

Smythe Hall Management Committee Annual Report 2020

Due to the outbreak of Covid19, this year has been a very exceptional one. There has only been one meeting of the Smythe Hall Management Committee and one of The Fund Raising Group during 2020 due to The Government restrictions.

The hall has been closed for the two national lockdown periods. However, from July to November, 2020, it was possible to permit some table tennis coaching to continue in line with Government and Table Tennis England guidance. We have not been able to fulfil the very interesting planned programme of social and fund raising events for the village community due to Government restrictions.

Two members of the management committee have given a lot of time to planning for closures and re-opening. They compiled a checklist to ensure the safe use of the hall based on ACRE's guidelines (Action with Communities in Rural England). This involved measurement of the hall to work out maximum numbers in order to comply with social distancing as well as devising cleaning and sanitising routines. These required procedures are made clear to hirers so that they are fully aware of their responsibilities. The Risk assessment has been revised to meet all legal requirements for re-opening.

In line with the Smythe Hall insurance policy requirements, one member of the committee has conducted a weekly check of the hall to ensure that all windows and doors are secure and that pipes and water heaters are not leaking. A checklist is maintained. The cleaner has been working, although with reduced hours, during the closures so that the hall is kept in a satisfactory state of cleanliness. Minor electrical repairs and checks have been completed in the hall to ensure that legal requirements continue to be met. The Management Committee has thus ensured that we are ready to re-open the hall when it is legally possible to do so.

The table tennis club is still the main source of letting income. This year, a total of £2845.40 has been raised. The total cost of maintaining and refurbishing the hall has been £2692.72. The most significant maintenance costs are hall insurance £1084.34; electricity charges £789.97; Essex & Suffolk Water rates £126.08; minor repairs to lights and sink £26.40; cleaning and sanitising equipment £533.15.

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The above report relates to the calendar year 2020. Subsequently, on January 11, 2021 following the lockdown in December 2020, we wrote to the Local District Council requesting financial support during the period of closure. When this request was unsuccessful, we sought the advice of our Member of Parliament who has provided advice to us and also contacted The District Council on our behalf. The income from lettings will be greatly reduced in 2021 and it is still very uncertain how soon the hall will be re-opened for indoor social events, which also raise money. We therefore have applied to the Local District Council for a Local Restrictions Grant which was recommended by ACRE. This grant is discretionary and our application is still on-going.

Provided by Pat Stratton, Secretary of The Smythe Hall Management Committee

**Report for the Stow Maries 2021 Annual Parish Meeting
from the
Parochial Church Council of St Mary and St Margaret, Stow Maries.**

Aims and purpose.

Stow Maries Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the Diocese of Chelmsford, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. **The PCC is also responsible for the maintenance of the church and churchyard at St Mary and St Margaret, Church Lane, Stow Maries.**

Objectives and activities.

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at the Parish Church and to become part of our parish community in Stow Maries. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and makes suggestions on how our services can involve the people of the parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer, scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, we try to enable people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer;
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.

To facilitate this work it is important that we maintain the fabric of the church.

Worship and prayer

Unfortunately, the church was not open for a large part of 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so many of the usual services were held live online with attendees located across the parishes. There are 11 names on the Stow Maries Electoral Roll.

There were no weddings, funerals or baptisms in the Church and just one occasion of private prayer. This was due to the impact of the pandemic.

Incumbent

The church is without an incumbent since the death of Sandra Manley 2 years ago. This position is still waiting to be filled. The Reverend Peter Begley is currently standing in as the vice chairman of the PCC and John Dutfield has held the position of PCC chairman until recently.

Covid-19 Pandemic

From March 2020, the UK was put into lockdown due to the fast spread of coronavirus. This left the church unable to undertake any of its usual physical activities as the public were unable to leave their homes. Services in St Mary and St Margaret's were cancelled, and the church closed its doors to visitors. Services were later given via online methods so that parishioners could still pray with others. We would like to thank everyone involved for successfully delivering these services at what has been a very challenging time for all.

