**Preston St Mary**

**ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY 2020**

**As a result of the current Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic parishioners were able to meet in the Village Hall as would usually be the case for the Annual Parish Assembly. However, groups and organisations within the Parish provided the Parish Clerk with reports for this document so that it could be placed on the village website.**

**REPORTS**

**The Friends of the Parish Church of Preston St Mary**

During the year ending 31st December 2019, the Society had continued to provide a programme of fund raising activities with which to support its objectives of preserving the fabric of the Church. The events planned for this year have, sadly, had to be put on hold until such time as we are allowed to gather together again.

Membership

The current paid up membership of the Society was **58** in 2019. This year it is down to only **38**. The subscriptions are likely to be our only income for the time being so I would therefore urge anyone who hasn’t yet paid to do so. We have introduced a Life Membership Scheme of £100 per person to save members renewing each year. Please give your subscriptions as soon as you are able during this time of social distancing to our Treasurer, Robert Jennings, or to Janet Martin. They would be very happy to accept them.

Works and Grants

In May 2019 a grant of £760 was given to the PCC for the servicing and costs of the security system to protect the lead roofing on the Church. Also, in May another grant of £2264 towards the cost of works to the floor.

In August 2019 £5000 was allotted to open up a further space at the back of the Church.

Future Works

The main task ahead for the PCC is the repairs to the Nave roof which was again highlighted in the Quinquennial Report 2015. Fortunately, the architect has suggested temporary, remedial works to the lead which could give another 5 years grace and prevent the serious water ingress that we have experienced. The Church also needs to install a new organ and re-plaster and decorate the interior for which it will be looking to the Friends and other bodies for grants.

September Song Concert

Lyn Davis along with her colleague Malcolm Boulter, offered to put on a delightful concert of light-hearted music, song and poetry on September 6th 2019. It proved to be a great success with the public who attended and raised the considerable sum of £853 towards our funds and allowed guests to mingle and enjoy a glass of wine and homemade bites after the concert. Grateful thanks to Lyn and Malcolm and all the committee members who helped to make it a most enjoyable evening.

The Christkindlmarkt 2019

The Christkindlmarkt was held on Saturday 9th November 2019, at Preston Manor Barn and thanks must be given to Tim and Anne Coxon for allowing us to hold the event in their spacious barn. It was with some sadness that we had decided to make this the final Christkindlmarkt due to the amount of work entailed for the declining amount of committee members and the proliferance of other rival Christmas fairs in the district which have been established since ours began 21 years ago. It was decided to make this a clearance sale to sell off all the remaining stock of Gisela Graham merchandise which we did. It maybe that now we have some new members of the Committee we might consider putting this event on again sometime in the future. The Christkindlmarkt raised £967.

Lastly, the Committee would like to express its thanks to all those volunteers who on every occasion work alongside it and who are always to be relied upon for the successful running of our events as well as those people who made donations to the Society’s Funds.

Lynne Brown, Secretary

on behalf of

The Friends of the Church of Preston St Mary

**Table Tennis Club Report 2019-20**

The Club maintained healthy attendances throughout the year which increased during the autumn, with the welcome addition of some new members.

This allowed maximum use of available equipment and the space available in the Village Hall providing more games and exercise for all, refreshed by the new Talent “brought to the table”.

Unfortunately, the Club membership remains almost entirely male, which is not intended.

The Club is for anyone who would like to attend, and, as always, female members will be warmly welcomed.

We had two linked social events during the year, the first being our outing to Bury Bowl on Election Day (December 12th), all as featured in the Feb & March issue of the PPP.

We also held our annual Christmas dinner for members and partners on 9th January (in TT club tradition) this time at The Horseshoes in Cockfield, all kindly arranged again by Julien Delaforterie, our meals expert.

Our Life president Dave Williams provided the “cabaret” giving an entertaining talk with props, on the meaning of “ping pong” along with Chinese versions of members’ names- utterly magnificent.

A photo of the gathering is attached to the original copy of this report.

