

Report to Walberswick Village Meeting 14th September 2021

The Parish Church of St Andrew, Walberswick

Worship

Restrictions associated with people's safety and health following the outbreak of Coronavirus have impacted upon the life of the church during the past 18 months.

When Coronavirus first began to spread in the early summer of 2020 there were several religious gatherings of various faiths and traditions around the country that involved large crowds. At these gatherings coronavirus spread rapidly and was then carried back to people's home communities. The government decided that it was necessary to prohibit religious gatherings during the national lockdown in the Summer of 2020. Some commentators have criticised the Archbishop of Canterbury for ordering churches to close. He did not. The Church of England was obliged to follow national government advice and regulations, and it was important to behave responsibly.

Therefore, in May, June and July 2020 and January, February and March 2021, Sunday services in the Sole Bay Team were conducted via Zoom. These were successful and popular, and members of the church family in Walberswick all joined in.

In the periods of time outside lockdown, restrictions associated with Coronavirus still impacted on church life. We were not permitted to sing in church. We had to maintain 2 metre social distancing. This limited attendance in church to a maximum of 40 people. We had to use hand sanitiser on entry and exit. We had to comply with track and trace. Sharing the chalice in holy Communion was not permitted. By Christmas 2020 it was permitted to have a small choir, and we were very grateful to Julia Joseph and our choir members who sang for two carol services in St Andrew's on two different nights in order that the maximum number of people could attend.

Cleaning regulations said that we had to clean the whole church twice every day if the church was left open to visitors, or it had to be closed for at least 72 hours between uses in order to allow contaminated surfaces to become safe. We do not have the people available to clean the whole church twice every day. Consequently, for much of the past year the building has been open on Wednesdays and Sundays only.

Ensuring our compliance with all these rules and regulations has not been easy, and we are very grateful to Joanna Saunders who has given her time to complete risk assessments, undertake cleaning and advise us on what we could and could not do.

On a more positive note, during the second period of lockdown in early 2021 we held Sunday services via Zoom but continued with Wednesday morning services in church. These services were valued by the congregation who attended, both as an opportunity for quiet reflection and prayer, and also as an opportunity to leave the house and see some other people.

Weddings and Funerals

For those wishing to marry, and for those who have been bereaved, the past 18 months have been very difficult. There were specific limitations placed upon weddings and funerals that applied to every venue, not just to churches. These at various stages limited attendance to 15 people or 30 people. All the churches in the Sole Bay Team have tried to support as best we can those who have had to postpone or rearrange weddings, sometimes several times, and those who have not been

able to say goodbye to loved ones in the way that they would have wished. Happily these restrictions have now been lifted, and we look forward to a wedding on 18th September.

Building Works

Between October 2020 and June 2021 restoration works were undertaken on the church porch. This work included stone work and roof repairs, relaying the floor and providing level access into the church, replastering and redecorating the inside of the porch. The main reason for the works was rainwater soaking in from above, and drains that were no longer up to the job. Large soakaways have been installed underground to improve drainage and to prevent damp. The total cost of the works was £57k, mostly met from the PCC's own resources, but we were very grateful to the Walberswick Common Lands Charity for a grant of £10k to help us with the work. Repairs to medieval fabric is specialised work and our repairs were undertaken by Hoggs of Bury St Edmunds who specialise in this kind of skilled work. When first built the porch ceiling would have been painted blue and covered with gold stars. Our Architect looked for any surviving evidence but sadly our Puritan forebears did too good a job at removal.

Finance

It will come as no surprise that months of lockdown, the suspension of public worship, closing the church to visitors, the absence of weddings, baptisms and funerals, plus the cost of repairing the porch, have put severe pressure on our finances. We are grateful to all those who do support the church so generously. Thank you to you all. The Village fete also supports St Andrew's and the income we receive helps the PCC to make ends meet. Two summers without a fete have also left a hole in the balance sheet, reminding us of the generosity, kindness and support that we receive from everyone when the fete is held, hopefully in 2022.

Looking Ahead

Sunday worship is now back to normal. We held a very enjoyable Songs of Praise followed by tea and cake on 8th August. This was to celebrate the return of singing. In August we have welcomed many visitors, both to worship and to explore. The church was used for two nights for Jazz in the ruins. We will celebrate harvest festival at our service on 24th October at 11.00.

Revd Canon Simon Pitcher