The Church

Due to the closure of the church, we have not been able to keep the doors open for those who wish to visit for private prayer. When open, historic details of the church, its churchyard, and links with Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome are available for the benefit of visitors which include local history societies and other interested groups. The historic display board details have been reviewed and updated with photographs.

During 2020, the lead on the roof was stolen which hit the community and the PCC very hard. To add to this problem, we discovered that the insurer was not able to cover the total costs of repair due to a clause in the policy that required a roof alarm system, which we have not got.

Temporary covering was placed on the roof to withhold rain and the elements from entering the internal part of the church, but this was soon found to be insufficient. Rain regularly flooded the church, causing much anxiety for the local church community. The internal parts of the church have now sustained water damage. The organ is currently being protected by a cover and the artifacts on the walls taken down as a precaution.

There has been a small amount of damage sustained to one of the leaded windows which will be included in the insurance claim.

We are now at a stage where we have been able to agree on a temporary fix which will last at least 20 years. We are confident that the insurance money and other donated funds will be enough to cover these repairs. We are currently waiting for a suitable architect to be appointed but this will almost certainly entail an additional cost to the PCC.

We would like to thank all of those who have helped us to get to this point, in what has been a very upsetting situation. Thank you in particular to the Arch Deacon, Elizabeth Snowden, Area Dean Reverend Peter Begley and those in the village, and others outside the village, who have given their support.

The Churchyard is maintained by the probation service, and the costs of fuel continue to be covered by a grant from the Parish Council which is very much appreciated by the PCC. These works were very sporadic during 2020 due to the social distancing requirements of the pandemic but we have had visits when possible.

Fundraising

The PCC is grateful to everyone who has donated money in this very challenging year. The impact of the lockdown made it very difficult to hold any public events, including services at the Church, so any money donated was appreciated very much.

We would also like to say a special thank you as we benefitted from the sale of Beryl Board's book on the history of the village. The book was published this year and the proceeds of sale were donated to the church, which was Beryl's wishes. Thank you to Reverend Selwyn Tillet, a former Rector at Stow Maries, and Sandy Cowan who were involved in the book's publication and distribution.

Pastoral Care

Some members of our parish are unable to attend church due to sickness or age. PCC members visit other parishioners when appropriate.

Mission and evangelism

Helping those in need is a demonstration of our faith. The PCC approved donations to local charities such as Farleigh Hospice (Harvest Festival produce) and Crisis at Christmas (carol service collection). The village website and Facebook page are being used to advertise church services and fundraising activities and helps keep parishioners informed of the important matters in the village.

Relationships with other churches

Stow Maries parish is in a benefice with the adjoining parish of St. Stephen, Cold Norton which is in plurality with the benefice of Althorne and North Fambridge. Both benefices are in the deanery of Maldon and Dengie in the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Financial Review

The financial statements for 2020 were prepared under the current Church Accounting Regulations; in accordance with the Charities Act and Charities (Accounts and Reporting) Regulations; and applicable accounting standards. The accruals basis is used to make financial years comparable.

Total receipts on unrestricted funds were £3483.92 including £2665 un-restricted planned gift aid donations. Restricted Funds donations and grants of £2333.58 were also received and a donation from the Village Fundraising Group of £1917.96. £2400 was spent from unrestricted funds as a contribution to the diocesan parish share which largely provides stipends and housing for clergy.

The PCC was unable to pay the requested 2020 Parish Share in full due to increasing costs. Unpaid Parish Share is not classed as a debt owing by the PCC to the Diocese but the PCC is aware that the annual increase in the Parish Share requested by the Diocese is greater than the increase in donations received from the congregation and parishioners.

The risk to the future financial stability of the parish is understood and PCC members do what they can to encourage voluntary donations from visitors and the very small village population. Excluding the underpayment on Parish Share, unrestricted funds had a net surplus of £58 for the year.

Reserves Policy

The PCC has struggled for many years to meet all the commitments from unrestricted funds out of which all routine running costs are paid. At present the policy is to keep a positive balance on the fund; at 31st December 2020 the balance was £8212.80 cash at bank.