Regrettably, we found our last session this year was held on the 12 March because of the clampdown related to the Coronavirus outbreak, although we all hope to be able to return as soon as is safely possible, we cannot forecast a restart date at present.

Geoff Poole

Preston St Mary Table Tennis Club

**Tree Warden’s Report**

I’m happy to say that many trees have been planted in the village this year.

I was able to find homes for 250 saplings of mixed varieties grown in the UK. There were supplied by the Woodland Trust through the Tree Wardens Scheme.

I am really thrilled to report that Richard from Preston Hall has planted an area with 100 saplings near to the Hall which overlooks the surrounding countryside and this will result in a lovely group of trees in coming years. I hope to persuade him to plant more next year!

The rest have been planted by various locals on their land.

We have also planted four small trees along the village green in positions where old trees have had to be removed. We now have a Bramley Apple, a Red Oak, a Quince and a Cherodendrum. Thank you to the Parish Council and Jack Tasker for the Cherodendrum. As the weather has been so dry this spring, villagers have watered them when necessary so lets hope they will all do well. Thank you to Honor and Merle.

The Mulberry we planted last year looks really healthy.

The Parish Council bought 1000 natural Daffodil bulbs, Narcissus pseudonarcissus, which volunteers from the village planted in October last year. Although they flowered patchily this year, I feel confident that they will increase and flower more reliably in the years to come. I am hoping to persuade the council to buy some more bulbs this year to enrich the display.

Sadly, we lost the beautiful Red Chestnut tree which suffered during the period of high winds but it had Canker so it was probably a good thing. Thank you to all the villagers who so kindly cleared the road and tidied it up. Also, thanks go to Mark Ward who took all the debris away. We are grateful to all involved.

I’m hoping to find homes for more saplings this year so please let me know if anyone could find homes for them.

Kate Hanlon

Tree Warden

Preston St Mary

**Village Hall**

Last year was another good one for the Village Hall and, despite the current difficulties brought upon us by the Coronavirus, we are in good spirits.

Our main source of income comes from hiring the Hall to various groups, with five different groups using it weekly and others using it regularly as suits their membership. The weekly clubs are: Art Group, Keep Fit, Table Tennis, Dancing Tuition and Carpet Bowls. Monthly hiring comes from the Ladies Group. (More details from me, if anyone wants them). A music group also practises regularly and we have had corporate training days here too. The 100 Club is a useful source of funds and a grant from the Parish Council is very helpful, covering some of the overheads – many thanks to the PC for that.

You may be wondering how we are getting on with our fund-raising efforts for the new facilities that we plan. We have had mixed fortunes from our many applications to grant-giving bodies and we are close to reaching our target. Indeed, if it weren’t for the need to pay VAT on the costs, we would be there! We will keep plugging on. Meanwhile, if anyone should know of a source of funds – or even wish to make a donation, which could be “Gift Aided” for tax purposes – please let us know. We will keep you informed of further progress.

Things don’t just happen on their own – they need to be organised. The members of the committee continue to work hard and have been supported by a number of other folks from the village, without whom we could not continue to provide what we believe to be a focal point for the social fabric of village life. Our sincere thanks go to each and every one of the supporters.

As I write, we are on the middle of the lockdown and the Hall is not being used. We do have some monetary reserves to fall back on if necessary so we are in a safe financial position, but we hope that “normal service can be resumed” as soon as possible, as we all miss the social element of what we offer. Whilst this hiatus may be irritating, we must always bear in mind that the principal effort must be the curtailment of infection and that we should do everything in our powers to bring this about.

KEEP SAFE.

Keith Davis

**St Mary’s Church**

We can now look back on 2019 as the year before the storm when everything carried on as normal and the Church welcomed its congregation and visitors alike with open arms not barring them with locked doors.

How simple life appeared then, with a pattern of events that mirrored the Church calendar as it has done for hundreds of years before.

