



## Annual Parish Assembly

12<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Present

Cllr Mike Booth, Chair, Cllr Steve Dyer, Cllr Gabriella Gabbitas,

Cllr Margaret Haig, Cllr Rosemary Dymond.

Cllr Tony Rice GBC. Russ Nicholls -Traffic Group.

Clerk. Charles Amis & Two Parishioners.

The Chairman opened the meeting by reminding us the Annual Parish Assembly is not a Parish Council Meeting but it is a meeting for residents of the village organised by the parish council and it is an opportunity for parishioners to give their views and air their grievances.

Community organisations are invited to report on their activities over the previous 12 months and their plans for the future.

1. Apologies for absence – Cllr Matt Mason, Cllr Robert Pryor, Cllr Ben Smith, Cllr Mat Peterson-Pearce
2. The minutes for the previous Annual Parish Assembly held in 2019 had already been signed.
3. Finance Report; No Comments / Approved
4. Chairman's Report

My second year as Chairman – not an easy year to say the least.

So many things going on – most of all a pandemic breaking out as we started the year.

I would like to thank those councillors that supported me over the last 12 months particularly, Steve Dyer my vice chair and also Tony Rice our Gravesham Councillor.

Thanks must also go to Tina Sampson who was particularly supportive as Clerk in the first 18 months of my tenure until she unfortunately decided it was time to retire but in turn has continued to be involved in the back ground, supporting our new clerk Charles Amis, who joined us in November.

I must also thank our caretakers of the Cobham War Memorial, Sacha Dyer & Rob Wemys who are doing a great job looking after that end of the village.

Then we had to get to grips with Coronavirus and having to hold meetings via Zoom or Teams – it has become easier, but now we're just used to virtual meetings, we're being told we must go back to the old ways.

Also as a result of Covid we had to close the Children's Corner, and the Public Toilets.

We've had the usual list of matters which demand our attention ranging from resurfacing Sole Street to Sink Holes in Halfpence Lane. Then there have been the usual range of normal planning applications but including some more difficult ones including the Norbond site in

the old Sole Street station sidings, White Post Farm, and the Batts telephone mast application.

Other areas which have involved considerable amounts of time for councillors include parking issues all over the parish as a result of lockdowns, plus Anti-Social Behaviour on motorbikes, quad bikes & 4 wheel drives.

Traffic Bollards and road safety in The Street have also required a huge amount of time over the last 3 years proving our case to GBC, Kent Highways, and Highways England.

Then we have the Lower Thames Crossing, St Marys Church Rooms, and looming on the horizon we have Gravesham Council looking at opportunities to build houses on the Green Belt.

MJB

#### 5. Other Village Organisations.

Cllr Booth thanked all the organisations for their reports and these will be posted on the parish council website.

The reports from the organisations are as follows:

#### **Cobham Amateur Dramatic Society**

Like most organisations our usual CADS activities stopped last March and rehearsals for the then Spring Play were cancelled.

However, during last summer, when permitted to do so, the organisation met in small groups in the open, for informal play readings. Villagers may have noticed a tiny group of socially distanced people sitting in a large circle on the Meadow, next to the Meadow Room, and this was possibly a CADS play reading.

Since then, the development of Zoom and increasing expertise of the group, has enabled us to rehearse and put into production two Radio Plays for the Kent Drama Festival this summer. Thanks to Roger Hodge, who wrote one of the plays and the technological assistance of James Blackett, who amalgamated all our efforts, two One Act Plays have been completed for the Festival.

Members have enjoyed the weekly meeting on line so much, that Roger has produced another radio play which will be rehearsed during March and April.

We recognise that many of our loyal audience will have missed our live performances and regulations permitting, CADS hope to stage an Autumn Production in the Meadow Room in November. Further details will be circulated when available and confirmed.

Many thanks for your future support.

#### **Bell Ringing Report 2020/2021**

The coronavirus pandemic changed everything. Bell ringing was stopped. The last time when we were allowed to ring all Cobham's six bells was on the 18th of March 2020 when we rang at Ron Chamberlain's request, for the Funeral of his wife Linda.

Jane and Dave Bubb have done so much to try and sustain the worship of Cobham Church. The Bubb's moved in the summer to Southborough where Dave was taking up his first church appointment as Curate. A slight relaxation in restrictions in August allowed three of

us, socially distanced and wearing face masks, to ring 3 bells for only 15 minutes to wish the Bubb family well prior to the start of the Farewell Service in Cobham Church.

Otherwise I have rung one bell for special occasions which is all that is possible. I rang for the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day, on Christmas Day (despite there being no Service), and on 23rd March 2021 for the over 126,000 people who have died with Covid since the first lockdown began.

