

# The Friends Quarterly



Welcome to the Friends Newsletter.

Our front cover for the third electronic issue of the Newsletter during the COVID-19 pandemic shows some of the intrepid team of volunteers working two metres apart and tidying St Mary's Church driveway between "lockdowns".

More inside...

November 2020

Issue 36

## Friends Update

This is the last Quarterly for this year, and despite it being a hard and sometimes distressing year for so many people, there is still pleasure in being in touch with all the Friends again through the newsletter. Without our usual gatherings at Friends events – the concerts, Strawberry Cream Tea party, and this year the Open Gardens – the newsletter has become even more special as a means of keeping in touch. That may still be the case during some of 2021.

When we have not been able to provide the social events for you to enjoy, it feels difficult to include the usual reminder about the coming membership renewal date which is the end of January 2021. Your membership is always valued, but in the absence of our fund-raising events this year, your annual donation is really appreciated. Although the church building is less accessible, its fabric and beautiful heritage features still need to be looked after and kept in good order in readiness for when it can be enjoyed to the full. We do hope that you will remain a member during the coming year to support St Mary's in this way. If you would like to change the amount of your donation by Direct Debit or cheque, then January 2021 is a good time to do it. We will send another reminder in early January to those of you who pay by cheque. It would be helpful if could you send or deliver your cheque to the Treasurer, Bob Kuyper, by 31 January at the latest. **Please label your envelope "for Friends of St Mary's" so that he can bank it correctly into the Friends account.**

His address is:

Bob Kuyper 58 High Street Chalgrove OX44 7SS

If you would like to be reminded of the amount you donate annually please just email or telephone me – [friends@chalgrovechurch.org](mailto:friends@chalgrovechurch.org) or 01865 400402.

Some of you may recall that the Friends have made a significant financial contribution to the development of resources for visually impaired visitors to St Mary's. These consist of touch-sensitive images of several heritage and architectural features in the building. Each image has its own recorded description so that the user can both feel the image and listen to the recording at the same time. After 4 years of steady work on these we are delighted to tell you that all the images and scripts for the recordings have now been sent to Dr Susan Griffiths who leads the development of resources for visually impaired visitors to the Natural History Museum. She is an invaluable advisor to us and will now check all the material and suggest any necessary changes before we make voice recordings from the scripts. We hope that these resources will be ready for use as soon as the church can be reopened for visitors.

As things currently stand, we can't make any commitment to Friends events in 2021. What we can say is that we will provide them as soon as possible once it is considered safe to do so.

We hope that you and all your loved ones remain well and safe, and we look forward to being in touch again in 2021 when the next Quarterly comes out.

*Lynn Baker on behalf of the Friends Committee*

## Update from the Vicar

I hope you are all staying well and that (if lockdown has ended when you read this) November was good to you and (if it has been extended further into December) that your morale is holding. Though much at present seems to be chaotic or terrifying, there remains so much in the world for us to be thankful. I am grateful for the arrival of winter, which I think is the most austere beautiful of all the seasons - especially the frosts. I am also grateful that most of us are still here, still trying to live as a community, and still trying to continue as a church. On that latter point, I can speak not only for myself but for the PCC and the congregation in saying how grateful we are to have an active Friends group. God bless you.



Looking back through November, a real highlight for me was the Remembrance Sunday service. Having met with representatives of the Parish Council and the Royal British Legion a few weeks earlier, we decided that it would be sensible to restrict access to the service in order to avoid the risk of infection. In compensation for not being able to attend *in person*, we invited the residents of the village to watch online, and to gather at their gates for the silence followed by a round of applause,

as we had done for the NHS in the dark days of Lockdown 1.0. There was a short period, after HM's Government's announcement of a second lockdown, during which we were not sure if we would be able to go ahead, but the Parish Council generously stepped up to be the official lead organisation, with Jo the Parish Clerk taking on the responsibility of Track & Trace recording. In the end, Bob Heath-Whyte and I led a service involving the Parish Council, the Royal British Legion, and active service personnel. We live streamed the entire service via the Church's YouTube channel, and we think about 200–300 people watched online.

