

Church Wardens Report 2020 *a game of two halves!*

APCM 26th April 2020 – delayed until ...

You may be unaware of this but I am a rather fond of watching a good game of football and in one Manchester Club in particular – I mention this because I see St Mary's in the same light. Very much a member of the premier league with a strong leader, willing coaches and a team that give 100% every time they turn out. We have, as they say, strength in depth - so should one person be unable to take a job on then others eagerly stand in.

John or leader never fails to make us reflect, inspire, often question and usually makes us laugh with his exceptional sermons – he always gives food for thought and this continues with his insightful articles in the magazine. John is bringing new ideas to St Marys – new service books and new services that have been overlooked and now are being introduced – the new hymns he has taught us and the encouragement to sing is a great joy to us although possibly not to John on the receiving end – still we do our best.

We have knowledge and expertise to spare in the form of our Verger and our many supporting members it has never been more apt to say we really appreciate everything you do and I am sure if you made a list of all those duties it would be a very long one indeed. So to all our first team, second team, subs and reserves thank you so much from Ros and I – you make the Church Wardens' job much easier.

This year saw the introduction of the Parish Giving Scheme and it really has been taken up by many of our congregation and we thank you for that. The process allows us to obtain the tax relief on the donations paid each month by Direct Debit instead of waiting until the end of the tax year. Consequently we are able to control our expenditure and cash flow and budget better for the year ahead. Of course it isn't for everyone so thank you to those who still give by envelope, cash and standing order and those who do more than one way of donating – we are very grateful to you all.

A welcome new addition in December was the wonderful Eagle lectern – the eagle was believed to be the bird that flew highest in the sky and was therefore closest to heaven, and symbolised the carrying of the word of God to the four corners of the world. Well our eagle has been lovingly repaired and restored by a whole team of dedicated and skilful experts who took him apart, cleaned, polished and putting him back together to enable John's words to take wings each Sunday – we applaud the expertise we have in our midst who can bring such a magnificent symbol back to life!

We have been pleased to welcome new faces into our congregation and sadly the year has again seen us saying farewell to some dear friends but we can look around our beautiful church and still see them in the pews that they occupied for so long; yes they are missed but certainly not forgotten.

So as we move further into 2020 and Spring and Summer months lie ahead we hope that the current troubles will soon be behind us and we can once again enjoy doing what we do best.

...22nd November 2020

Little did we know when I wrote that back in early April that we would now still be in the midst of this pandemic which has been life-changing for so many people. And I know our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost their jobs, in some cases their homes and worst, and above all, their loved-ones.

However we are determined to concentrate on the positives that have come about and the main one being we are all still here and open for business!!! Our doors have been open wide each day welcoming regulars, visitors and a record number of pilgrims have had their passports stamped and some even have gone on their way with a precious blessing!

Yes we have missed out on our Fete and our Summer luncheon but they will return and Edward and Gill amongst others cycled their legs off for Ride and Stride and made a record-breaking amount, a big thank you for that.

Through all the upheavals we have adapted. You have mastered Zoom and we have seen laptops being balanced precariously to record sermons. Thanks to Tony's expertise the sermons and hymns are made available for all to enjoy and sing along with in your own home.

As I write we are in our second lockdown but when we were allowed back in church social distancing had been rigorously observed and the addition of the two extra services was a master stroke, allowing us to ensure we didn't overload the pews!

Jenny and Sheila our church '*open up and lock up team*' have been battling the bats and flies and have done so every day without fail and at this point a personal thank you to Jenny from Tess and I for the plastic chairs installation from the moment we were locked down. They have served us well and it was a brilliant idea and as we know even the sheep tried to get a seat there one Sunday!

Finally, all Ross and I need to say is 'Thank You'.

Please continue to look after yourself and each other and if it isn't a sin to say we should be very proud to have achieved all we have at this time and to be part of this wonderful church.