On 8 January 2021, at the family's request, I rang bell No. 3 for the Funeral of Alan Holland. The third bell was recast in 1994 when the bells were restored. The bell bears Elizabeth Holland's name as Chairman of the Friends of Cobham Church who were central in raising the funds for the bell restoration.

For the moment we can only dream of change ringing resuming. We await guidance from the Government and the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. When bell ringing is allowed again we have the challenge of reviving the art and science of English method ringing and then that cherished sound of the bells will once again float across the land.

**Peter Hartley**

#### **Friends Of Cobham Church**

Despite the restrictions of lockdown, urgently needed tree surgery was carried out in the upper and lower churchyards during October. The cost, £3000 in total, was shared equally between the church, the Friends and a private donor. Work (funded by the Friends) also went ahead on connecting the church to mains drainage. The new drain running up the church drive from the main sewer in The Street was laid in October and a diamond drill has since channelled through the west wall to enable the pipe to connect to the toilet in the church.

With all the usual fund-raising events cancelled, we were particularly grateful to Angela, our vicar, and all who supported her sponsored Bible reading in December, which raised a splendid £1000.

At our AGM, belatedly held in the autumn, we elected Sarah Reynolds to the Friends Council, filling the vacancy left by the resignation of Claire Edwards. Sadly, December 2020 saw the death of Alan Holland, a founding member of the Friends and our Chairman for many years. He will be much missed.

Mary Palmer  
Secretary

#### **Cobham Sports Association**

Unfortunately there has been no sport at Cobham since the end of October 2020. When restrictions were relaxed in July 2020 we managed to play a few friendly games of cricket but the league was cancelled. It was too late to play any Colts cricket. The football season started in September but stopped at the end of October and has now been void. From the 29th of March 2021 sport had been given the green light so we are hopeful that we will get a full Colts and senior cricket season. Football training can also commence and although the league has been void teams are allowed to organise friendly matches as long as guidelines are followed.

Jim Jackson

### **COBHAM BOWLS CLUB**

2020 was an unusual year but not just for COVID. Due to the coronavirus, we lost nearly all our club fixtures, and the bar, our main source of income, remained closed for many months. On the positive side, we invested £150,000 on a new bowling surface and floodlighting. This will give us bowling throughout the year, instead of just the 5 months of the summer period. Since the installation of the improved facility and despite limited bowling and no bar, we have attracted 30 new members.

We have acquired a bowls wheelchair to enable us to offer bowling to people with certain disabilities. If found to be useful, we will endeavor to purchase further equipment to assist disabled people.

The loss of income due to COVID was substantial. Half price membership fees, reduced bar takings and no raffle money. We also have a loan from Bowls England to repay. With this in mind, we were very grateful to Gravesham Council for the COVID grants we were awarded. It has helped us remain financially viable through these difficult times.

2021 is our centenary year but due to the uncertainty of coronavirus restrictions, we have sadly decided to postpone our celebrations. We do however hope to have these in 2022.

The public car park adjacent to the Club has been particularly busy. As there has been no bowls, cricket or tennis and the school has been mostly closed, this would seem odd. Particularly as we have all been told to "stay at home". It would appear people want to enjoy Jeskins Park but are not prepared to pay the car park fee, which I assume goes towards its upkeep. We note the Parish Council have erect a sign to deter this type of parking but unfortunately this has had limited affect. We are not sure what else may be done but we foresee parking problems when all sports facilities are once again open and particularly at weekends.

The Bowls Club is in a good state of health and looking forward to the future.

Bill Chellingsworth  
Club Secretary

### **ST MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH, COBHAM**

We, like everyone else, have suffered the effects of COVID. The church closed its doors for the first time in my living memory during 3 national lockdowns. After the first lockdown we were able to comply with all the government guidelines for making the church ready to re-open. That meant that we have been able to open the church for Private Prayer most Wednesdays and continue with Sunday services when not in a lockdown.

Unfortunately though, our services have been greatly restricted with no congregational singing, no refreshments, no sharing the peace or communion cup, everyone wearing masks, using hand cleansers and observing social distancing. YET we still came to pray for our community and worship God!

With the loss of Concerts, the Christmas bazaar and other sources of income (in particular collections at services) we have seen our income hugely reduced and our finances are now in a perilous state.

Fortunately, some maintenance work was able to proceed with funding from the Friends, (see their report) and I was very grateful for the generous support for my sponsored Bible Reading, which raised £1000 for their funds.

Some of our congregation have been shielding due to age or frailty and are still unable to come to the church so I have provided an online service each week throughout as well as a Mid-Week reflection. It has been a helpful way of keeping in touch and passing on notices so that everyone is kept in the loop.