Looking forward to December...well, at the time of writing this, we cannot be certain what we will be permitted to do. That said, we are continuing to plan and to prepare in the full expectation that we will be able to engage the community during Advent and celebrate together somehow at Christmas. Mentions in dispatches ought certainly to include Bob Heath-Whyte, Jennifer Thompson and the other organisers of the Church's Online Advent Study Series 'Walking to Bethlehem'. We are also grateful to Kirsty, Heather, and the School for some of the Children and Families activities made possible during this period, including an Online Posada (a Mary and Joseph themed activity for Advent), an Angels-themed community art project, and for assistance in organising other important activities,

such as Christingle Assembly resources. In both parishes, we are grateful to the teams who have taken on the responsibility of planning and executing our outdoor Christmas Eve crib events, especially to Andrew, Jonathan, Marian and Roger. And we are grateful to members of the choir here, who have been working with other vocalists in the area to prepare materials for online services throughout the coming seasons.

When we look back at 2020, it may be that, alongside all of the fear and disruption, we recognise some of the ways in which, even when separated by lockdown, we have continued to work together. Once again, the Friends are such an important part of that. Let's make 2021 the year of our recovery!

*Fr Michael Lakey*

## **We Remember...**

David Viall 19 August 1941–5 August 2020

A tribute



I first met David at the Vicarage. The two of us went to see Rev. Canon Ian Cohen once a week in readiness for our Confirmation. David's depth of knowledge was mesmerising! He knew passages from the Bible intimately, he understood their spiritual meaning, he could point to the geographical location on a map, and he knew when they had taken place chronologically. David and I went on to be confirmed together, and I was extremely lucky that our friendship continued.

I am sure it is well known that David had an enormous collection of cacti. To say he was an enthusiast would be an understatement. He had a room at the bottom of his garden containing hundreds of them, and they were beautiful. I must have been very enthusiastic, because a few weeks later, David, out of the blue it seemed, gave me 12 cacti to start my very own collection. True to character, they came with a handwritten file containing notes on each cactus detailing where in the world they came from and how to care for them.

I went to church as often as my shifts allowed, and I always sat with David. To be greeted by David was the best thing; with his huge smile and warmth, he always made me feel very important to him. He remembered the details of my life and he peppered me with questions. To be with David was a very warm place and I miss him greatly. David was a gentle man and a gentleman; he was interested and interesting. But most of all he was kind. David Viall was a very kind man.

*Melissa Spearman*

“Thus”

Memories of the light that shone from them over the years  
Now are reflected in full trueness in my pool of tears  
And in a heart that between pain and sadness veers  
Toward a reunion in commonness and eternity that ever nears.

*David Viall*

(EDITOR'S NOTE: this poem was read during David's funeral by his good friend Sarah.)

Derek Croxford 11 July 1935–4 October 2020

A tribute from his Methodist friends



Derek was a real gentleman, and a much-valued friend. His knowledge of Chalgrove was always interesting to listen to. I first remember Derek when he was running the Chalgrove Bakery: he produced the wonderful bread and hot cross buns that we all missed when he retired.

Derek regularly attended Chalgrove Methodist Chapel until his memory started to desert him, and he went into the home where he ended his days.

Although he wasn't able to attend Chapel regularly while he ran the bakery, I think because of the early starts to produce the bread, he was always very supportive of the life and work of the Chapel. He baked the traditional bread for the Harvest services held in the Methodist Chapel and Saint Mary's Church and possibly further afield. The sheaves of wheat with the harvest mouse will remain treasured memories of Derek's skill and service to the community in which he lived for so long.

*David Turner on behalf of the Methodist community*

A tribute from Colin, his brother

It is with great sadness that I write of my brother Derek's death on Sunday, Oct 4<sup>th</sup>. He was 85 years old and had suffered a long illness.

Apart from 2 years National Service, he lived in Chalgrove all his life, working in the family bakery supplying fresh bread to Chalgrove and surrounding villages. In his younger years he played cricket and football for the village.

He will be greatly missed.

