

In March we held our Parish APCM – this is my report for that meeting, which hopefully gives you an insight into some of the exciting developments during the past year.

Rector's Report:

2018 started on a high note as on January 1st, the new 'Parish of Effingham with Little Bookham' was legally created. It had been a long road to reach that point and we rapidly realised that it really was just the starting line; but there was also a sense of celebration and unity as the faithful from each church began to really feel part of a bigger family. Those who have joined us in recent months, take to the idea of one parish with two churches, as a duck takes to water, and I am sure that with each passing year that cohesion will strengthen.

It is important to thank some key players in the settling down process – in particular, the members of the PCC and the four wardens and their deputies: Val Winter, John Amos, Pat Mills and Laura Smith. As well as Jacqueline Bennet, who as secretary has had to deal with many a legal document. We are also grateful for Sheila Ecklin who ably 're-created' the electoral roll, only to discover that it had to be done all over again in early 2019, in line with the rest of the UK.

Much credit needs also to be given to Jennifer Blackburn as treasurer and her assistant Chris Peers who have battled with the intricacies of bringing two sets of finances together and the knock-on effects of such a move. At times, I believe they thought it would **never** be sorted, but they continued with determination and it seems that now things are beginning to run more smoothly.

In August we were delighted to welcome Bishop Andrew of Guildford to lead us in our celebrations to mark the new parish. The weekend consisted of a Beating of the Bounds walk as a small group of enthusiasts walked (almost) the whole length of the new parish boundary. On the Sunday Bishop Andrew baptised Louis White, one of the latest additions to the church family, at All Saints Church. The congregation then processed to St Lawrence church where communion was celebrated. The proceedings were capped with a wonderful lunch enjoying the sun in the church hall gardens.

In June we were delighted to mark the 75th anniversary of the Dambusters' raid in recognition of our long association with Barnes Wallis. We welcomed Dr. Robert Owen, the official historian of the 617 squadron, who gave a fascinating talk on the raid. The event was so popular that we have invited Dr Owen back again during the 2019. Barnes Wallis' daughter, Elizabeth joined us for the talk and even brought the 'authentic marbles' to show.

Elizabeth visited again on the following day as she opened our church fete, the highlight of which was the fly past of a vintage Dakota.

The proceeds from the talk and fete started our official appeal to raise £45,000 to install new lighting in St Lawrence and we are delighted that by Christmas that amount was raised and in February 2019 the installation began.

In May 2018, we had had a Parish Vision Day and our parish purpose was decided as follows:

1. **Inspire** each other with God's love
2. **Grow** God's Church and disciples
3. **Serve** God's Community near and far
4. **Celebrate** God's Gifts

In keeping with our third objective, in the autumn, we once again invited the community to a Harvest Supper, which was held in the Tithe Barn in Little Bookham courtesy of the generosity of the Nicholls family. The event was very well supported, and no doubt will become a regular fixture in the community calendar.

A new initiative in September was to arrange a parish 'Litter Pick'. Some hardy souls made a good impression on the local litter problem and again we felt that it was a service that would be worth repeating. Our thanks are due to Laura Smith for suggesting and organising this initiative.

In November we marked the centenary of the end of the First World War. We were fortunate in finding a local teenager who played the trumpet at St Lawrence with much skill during the commemoration. Not surprisingly, the churches were packed on Sunday 11th November.

During the year, we also initiated a week's worth of hot meals for those with new babies or in particular needy circumstances. Three families were thrilled to be served in this way and again this is something that we will continue to provide.

In 2017, Gracewells residential home has been opened in Little Bookham and during 2018, once a month, I (ably assisted by either Anne Bleming or Catherine Hall, as PAs) have continued to go into the home to provide a short communion service. At Christmas time we repeated a very popular Christmas Carol Service for the residents and their visiting families. We had a good crowd from the congregation come to help on that occasion.

Another new initiative during 2018, was the introduction of a 'Blue Christmas' service which was particularly aimed at those who might not have been looking forward to the festive season, for one of a variety of reasons. A reasonable number of people attended and it seems to have been well-appreciated.

Our children's work in the parish continues to flourish. We now have a small, but dedicated group of regular 'Sunday children' and the numbers of youngsters are boosted at TGIS services and at our Tuesday Chatterbox services. The latter has become a particularly supportive group of mothers who are always ready to welcome new-comers.

Our Living Easter and Living Nativity were well attended again this year. It was particularly gratifying to discover the help of the wider community in sourcing Jimmy the Living Nativity donkey after our regular donkeys moved to Scotland.

In many ways this was an example of the affection and attachment that the wider community now feel for our church fellowship. They may not attend on a regular basis but their occasional presence and the interaction on our social media sites show that we are considered approachable and welcoming.

Of course, our 'raison d'être' will always be the worship of God and the building of his kingdom both within us as individuals; within our parish community and also in the wider community. We continue to offer opportunities for worship and use both our churches regularly and appropriately. We are delighted to have new members joining us and we pray that it will not be long before they really feel at home and become part of our church family.

Like any family, there will be members who are more active than others, and those, at times, who need more support and compassion – I pray that we will always be aware of such 'situations' and

that we will continue to 'love abundantly and with empathy', as we know that God loves each one of us.

Our Parish offers so much now, and we hope to offer more, but it can't happen without volunteers prepared (often sacrificially) to serve others. Some of our community, have given decades of their life in service to this parish and, naturally, in some cases, would like to have a well-deserved rest. I am particularly grateful to those who have agreed to take on new roles, but there are always other opportunities to help out.

As the Rector, I am sometimes seen as the 'ringmaster', trying to get others onto 'the stage' at the right time, but I prefer the analogy of an orchestral conductor – bearing in mind that everyone connected to our church is equally 'musically gifted' and only together can we play wonderful 'concertos' to the glory of God.

I pray that our Effingham with Little Bookham 'orchestra' will go from strength to strength during the coming year as we enjoy each other's company and make (holy) music together.

Your Rector,
Mandy