

St Peter & St Paul's Church, Aylesford
Other Group Reports APCM 2020

Bellringers and Steeple Keeper's Report

The start of the COVID 19 lockdown in March 2020 have had a profound effect on bellringing and steeple keeping at the church.

There have been no weekly practice sessions on a Tuesday evening since the lockdown began. The lifting of some of the COVID restrictions meant we were able to ring for Sunday services again in August 2020, albeit with reduced numbers of ringers in order to maintain social distancing. Typically, we could only ring 3 or 4 bells. We also rang for three weddings and three funerals, again with reduced numbers. However, the third lockdown in December meant that service ringing had to cease again. Nevertheless, I did toll for service on Christmas Day and on 27th December before services became Zoom only.

The first lockdown meant the church was shut for all purposes so it was not possible to keep the clock wound. As a consequence, it stopped and was silent from March 2020 till July. The clock was restarted on 24 July. We had an issue with the clock in February 2021 in that it stopped on 2 or 3 occasions despite being wound up. We had the clock serviced by Keith Davis on 3 March and it has performed satisfactorily since then.

Terry Barnard

Brassey Centre Management Committee

Owing to the Government calling for a country wide lockdown starting middle of March 2020 caused by the Worldwide Covid19 pandemic no lettings/hiring of the Brassey Centre rooms (Thorndyke Room and the Saturday Bazaar Room) have been possible. Re-opening of these rooms is most likely to be 21st June 2021 but will depend on the government plans/conditions for release dates from lockdown being met.

As a result of the Covid19 pandemic and restrictions imposed by the Government, takings have been minimal for the 2020 financial year, which caused serious concerns in respect of the Church funds.

The Brassey Trust very generously decided not to charge the Church the £5000.00 rental fee for the Brassey Centre which includes the church Office, for the 2020 financial year. This arrangement will continue into the 2021 financial year but will be reviewed quarterly as the country comes out of lockdown and normality returns.

The Brassey Centre was set up at the beginning of the lockdown with all the cleansing procedures and notices with strict instructions for hirers assuming we would open up in a phased approach to be stated by the government. If the government releases everyone on the 21st June 2021 it may well be that there will be guidelines for allowing community halls to open up again. With the 21st June 2021 in mind we probably need to start thinking about what needs to be addressed within the Centre so we are well positioned for opening.

On a more positive note, as the Saturday Bazaar room has not been able to operate, in December 2020 it was decided to make use of the room as a "Food Bank" to help families and people who have been struggling during the Covid19 pandemic. For further information on this see report from the Food Bank Team.

In August 2020 the Brassey Trust had a serious roofing issue above the kitchen and corridor between the main hall and the kitchen. The end result was that a whole section of the roof in that area had to be stripped with some rafters being replace, new felt, new battens, new tiles and lead work together with a new section of the ceiling in the corridor. The Brassey Trust is still looking at how best to make use of the sheds at the rear Centre as storage areas for potential

hirers and the church. A Surveyor/ Architect has been asked to look at options that might be available.

The Brassey Trust together with the Brassey Centre Management Committee are reviewing the best method of locking / Opening the Centre while ensuring it is secure.

The committee is aware that the monies brought in by letting Thorndyke Room etc. are not sufficient to cover the cost of renting the centre from the Brassey Trust. We endeavour to encourage new hirers but feel we should not increase our fees at present, as stated in previous reports. We must be able to compete with other halls in the area. However, hire of the Centre does provide us with a Church Office and venue for Church functions for which no fees are charged.

Bob Halliday

Choir Report

Within a very few weeks of writing last year's Choir report for the APCM, everything which we had taken for granted for so long changed suddenly, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In consequence, there is little to report this year, and with singing in public worship banned for most of the year, it is difficult to present anything which does not appear totally negative.

After the usual post-Christmas quiet start to the year, we had started our rehearsals for the Good Friday performance of Fauré's "Requiem" in late January, little realising that the rehearsal of 5th March would be the last one of the year – by the end of March, we were all in lockdown.

The real highlight of the year though, was on 29th February, when three Junior Choirs put on a Festival of music in Aylesford church – our own Junior Choir ably led by Paul Richards, combined with those of Mereworth and West Malling. This was a really positive and well-supported afternoon, with clear plans to make it a regular event across the three churches.

All the plans for the remainder of 2020, including those for Good Friday (as well as scheduled organ recitals) were cancelled.

For several years, I have reported difficulties in recruiting into the choir; at the start of the year, we were in a difficult position, relying heavily on a number of auxiliary members to join us for major works, and even the number of auxiliaries was shrinking at an alarming rate. The pandemic has dealt a further major blow, with the loss of one chorister and the gradual drifting away of a few others without the weekly routine of practice, services, and social interaction – Zoom has been a lifeline for the church generally, but many of the choir either do not have access to it, or feel uncomfortable using it.