*Colin Croxford*

## Congratulations

### Ride and Stride 2020

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 a 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.

This year 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 instead. 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 (3 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 £1000 for the first time – thanks to sponsors in the village, church members and their families. Our Striders publicised their efforts on the Chalgrove Village Facebook page and in church and were rewarded with very generous support.

*Carole Heath-Whyte*

## Church news

### Churchyard Working Party

It is strange how as a person you undergo changes during your life but then something happens, and you revert to your old self. We moved to Chalgrove to retire fully. "No more volunteering, just sit back and enjoy ourselves and our grandchildren" we said to each other.

In life before Chalgrove I was called many things at our old church, usually nice things to my face but I know I was always referred to as 'Mrs Bossy Boots' behind my back. I must confess I do tend to take over and start issuing orders when work of any kind needs to be done, but in fairness to me I did my fair share as well.

So when it was pointed out that the driveway around St Mary's Church was looking rather neglected and overgrown in places I couldn't help but agree. I then felt the familiar urge to go in like the proverbial Bull in a China Shop. Regretfully I am not one for organising meetings to talk about such matters; instead I like to get some volunteers and then start organising them myself!



Thanks to the volunteers who responded positively on to my request for help there is now a regular working party meeting in the churchyard each Wednesday at 2.30pm. Weather permitting, the task is to clear the driveway back to the kerb edging on each side. Due to my recent knee replacement I am unable to do my fair share of the clearing and digging, so last Wednesday I reverted back to being Mrs Bossy Boots, even arguing with some of the work team that there was no black

cloud above our heads and it would not rain as the BBC weather forecast said it would be 'sunny with light cloud'. Well the black cloud was very real and the rain very cold, so I was proved wrong! However, I am sure it will be better weather next time we meet up to do a gentle bit of driveway clearing.

Many thanks to all the willing volunteers who turned up armed with spades and forks prepared to give the work 100% of their effort. I do hope that awful Mrs Bossy Boots didn't put you off too much. Facebook Chalgrove Village Notice Board has had over 73 likes regarding our work so obviously it is appreciated, and parts of the driveway are already looking much better.

There is plenty of driveway still to do and the work will continue. All the volunteers work at a safe distance from others and during lockdown our agreed ban on any social gathering to chat is strictly adhered to. Mrs Bossy Boots sees to that!

## **St Nick's Fayre – Saturday 5 December**

This year is a very different one for us all, and our usual St Nick's celebration in the Village Hall is yet another event that must be re-imagined in order to happen safely. We do want to provide a celebration of some sort for everyone's enjoyment. Currently members of the PCC are considering whether and how St Mary's churchyard could provide a sufficiently Covid-safe place for Santa to visit, bringing with him some socially distanced delights for all, especially the little ones.

Our usual excellent raffle will happen, but again differently organised. The tickets are already available (see below). This year's financial situation for St Mary's is worrying. The 2020 celebration of St Nick's will be the only remaining opportunity this year for the PCC to help raise much-needed funds for the church.

As you know, since the highly successful Friends Quiz in February, no further fund-raising occasions have been possible apart from the money raised by St Mary's folk who participated in the annual Oxfordshire Historic Churches Ride and Stride event in September. The PCC are always grateful to Friends for their financial support and this year we have really missed the fun and pleasure of your great events.

At this particularly difficult time in St Mary's finances please could you help by collecting and selling raffle tickets?

Tickets can be collected from Jeanette Barrington 01865 890607 or from me [bells@chalgrovechurch.org](mailto:bells@chalgrovechurch.org) or 01865 890755 (ring 6pm-9pm only please).

Thank you very much.

*Andrew Davis (PCC lay Chair)*

(EDITOR'S NOTE since Andrew wrote this, the PCC has decided, with regret, not to hold any celebratory St Nick's event this year, for reasons of safety and health. However, the raffle is going ahead so please do collect tickets to buy and sell.)

## **Bellringing and caretaking news**

Sadly, the bells remain silent and will do for the foreseeable future. With many of our ringers in the vulnerable category we can only dream of the day we ring out again.

