

Secretary's annual report

1. Talks programme

We cancelled our Spring programme shortly before the first lockdown was announced. We were able to hold two of the three Spring talks in the autumn via Zoom. The third was impossible to hold as it involves musical instruments – we look forward to scheduling it when face to face meetings resume. We have two new members – David and Andrea Chance – who are both experienced speakers: we shall schedule their talks also when we can meet again face to face. The autumn talks, both by Zoom, were Mark Haworth-Booth on Museum Life and Dr Alison Evans on Mindfulness. These attracted good audiences and generous donations via the new Donations Button on the church website.

2. Donations Button

This was installed by our webmaster and MH-B in July. £305 had been donated by the end of the year. The system is recommended by Parish Buying and involves Give a Little as the service provider, who take a small percentage of each donation. The service offers a Gift Aid option. It has proved to be invaluable as a way for those attending Zoom talks to offer support. We have managed to make up the shortfall from donations at face to face talks thanks to the Donations Button.

3. Website

Our webmaster, Colin Jones, has future-proofed the website so that if he is for some reason suddenly unable to continue his role clear instructions will ensure that the website continues to be updated. The webmaster's fee is paid by the Friends. The Friends' Secretary is liaison and provides the webmaster with updates on eg Services plus news items and information on events. This year's financial report shows two payments to Colin Jones – £90 and £125. He would normally have received the first payment the previous f.y. The second payment is higher than usual because Colin has upgraded the security of our site so that users no longer see a 'Site Insecure' notice when they enter it.

4. Membership

This year we lost one of our founding members, Arnold Bradbury. Arnold was a generous supporter and a regular attender of our meetings. He gave a memorable account of his life and career (on conversation with MH-B) in Spring 2017. Arnold joined us on Zoom for MH-B's talk ('My Museum Life') on 15 October. He was in very good spirits and was joined by his daughter, his son and daughter-in-law. He asked a very good question. That was, it seems, Arnold's last public appearance. He will be much missed. We also lost Rita Woodhead, who has moved back to Surrey, where she will be closer to family and friends. She gave a great deal to the parish in her short time here, including helping David Netherway make such a success of Parson Jack's Studio in the Old School Room. We also lost Perce Saunders, who was not a member but always interested in Friends' events: Perce has left the Friends £500 in his will. This year we added three new members (66, 67 and 68) – John Harland and David and Andrea Chance. We also received generous donations in memory of Mrs Harland.

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5. Supporting St James Church

The Friends pay annual maintenance contracts for both the church clock and the church CCTV system (introduced after the vandalism of the pulpit and paid for by the Friends). David Netherway will report in a separate item on Friends' projects, which we are all most grateful to him for overseeing so effectively.

The Friends of St James Church

Report on projects to the AGM 16th February 2021

The Friends' Projects in a year of Covid19

2020 Began with confidence for a year of progress ahead with several projects the Friends were championing for the church, Old School Room and Streamside Garden and churchyard.

The Old School Room

Funding had been obtained in the previous year for the refurbishment of the Upper Room in the Old School Room. Grants, enthusiastic volunteers and local business support resulted in a really well received upgrade of the room and set it up for hosting more events and art exhibitions. This was happening with the growing popularity of the Parson Jack's Studio Café events, (with many thanks to the drive of Rita Woodhead) and art display – further events were booked and art exhibitions planned.

Unfortunately, as with everything in 2020, it all had to stop. We all hope 2021 and beyond will be better.

Work on the planning of the major upgrade of the Old School Room and the local community and Jack Russell archive has continued. By the end of the year plans had been agreed. The complex problems of balancing the importance of the historic fabric with the need to meet the needs of the 21st C – including accessibility plus a proper toilet for the church, Upper Room and Preschool – had been agreed. Planning Consent and a Diocesan Faculty have been obtained for the work.