We are continuing to explore ways of securing funding for the Junior Choir when the Ouseley Trust money runs out (which was mid-2021, but will now be at least a year later), in the hope that this can be revived at the point at which we are allowed to meet again and sing.

The prospects for the adult choir reflect a situation common in so many churches across the land: Without any knowledge of either when we are allowed to sing, or who will still want to at that point, the future role of the choir is uncertain.

Michael J Keays - (Organist & Choirmaster)

Church Flowers

Well what a year! We had a few donations towards Easter flowers, but, obviously didn't use them. We did do some small Pedastals at the chancel steps during the time that we were open for services. We did a much smaller harvest festival and that was it. Let's hope that this year will be better. Thanks to all the volunteers that came in and helped.

Ann Game

Aylesford Handbell Ringers

Despite the problems of the Coronavirus restrictions, now extending until at least May 2021, Aylesford Handbell have managed to keep together and even managed a socially distanced outdoor practice.

Our last performance was at Charton Manor Residential Home near Farningham; our friends there received us once again with their customary warmth plus tea and cakes.

Shortly after, we had to replace our normal Monday practice in person by meeting on Zoom most Mondays This was for the sake of fellowship, with various games and quizzes and a lot of chat. Sadly, not everyone can join via Zoom but we have tried to keep in touch with them by phone.

We ordered a set of handchimes from the manufacturer in the USA and received them in August. At £912 they are less expensive than handbells, and probably easier to ring. They produce a more tranquil tone than our handbells and will add some extra variety to our performances.

Thanks to Ann Butterworth's initiative, we were able to gather at the bandstand in the RBLV Memorial Garden one sunny Saturday in August for our only practice during the lockdown. We were protected by a stringent risk assessment and hand sanitiser. Further and very enjoyable protection was provided by some elderflower and prosecco jelly from Aline. We took the opportunity to play our new handchimes for the first time. We look forward to getting to know them better in practice and performance.

At the time of writing, we are daring to think about resuming practicing. Will it be like riding a bike? Will we get back in the saddle with no problem? We play for our own pleasure but hope we will be able to get back to performances in church and elsewhere. We also would like to strengthen the band with some new members. Previous musical experience is not necessary, just an ability to count and enjoy each other's company. Please contact me if you are interested.

Gordon Hunt

Messy church

Due to the pandemic, Messy church hasn't been able to meet face to face.

We decided we would try having Messy Church by Zoom. We decided to do this every fortnight.

We had a few families join and some new families joined us that don't live locally which was lovely.

To start with we had 8-10 children, we sent the craft around via email and dropping items off to the families. This seemed to work to start with, but we stopped running Messy Church via zoom as we only had 1 child at the last meeting.

Hopefully, when we are able to meet face to face, we can re-start again. We are still in contact with all the families, between all the volunteers.

Jane Roberts

Pastoral report

The team of people are continuing to contact people by phone. This was commenced March last year to keep in touch mostly with those in our congregation who do not have internet connection.

Several of us also keep in contact with people who very occasionally attended our church.

I know lots of you keep in touch by phone, Whats App groups as well as zoom, Facebook and other ways.

Perhaps we are only now realising the importance of this as we reach this anniversary we none of us expected or thought likely.

I believe many of us have struggled with uncertainty, have felt alone, in fear and even unexpectedly tearful. Some have used this time to learn new skills. Do tell us about these. I know one of you is learning to play the drums!!! Several have been busy sewing face coverings and PPE gowns.

Several of our church friends have been ill with covid 19 virus and recovered. Others have died, not necessarily of covid, and we miss them all. I am sure when we can gather again we will remember them and celebrate their lives.

Those of us who have joined in zoom church services have been inspired by the services of the Word and sermons from both Ruth and Peter. If there is one lesson for us, I believe, it is to show love and care to all whom we meet. We all need our church community to thrive post pandemic. We can share our stories of this difficult time and encourage those of us still anxious and timid when faced with joining crowds again.

Restrictions on visiting people in their homes has curtailed offering Communion regularly, though in agreement with our vicar and special circumstances this has been possible but with many Covid 19 safety measures. I have not been to the sheltered homes or Care homes with services as the residents have not been allowed to gather and visiting restricted. . I sent Anna Chaplaincy booklets into Appleton Lodge and Gavin Astor care homes to help staff with general prayers, end of life prayer and how to take care of themselves. Our vicar sent large boxes of biscuits to each care home and the sheltered homes.

Neither the vicar nor I have held services in the Heart of Kent Hospice for the same reasons.

Janet Holdstock