, over £1,500 for the first time thanks to sponsors in the village and church members. Our Striders publicised their efforts on Chalgrove Village Facebook page and in church and were rewarded with very generous support.

Carole Heath-Whyte

Stewardship

Here in Chalgrove, the church community has given faithfully and sacrificially over many years in order to prepare our beautiful building for the work of God in this village. Let me say thank you to all of you. I know of other churches which have had major unexpected plant problems emerge in the period of the pandemic, which has added financial and logistical headaches to what was already an unusually demanding time. Every day, I am grateful to God for you and for my predecessor, Fr Ian, for doing what some folk call 'mending the roof when the sun was shining'. As we approach the final stage of the Government's lockdown easing, albeit with anticipated delays, the challenges for us will be to renew the use of our special building, to review the worship we offer to Almighty God, and to refocus our attention on mission, congregational development, outreach, teaching, social events, and so on.

Financially, our headline figures suggest that we have weathered the Covid storm thus far in better shape than we might have otherwise anticipated. This isn't the same as saying that we are totally unscathed, but it is to say that God is very good! As I mentioned in last year's Stewardship notes, a modest increase of 2% in our total net income would give us a bit more stability. This, of course, is not to ask everyone to give extra; some may need to give less. It is to invite us all to review prayerfully our giving on a regular basis and to give what we can - whether of money, of time, or of talents - but most of all of our faith, our hope, and our love.

Fr Michael

Flower Arrangers

Many thanks to all the Flower Ladies for their help during a difficult year. During the lockdowns we were not allowed to arrange flowers in Church, so had to make them at home and then take them in.

We are all looking forward to getting back to something like normal.

Claire Ing

**"In September
Lynn and Charles
Baker and Jessie
walked local churches
and so did Patricia
Hunt and Bob Heath-
Whyte"**

**"....the challenges for
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Year Book 2020 - 2021

May 2021

"God wants us to be welcoming and hospitable,
serving and building within our community"Chalgrove Church
A PLACE A PART

Methodist Partnership

If I were to keep to the main theme of this Year Book - 'A record of the past twelve months in the life of our church' - then I would be telling you about how I have had to become familiar with software such as Outside Broadcast Studio (OBS) and KdenLive to produce our recorded daily prayers or worship materials for the Circuit; how ZOOM has become a way of life ("you'll need to unmute yourself" is a phrase that I wouldn't have used two years ago); and how pastoral ministry has had to transform to weekly letters or phone calls, especially those who are shielding. This, as you might imagine, is a very different scenario to the one I imagined for my last year in pastoral charge of churches. So instead of doing all of that, I would like to offer a few reflections on my experience of St Mary's.

Firstly, St Mary's has become for me what the Celtic church would call a 'thin place'; a place where "the veil between this world and the otherworld is porous, where there is mystery in the landscape. The earth takes on the hue of the sacred among peoples whose connection to place has remained unbroken through the ages". I've been fortunate to visit a few - Iona, Lindisfarne and Bardsey are the obvious ones, but a small, ancient chapel in the grounds of one of the Leonard Cheshire homes is another. The worship of centuries seemed to seep out of the worn stones. Thank you for your care and love for such a special place as St Mary's.

Secondly, across the country, attendance at streamed or recorded services has been much greater than we anticipated. Father Michael will correct me if I am wrong but I believe that this is true of the benefice services as well. From my perspective this may suggest that the general population still has a spiritual appetite but that in this age of Netflix, iPlayer, Amazon Prime, etc ... people can access 'visual content' when they want, rather than when we put it on. Much cleverer people than I have researched this long and hard (The Centre for Digital Theology for example: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/digitaltheology/>) but for the moment I'm sticking to my theory. If I'm right then this pushes us to retain a digital presence even when COVID has long gone, as well as a 'real life' worship experience, but also challenges us as to what gathering together as a community will mean in the future.

Finally, (of course there are three points!) what the COVID forced lock-downs have done is to accelerate a process that was already underway, certainly within Methodism. A church is in a vulnerable position when it relies on the finance from room lettings rather than its congregational giving, and this vulnerability has been exposed over the last 18 months. I anticipate that many rural Methodist chapels will be closing sooner than predicted. I hope I am wrong.

I acknowledge that many Anglican parishes are struggling as well, but I suspect that the differences in ecclesiastical infrastructure, and relative denominational size, will mean that the impact may be less. I hope so. Where I am going in this argument is that the model we have at St Mary's will become much more common than it is now. Across the Northampton Methodist District, which covers Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and small bits of five other counties, I know of only one other 'ecumenical welcome'.

In truth, the 'ecumenical welcome' which Father Michael was kind enough to renew when he came doesn't really cover the 'one congregation, one purse' arrangement that we have, and so, as Methodist Ecumenical Officer for Oxfordshire, I shall be working on a covenant that will try and describe the current relationship, allow better access for St Mary's to wider Methodist resources, and hopefully allow an easier ecumenical path to follow in the future. So you are not getting rid of me as easily as you may have hoped!

It has been a joy and a privilege to serve as the Methodist minister for St Mary's, Chalgrove and I will miss leading worship in your 'thin place'. If I have a regret then it is that I wasn't able to help facilitate the church's outreach to the new housing in the village, which I will be passing on as a priority to Rev Stephen Spain.

You may be aware that during this time of lock-down and isolation there has been an increased interest in the works of Julian of Norwich, who, it is thought, kept herself in isolation during the various plagues that ravaged England in her life time. I finish with some words attributed to her which seem appropriate:

"He said not 'Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be dis-eased'; but he said, 'Thou shalt not be overcome.'" - Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love

John Anderson

".... Thou shalt not be overcome."