Chalgrove time is maintained with the clock being wound twice a week. Whilst I am up there listening to the quiet ticking of the mechanism, I reflect on how history is being shaped. My predecessors would have had many experiences throughout their tenure – industrialisation, wars, recessions, the coming of the digital age - yet a constant for over 300 years has been this simple clockwork mechanism.

*Andrew Davis*

## SPECIAL FEATURE

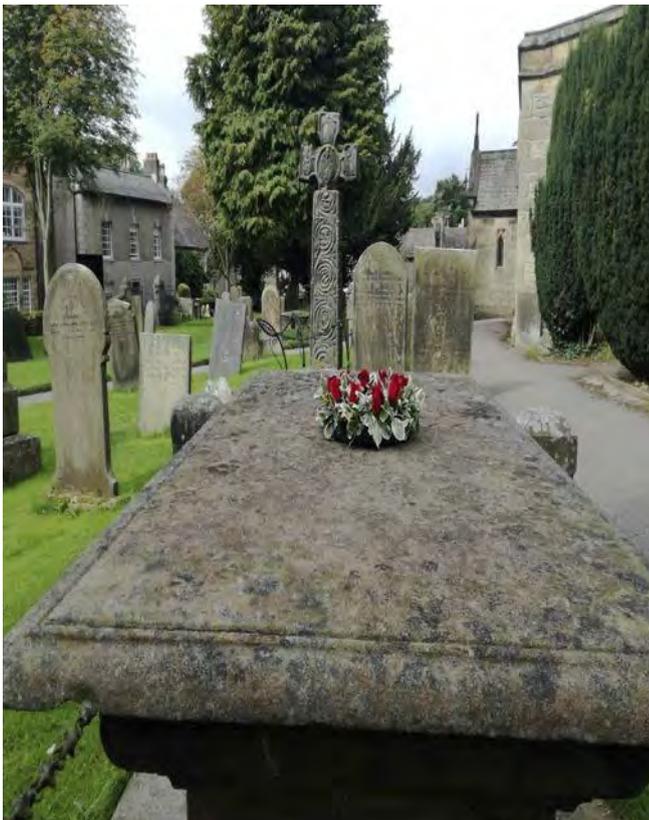
### Eyam – The plague village

At this moment in our lives why would anyone choose to visit somewhere that could stir up fears about infection on a pandemic scale, illness and the possibility of death?

It is not an easy question to answer. Perhaps having read this you will find your own answer. I hope so. My intention in writing is not to produce an historical account of the place I visited whilst on holiday, or a homily on “this is how we should behave today”. Instead I hope that it will give the reader a sense of my experience of a place and its people who lived with and through profound depths of human suffering, and yet demonstrated both courage and the sustaining strength of mutual dependence. And I hope it will be a tribute to the community which continues to witness to their history with respect and pride.

Eyam (pronounced “eem”) village has rightly been called “a place with hidden depths”. Located within the Peak District National Park the village is also known by many as “the Plague village”. We decided to visit there whilst spending a few days exploring and walking in that area of the National Park.

In 1665 the Bubonic Plague or Black Death was rampant in London. In September of that year a bale of cloth was delivered from London to Eyam for use by the tailor. It was damp, so the tailor’s assistant dried it by the fire, releasing the fleas – the carriers of the disease. By December, 42 people had died and by the following spring many villagers were on the point of fleeing their homes to escape the infection, an understandable response to mortal danger. But by their persuasive example and their pledge to stay and support the villagers in every way they could, the young priest, Rev. William Mompesson, his wife Catherine and the previous and highly respected priest Thomas Stanley, convinced the villagers to self-quarantine and so stop the infection spreading beyond the village boundaries.



The toll this took on the Eyam community was enormous. In many families there were multiple deaths. Bodies had to be buried quickly, close to home and by a close family member. The infection was at its peak in August 1666. It was in this month that Elizabeth Hancock buried six of her children and her husband in Riley’s field, close to their home. They had all died within 8 days of one another. Their burial site is identified and protected by the National Trust. That month Catherine Mompesson also died, aged 27. Her tomb in Eyam parish church is regularly graced with fresh flowers.