The Fabric Fund is a restricted fund and is used for repairs and maintenance of the church building. It receives funds from the village fund-raising group as well as grants from charitable bodies and donations from parishioners in response to appeals.

The Churchyard Fund is a small fund which helps to pay for grass cutting and grounds maintenance. It receives a small grant from the Parish Council each year. The policy on this fund is to ensure the balance does not fall below zero.

The Smythe Memorial Fund is a small fund which helps to pay for maintenance of the family grave and memorial church window. The policy on this fund is to ensure the balance does not fall below zero.

Volunteers and helpers

The PCC would like to thank all the volunteers and helpers who work so hard to keep our church open. In particular we want to mention:

- The Fund-raising Group for the hard work arranging events
- The Community Payback Scheme for all the work maintaining the churchyard and the PCC member who co-ordinates it.
- The Brown family for allowing their field to be used for the boot sale organised by the Fund-raising Group
- All those who gave raffle prizes for the various fund raising events
- The organiser and volunteers who helped with the collection of 100 CLUB subscriptions.
- The residents who opened and locked up the church every day (when the church could be open)
- The residents who have cleaned the church and arranged flowers.

Structure, governance and management

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. **All those eligible who live in the parish are encouraged to register on the electoral roll and stand for election to the PCC.**

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. New members may receive initial training into the workings of the PCC. **No PCC member or volunteer receives remuneration or benefits for the work they do.** The PCC met four times during the year with full attendance apart from Revd. Sandra Manley, who was unable to attend due to sickness for the latter part of the year.

At the APCM last year, Kathy Swan was elected onto the PCC. We welcome her to the council and are very grateful for her time.

The Fund-raising Group is a subcommittee of the Smythe Hall Management Committee which manages the church hall owned by the Diocese and leased to the PCC. The Smythe Hall Management Committee is chaired by John Dutfield and includes representatives of the Parish Council and PCC. The Fund-raising Group includes many residents who are not regular members of the congregation. All the funds raised are usually shared between the Smythe Hall and the PCC.

Administration Information

The Church of St Mary and St Margaret is situated in Church Lane, Stow Maries, Essex CM3 6SL. It is in the Deanery of Maldon and Dengie which is part of the Diocese of Chelmsford.

The correspondence address for administrative matters: Stow Maries PCC c/o Miss Julia Morris, 1 Rectory Cottages, Church Lane, Stow Maries, Essex CM3 6SJ.

The correspondence address for financial matters: Stow Maries PCC c/o Jane Coe, Seaton, The Street, Stow Maries, Essex CM3 6RY.

Matters concerning church services, etc. should be addressed to Mr. John Dutfield, Morleigh, Church Lane, Stow Maries, Essex CM3 6SL.

The PCC is a body corporate (PCC Powers Measure 1956, Church Representation Rules 2006) and a charity currently excepted from registration with the Charity Commission. PCC members who have served from 1st April 2020 until the date this report was approved are:

Elected Members

- John Dutfield (previous Chairman)
- Brian Townsend (Current Chairman and Electoral Roll Officer)
- Kathy Swan

Co-opted Members

- Jane Coe (Treasurer)
- Julia Morris (Secretary)

Additional Information

Since the Report given above, that is a slightly abridged version of that presented to the 2021 APCM, John Dutfield has been forced to resign as Chairman of the PCC due to ill-health.

John and his wife Christine have been carrying an increasing burden for several years, due mainly to the decline in new members joining the congregation and the problems of ill-health in several of the existing members.

The problems caused as a result of the theft of the lead covering of the roof could not have come at a worse time as the amount of work that they then undertook has taken its toll on them.

This included mopping-up the saturated floor after each period of rain and trying to protect those items that were threatened with severe damage by rainwater running down the walls - we surely have not forgotten how much rain fell in the months leading up to April!

John and his wife have carried the work-load for these activities without complaint and as a long-standing member of the PCC, I wish to place on public record an appreciation of their devoted service to the residents of Stow Maries in looking after our Parish Church and its users for a very long time.

We are all indebted to them.

Brian Townsend