

St. Mary's, Easton Churchwardens Report 2023/24

This past year has not been an easy one. The appointment of new architects and gaining momentum for our repairs was at times a struggle. The discovery of wall paintings under the paint lifted by previous chancel roof repairs meant that our application to the Diocese for permission to carry out repairs had to be resubmitted and came too late to start work on the external roof repairs in 2023, as was our ambition. Things have gone more smoothly since and we have now obtained diocesan permission to commence works as soon as the weather is right and we have selected our contractor.

Our ability to hold Valley Worship services at Easton has been curtailed recently by the onset of winter combined with there being no public facilities in Easton safely accessible from the Church. This has led to the service being moved to Martyr Worthy by the PCC during the recent winter months and points to the need for a space separate from but adjacent to the Church for managing younger children. Somewhere they can enjoy and share experiences at The Ark whilst their parents enjoy some spiritual space.

Fund raising continued in the year to address the repairs to the church roof and, if possible, a sprucing up of the interior together with progressing the development project. The year started well with an informative and entertaining talk given by James Ekin in St Mary's based on his experience of the SUEZ Crisis of 1956. This was complimented by a solo performance in September by Michael Lunts of his 'Coward at Sea' one man show which pulled in a good audience and was the largest contributing event in 2023 for the Easton Church Fabric Fund. Additional funds were received from the bell ringers, Safari Supper and Christmas Carols Party events as well as from donations totaling in all £12,275 for the year. All in all a magnificent effort which should allow us to go ahead and weatherproof the existing church building commencing in June 2024.

The development project pre-planning application consultations started with representatives of SDNP and Historic England. The proposals were received positively in most respects but the solution suggested to provide disabled parking and access was highlighted as problematic and needing further work. Following feedback from the community consultation in 2022 we know this to be of high importance and are developing an alternative proposal as a priority.

The re-introduction of regular communion services on the first Sunday in the month at St Mary's has been increasingly supported by Easton residents and has combined with other traditional family services through the year to lure more of our local residents into attending. Zoom was wonderful to maintain contact during the Pandemic but is no substitute for the shared spiritual experience and human contact of going to church with friends and neighbours. Particular thanks is due to all who helped stage the crib service in December which managed to combine theatre, music traditional and modern, and 38 sheep into the telling of the Christmas story for the congregation of over 300 people who started their Christmas with us.

As always we thank all those who contribute to running the church and its facilities for the benefit of people in Easton, the Parish and the wider community. Whether they pop from the road to have a look, pause and draw breath and appreciate the historic atmosphere and the beautiful setting of the church and its surroundings. The DCC members, the Flower arranging team, the Bell Ringers (who have increased), the opening/closing team and the church yard maintenance volunteers. All are unsung, often not seen but nevertheless vital to keeping the building and its environs presentable and used through the year.

Mary has been key to the success of communion services through the year, but is sadly unable to continue as a Church Warden for another year for reasons beyond her control. We thank her for her contributions great and small and we all wish her and David well for the future.

Chris Ellis
Mary Purser
Church Wardens
20th February 2024