Three months later, in November, the last death was recorded. By then 76 families had suffered the loss of a loved one, and the total number of deaths from the infection was 260. The highest estimated population before the outbreak was 800.

How did they manage their need for food and other supplies? Who or what supported them?

On the request of Rev. Mompesson, outlying villagers and the residents of Chatsworth House delivered food and other essential supplies to a well or natural spring some distance away from Eyam. Here any coins given in payment by Eyam folk were soaked in vinegar and could then be washed before being taken by their benefactors.



Belief in eternal life was very strongly held. There is ample evidence that the two priests and Catherine Mompesson gave the villagers immense support, in practical ways as well as emotionally and spiritually. The Rev. Thomas Stanley was held in great respect by the villagers despite – or maybe because of – his refusal to sign the 1662 Act of Uniformity that required priests to use the Book of Common Prayer in all services. Eyam residents had supported Rev. Stanley's view and the Puritan Government of Cromwell, so they were disappointed when Stanley was removed from Office and replaced by Rev. Mompesson. Rev. Stanley's willingness to respond so generously to Rev. Mompesson's request for help and return to the village made an incalculable contribution to the capacity of the population to endure the consequences of their self-quarantine.



Regular gatherings for worship took place in the open air. A good distance away from the village centre, Rev. Mompesson had found a rocky formation in a field that offered some natural shelter where he and his congregation could gather. Called Cucklett Delf, it is situated in land which the village has more recently designated as a conservation area. It is a place of great beauty and natural serenity.

Our visit to Eyam left me with many mixed emotions. Sadness; wonder at the courage and tenacity of the people who lived and also died there; gratitude for the example of enduring hope, faith and love; and joy at witnessing the liveliness of spirit and creativity still evident there. On one of the days we were visiting, we chanced upon the "non-Carnival" village celebrations to mark the end of well-dressing week. Many people were in fancy dress even though floats were not permitted owing to the risk of infection, and there was an air of celebration, good humour and fun. The usual well-dressing was also not permitted, again because of the risk of proximity

with others. Instead, beautiful individual pictures in wooden frames had been made by children and adults in the traditional well-dressing way by pressing petals, mosses, berries and other natural materials into wet clay. These were prominently and proudly displayed in the village centre.



In the words of one resident, "You can't just turn your back on what people did". Eyam folk honour their history in a simple, dignified and rather understated way. Their village school has the words "Ring-a-ring of roses, a pocket full of posies" wrought into the pattern of the metal gates. Certain homes are identified as "plague cottages" with small notices in their gardens telling of the number of deaths suffered by the family that used to live there. They are welcoming to visitors and of course, by a strange irony, now even benefit from the suffering of their predecessors.

*Lynn Baker*

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Geraldine Brooks has written an historical novel entitled *Year of Wonders*. Published in 2001, it is a fictionalised account of Eyam village during the year of the Plague. It is the author's debut novel and was judged to be a Notable Book by both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.)

## SEASONAL THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITORS

As we end this issue of the Newsletter, circumstances surrounding the on-going existence of COVID-19 preclude us from being able to give information of forthcoming events. One thing is certain: the Christmas season will soon be here, and the editorial team wish you well through this period.

November being the month of Remembrance for those who have fallen during wars and conflict, we shall leave you with this photograph (by courtesy of Kevin Poile) showing one aspect of the memorial entitled "Standing with Giants", displayed this year at Blenheim Palace. Featuring 200 life-sized soldier silhouettes and 75 poppy wreaths, this dramatic and moving installation is made from recycled building materials. It is the creation of Witney artist Dan Barton, who hopes to raise £30,000 for the British Legion from donations by the public. His website link is: [www.standingwithgiants.co.uk](http://www.standingwithgiants.co.uk)



**EDITORIAL POLICY** We welcome your contributions (up to a maximum of 500 words) to the newsletter but we reserve the right to edit them. We should also point out that the views expressed in *The Friends Quarterly* are not necessarily those of the editorial team, the incumbent, or the PCC of St Mary's Church.

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