

# Great Brickhill Annual Parish Meeting, Tuesday 7th May 2024

## Parochial Church Council Report

It has been another busy year in the life of the church. The Annual Church Meeting was held in the church on Tuesday 9th April. Julia Turner was re-elected as Church Warden. Joy Wilson stepped down from the PCC having served for many years. All other PCC members are serving another year.

The Accounts for the year were adopted and reports were presented on the services/events/activities held throughout the year. Due to the success of the two main fund-raising events, the Snowdrop Walks and the Plant Fayre, which had been badly affected by either Covid or bad weather in recent years, the accounts for 2023 showed a much healthier position at the end of the year. It was still not possible to pay the full Parish Share to the Oxford Diocese. As an end of year deficit was projected, £14K was paid towards the allocation of the £21,433 Parish Share to the Diocese (only £8K was paid in 2022).

The Rector is currently on sabbatical leave, from 13th April to 1st July. All clergy are due a three-month sabbatical every ten years. The Rector's last sabbatical was in 2010 – his intended sabbatical in 2020 was cancelled due to Covid. Arrangements have been made to cover the Rector's absence and services are continuing as normal.

Last Sunday we were pleased to welcome the Archdeacon of Buckingham, the Venerable Guy Elsmore to lead our service.

We were sad to hear the news in April that the Bishop of Buckingham suffered a serious heart attack and, very sadly, died. The recruitment process for a new Bishop has started but the new Bishop will not be in post until early next year.

### **SERVICES:**

There has been no change to the weekly pattern of services. During the year we have had one wedding, one service of Blessing for a child, eight funerals and two Thanksgiving Services. We were very sad to hear of the loss of three regular members of our congregation, Lady Rachel Duncombe, Janet Blake and Sheila McLoughlin.

A number of special services were held. In addition to our annual services such as Remembrance Sunday, Nine Lessons and Carols, all of which were well attended, the highlights were:

- On Sunday 7th May, a special Benefice Holy Communion service was held at Great Brickhill, which incorporated thanksgiving for the Coronation of King Charles III, including special readings, prayers and hymns from the Coronation Service the day before at Westminster Abbey.

- An outdoor service was held in the churchyard on Sunday, 30th July. We welcomed people from across the Benefice and even as far away as Australia! We were also joined by four four-legged friends. The Treasure Hunt gave a great opportunity to have a good look around the whole of the inside and outside of our wonderful church.

- With thanks to the Turner family, the Harvest Festival was held at Rectory Farm. We were joined in the next door barn by some geese and some splendid cattle. After a lovely service with both traditional and new Harvest songs, a Bring & Share lunch was enjoyed in the autumn sunshine. Contributions were received for the local Food Banks.

- The Village Nativity on Sunday, 17th December. The Cricket Club kindly hosted this event again. We were lucky with the weather, just a bit of wind to contend with. It was as usual a great start to our Christmas celebrations.

- Palm Sunday Procession. The procession started from the bus shelter near the Old Red Lion. After a reading and a song, we then followed the bagpipes and the "donkey" to the church where there was a dramatized reading of the Easter story.

### **High Ash Services:**

Services are held in the church four times a year, for Harvest, Christmas, Easter and end of year Leavers service. Normally the school would come on two afternoons for their services (Foundation plus Key Stage 1 pupils, and Key Stage 2 pupils). But, to minimise delay to work on the roof, for Easter we welcomed the whole of High Ash School for a joint service. It was quite a squeeze to get all the pupils seated and unfortunately, there was no room for any parents.

In addition, pupils from years 1&2 came to visit the church on 31st January. They had a tour of the church, looking at the special places, did some sketching outside and had an interesting Q&A session. Some of the children joined us for the next Family Service to tell us about their visit.

### **MUSIC & BELLS:**

Jerry Breslin continues to lead the choir and the weekly Benefice Choir practices, which are held on Monday evenings at Great Brickhill. On Saturday 16th September the choir gave a concert in St Mary Magdelene (Willen) Church as one of the concerts in their Heritage Week.