Congregation numbers were much the same as 2018 but the most popular regular service, Preston Praise (normally 1st Sunday in the month) has grown in strength and like other services involving socialising and refreshments has benefitted from the extra space created at the back of the Church by the removal of the pews. A few more speakers have joined the trusty band of leaders who conduct the service and it is always a joy to hear our village singers and musicians and the spiritual thoughts of Fellow Church goers. If that doesn’t encourage you to join us perhaps the delicious coffee and croissants will tempt you to try our special service with its emphasis on friendly fellowship.

Rogation on 2nd June at Priory Farm was one of the highlights in our calendar and as usual took place at Priory Farm thanks to Denise and Alan Luck. Throughout the year we celebrated all the major Christian festivals, Good Friday, Easter Sunday Sunrise, the patronal Service and the Christmas Eve Carol Service which each year fills the Church with happy people wanting to sing their hearts out in praise of the birth of our Lord and its meaning.

Since the removal of the pews you may be wondering what we have in mind for the future. The Church Wardens and PCC started in 2019 to think about adding a proper kitchen and toilet facilities but this of course largely depends on funding and Keith has applied to various bodies to help us. It would make life so much easier for cleaning, flower arranging and refreshments not only for the Preston congregation but for people putting on concerts and lectures. Choirs are always in desperate need of a loo when rehearsing and performing for so many hours.

The PCC is grateful to the Parish Council for the grant towards the upkeep of the churchyard and to the Friends for all their fund-raising, without which we would be sorely troubled financially. We hosted a concert that the Friends organised on Friday 6th September when Lyn Davis and Malcolm Boulter very successfully entertained very many people from Preston and surrounding areas. We are so lucky to be able to call on the very talented people in Preston St Mary to arrange these and other concerts and lectures.

Throughout 2019 we were able to keep our beautiful and historic grade one building open to everyone who wanted to enter. It is a haven of tranquillity for many as the visitors’ book endorses. During lockdown we have had to close our doors but the Rector and team have done their best to keep in touch with everyone and to promote services from their homes on Zoom.

Please join us when this unsociable period is finally over and our Church will be opened and cleansed ready to welcome old and new residents alike as well as visitors from further afield to give thanks that we have survived the terrible ordeal that Corona Virus has placed on the Church and Country.

Janet Martin

Church Warden

**Preston Art Group**

The Art Group normally meets in the Village Hall for three ten week terms a year. Meetings last for two hours and are held on a Monday morning.

The cost of membership remains at £45 a term which allows us to hire the hall and pay for visits from two tutors – Mossy Kennedy, and Kate Hanlon. We explore a variety of subjects and media with our tutors but can revert to our own preferred form of drawing or painting when having non-tutored sessions. This is a friendly group, supportive of one another and welcoming anyone from the locality who wishes to join us. During the coronavirus lock down we have tried to keep up our art and hope to have an Exhibition of ‘viral art’ when we are free to do so.

Hopefully we might be able to meet again in the Autumn because there is space in the hall for us to spread out and we use our own materials. This will need approval from the Village Hall Committee.

Judy Legg

**Preston Parish Paper**

The Preston Parish Paper has continued to appear throughout the current COVID-19 pandemic, though the April/May and June/July editions have been issued in electronic form only, as printing and delivery operations were not possible during lockdown. However, the August/September issue is once again being printed and delivered in a hard copy edition.

The paper has continued to grow over the last year, several times reaching 40 A4 pages, the maximum size that can be achieved without switching to more expensive production methods. We have continued to expand the variety of content beyond the ‘bread and butter’ regulars – Church and village news and events, the Village Hall, Six Bells, clubs and societies, births, marriages and deaths etc. Thanks to many willing contributors we now have notes on cookery, nature, agriculture, gardening, local history, health and wellness, as well as book reviews, quizzes and even cocktail recipes. We also carry a number of advertisements.

Your editors remain enthusiastic and would encourage everyone to contribute and to write to us about anything of interest, to let us know what you think of your Parish Paper, and what you would like to see in it.

The Editors.