The challenge now is to obtain the funding. This is a bigger challenge now as most of the major funders reduced or paused their grants and focused on Covid recovery. Normal fundraising events have been impossible. However, let us not despair. We have all the plans and consents in place to start work as soon as funds are there. We have had an offer to meet the cost of the new kitchen. There may be ways to break the project up into smaller elements delivered over time. With local help there are ways that cost could be trimmed. Funders are beginning to open up again. The popular Antiques Road Trip TV show last year focused on Jack Russell and his terriers and gave some welcome publicity to the village and our heritage.

Maintenance work goes on, of course. A faulty tap was replaced in the lower room thanks to funding from the Friends and the helpful village plumber Matt Cullen. However, a new boiler may be needed sometime as the present one (20 years old) is beginning to show its age. It has been kept going free of charge by the gas engineer Malcolm Whitton.

Throughout the pandemic the Preschool has operated within the Covid rules to provide for our village young children. This is a service the church is happy to support.

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The Churchyard and Streamside Garden

Volunteers, working within the Covid rules, kept the churchyard and Streamside Garden looking well cared for. A generous private donation and support from the Friends enabled maintenance work to be done – before the lockdown – on the yew trees and the trees along the stream boundary. As this work affected trees with preservation orders, or within the Conservative Area, local authority consent was required. This had delayed the work from the previous year. Lower branches of the yews were encroaching on graves beneath. The trees were tidied up and brambles and ivy removed. Large alders on the riverbank were thinned out, letting in more light and allowing views of the church. Dead elms were removed. Funds donated to the Friends in memory of Anne Hayes, and from an earlier Open Gardens fundraiser, were used to replace a dying cherry tree with a crab apple. A new Stepping Stone Path was installed in memory of Anne Hayes: the stones are engraved with the words of the hymn ‘One more step along the road I go’.

Snowdrops donated a few years ago by Jessica Duncan, a member of the Friends, Jessica Duncan, put on a fantastic display this January.

Covid restrictions meant that some maintenance work to the Streamside fence has had to wait. However, the Friends have funded a new outside tap, thanks again to plumber Matt Cullen.

The Pulpit

Trustees and members will know that structural problems and an act of vandalism meant that repair and maintenance work are needed on the medieval carved stone pulpit.

The Friends organised, and with the help of a ChurchCare grant, paid for investigation and reports by McNeillage Conservation. After negotiations and advice from the Diocese a faculty was granted later in 2020. The cost will be about £12,500 (plus recoverable VAT) including work on the mediaeval paintwork. Grants have been offered from ChurchCare, Devon Historic Churches Trust, Swimbridge Ecclesiastical Charity and the Archdeacon's Fund. These total £8000. Other applications are waiting for responses. Any suggestions for fundraising welcome are, of course, very welcome.

DRN 2021

Friends of St James Church, Swimbridge: Financial report 1/2/20-31/1/21

Income

Members subscriptions £868.80
Anonymous Donation for tree surgery £300
Donations via Give a Little Button on church website £305
Donations from Parson Jack's Studio £106.80
Archbishops Council grant £300 (for pulpit conservation)
Philip Dalling donation (for Shaun's help on an article on church during lockdown) £100
Anne Hayes Memorial Fund (transferred from PCC) £1423.83
Roger Watts donation for OSR after Zoom talk £25.00
Donations in memory of Mrs Elspeth Harland £187.30

Total £3616.73

Outgoings

Mark Evans (tree surgeon) £1,880
Colin Jones (webmaster) £90
Sally Anne Balment (accountant) £30
McNeillage Conservation (pulpit report) £440
Stephens Scowen (diocesan solicitors – faculty for pulpit repair) £260
Ardosia Slate (Stepping stones) £798.60
David Netherway (tap repair) £25
David Wilson Partnership (OSR) £1,675.20
Stephens Scowen (faculty for OSR works) £260
David Wilson Partnership (planning fee) £117
Cumbria Clock Co (annual maintenance contract) £174
Matt Cullen (Preschool taps) £50
M&E Alarms (annual maintenance contract for CCTV) £72
Colin Jones (webmaster, fee plus improvements to security of website) £125

Total 5996.80

Bank account

At 1 February 2020 £3416.13

At 31 January 2021 £1758.26

MHB 15 February 2021