David Middleton continues in the role of Tower Captain and organizes ringers for weddings and funerals as required. Bell ringing practice takes place on a Wednesday evening and the bells are rung before most services. David arranged for a quarter peel of the bells to be rung on the afternoon of the Coronation, and also on other occasions. We receive a number of requests for visiting bell ringing teams to come and ring our bells. David is always happy to hear from anyone who would like to join the Great Brickhill bell ringers.

### **EVENTS IN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS:**

The major events were:-

#### **Christmas:**

The Christmas Coffee Morning held in the church on 25th November raised £1,030. Carol singing round the village took place and the weather was good on both evenings. The total collected was £693. The Advent Windows lit up the village again from 1st to 31st December.

#### **The February Snowdrop Walks:**

We had a fantastic two weeks for the Snowdrop Walks with good weather on both days. Lots of visitors on the first weekend and even more on the second. We don't know how many cakes arrived, but it was an awful lot! The second day raised £1701, which is a record for any one day. Added to the previous week, plus donations, the total for the two weeks was £3033. (Last year's record amount was £3000, which in itself was £1200 more than ever before for the Snowdrop Walks). Thanks go to Sir David and Sally Duncombe for allowing us access to their wonderful grounds.

#### **Plant Fayre, Sunday 14th April:**

After the very wet period earlier in the month, we were lucky with the weather and the turnout supported that with 438 adults, plus children, recorded as visitors. The

magnificent sum of £3,168 was raised for church funds. The legacy of Andrew Smith's parents, Ian and Lavina Smith, lives on - their vision in starting this annual event continues, and becomes even more successful.

With all our fund raising events, although the primary purpose is to raise funds, it is always our aim to hold an enjoyable event, an opportunity for catching up with friends – and we certainly achieved that in the last twelve months.

### **COMMUNICATIONS:**

A major revamp of the Benefice website took place in October. The website providers completely rewrote all of the public facing part of the website, i.e. the Home page, allowing better access via mobile phones. The content of the sections remained unchanged, only the Home page was affected.

A weekly e-mail is sent out to those on the database and the website is continually updated to provide all the up-to-date information regarding services and activities. Items are also circulated on the village WhatsApp Group. A Pew Sheet is produced for all services and a report is sent each month to the online Parish Newsletter.

Parish Newsletter: A printed copy of a scaled down version of the online monthly Parish Newsletter, which includes just the news items, is available in the church porch and a copy is delivered each month to those known to be in the village who are not able to receive the Newsletter any other way.

### **WORK ON THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH:**

In November we were delighted to have a new notice board at the church gates. Marcus Feinhols of Fine Home Properties kindly sponsored the board and we are very grateful for his support. The new notice board houses all the main notices and the old notice board displays the large service boards, easily visible from a distance.

Two very successful workdays were held, an industrious morning on 12th August and 2nd September, followed by a relaxed lunch for those who could stay. A lot of jobs were achieved, both inside and outside

Andrew Smith carried out a thermal survey of the church. Many of the recommendations in the survey have been carried out to make the church more energy efficient. More work is planned for later this year. In the last ten days we have been awarded a Net Zero Carbon Preparation grant to carry out a feasibility study to look into replacing the old gas boiler, which will soon need replacing anyway, with a heat pump.

### **RE-ROOFING WORK:**

The work started on 12th February. We have been successful with grant applications, from 7 different funds. The project was also put forward successfully for the National Churches Trust "Last Chance Churches" appeal. This meant we have enough funds to carry out the repairs on the roof and the ceiling panels. The total cost of the work is not yet known as additional work has been required at several stages, but we hope to also have sufficient funds to re-paint the badly damaged walls. The outside roof work is all but complete and scaffolding is up in both aisles for the internal work. Due to the damp on the north side, any painting there will have to wait until later in the summer.

There has been a lot of disruption and dust etc over the last few months but, although the church has had to remain largely locked, services and choir / bell ringing practices have continued.

We are extremely pleased that we do not have to put out buckets each time it rains and we look forward to when the contractors have finished and we can return the church to its normal state.

***Phillipa Cook***  
***(Great Brickhill PCC Secretary)***