We have also run a telephone 'Prayer Chain' throughout this season, responding to requests for prayer from individual members of the community.

I am very grateful to David Palmer for keeping more than a watchful eye on the church and to Jonnie Pye for continuing to maintain the churchyards. They have both given much time and energy to these tasks. And likewise to Mary Palmer for keeping everyone informed and sending out the various bits of information that I give her.

We have not been able to re-open the St Mary Church Room and work has stalled there again due to COVID and the financial situation. We need to raise the funds to get the building regulations done and then go out to tender.

Revd Angela Walker

V

#### Cobham & Luddesdowne W.I.

Our last meeting was in February 2020, then the 1st. lockdown began and we had to close, along with all the groups, Art, Read & Rabbit, Bookworms, Knit & Natter and the Craft group. Members of the Craft group organised themselves via Zoom as their ladies are really clued up with technology. They made felt Christmas Tree decorations. Kits were purchased on-line, plus using a combination of Facebook, Youtube and on-line tutorials via Denman College, the members continue to be busy during the lockdowns and accessed W.I. talks including baking, crafting and yoga via the W.I. link

Several ladies got together and made crochet blankets, a response to a Facebook plea spotted by the President on Facebook from Darent Valley Hospital to help Dementia patients recognise their own beds.

The ladies also made fiddle muffs and fiddle cushions for the patients. Patients were able to take their items home, when able to leave.

In 2019 we enjoyed our Centenary dinner celebrating 100 years. Members were asked for their views on what should go on a Centenary Banner.

These were gathered in, and a design encompassing what our Institute has achieved over the 100 years was created.

A small group of members undertook this task, but it too has been a victim of the pandemic and lockdowns, so work has slowed down. When completed, this will make a wonderful banner to add to our amazing collection.

In December 2020, Mrs June Woodham sourced a variety of items and filled 'friendship bags' then distributed them to all the members. This unexpected gift from the committee was much appreciated by members.

To keep all the members connected the committee invited members of the Art group to make Easter cards for members. Three artistic members of the Art group, Anne Latcham, Molly Neville, and Jenny Brooker created the hand painted cards which were sent out in time for Easter.

Like all the clubs and groups in the Parish, our members are looking forward to when we can meet up and interact once again with each other.

We would like younger ladies to join us as ideas for new groups etc are always welcome.

Plus we have space on the committee as two ladies have retired. It is not hard work.

Thanks to the skilled techno ladies in the Craft group, Cobham & Luddesdowne W.I. now has its own Facebook.

Margaret Haig. President.

#### ST. MARY'S CHURCH ROOM

During the past two years a great deal of investigation, revelation and planning for fund raising has been undertaken. I had enquired from the Archdeacon's office, who in the Diocese is responsible for the maintenance of St. Mary's Church Room. The reply is that the maintenance falls upon the Parochial Church Council and is not the responsibility of the Diocese.

At the 2018 LFG AGM the PCC Treasurer said that the PCC had a potential donor of £5,000 towards Architect's fees. On receipt of the architect's account, after the PCC has paid their donation of the £5,000., it was then that the LFG agreed to fund raise to provide an additional £3,000. This is in our Barclay's Bank Account. We have not been sent the architect's account.

On the 15th January, 2020 the Local Funding Group (LFG) replied to a Cobham Parochial Church Council (PCC) email by saying, 'As requested, I confirm that we unanimously agree that upon receipt of the architect's account, the Local Funding Group, St. Mary's Church Room, will release up to £3,000 so that the PCC can take the decision at the Cobham PCC meeting on the 4th February, 2020 to go ahead and apply for Building Regulations, provide detailed specifications and scope of works. You have indicated that the PCC has some money which can, if necessary, make up the rest of the architect's fees.'

At the LFG meeting on the 3rd March 2020, the PCC reported that Rev. Angela Walker had confirmed the go-ahead for the architect to complete the Building Regulations application and proceed with the works through to project management. The scope of works is essential to see where areas can be reduced for the overall building cost, including architect's fees of 3.5% of the contract sum, for detailed design, specification and submission of Building Regulations based on the estimated contract cost at that stage as well as 3% of the actual contract sum. (At the 2018 AGM the PCC treasurer reported that the 15% architect's fees with no VAT element, was quite reasonable.)

The architect is unable to take the next step with our renovation project until Building Regulations are received so that detailed specifications and scope of works can be prepared for quotations from building contractors to assist the procurement by the PCC

of the necessary grant applications.

On the 24th March, 2021, I contacted the STG Local Authority Building Control office who tell me that they have not received an application for Building Regulations for St. Mary's Church Room although they have provided a quotation for the submission.

However, in an endeavour to assist the project forward, the LFG has applied for a grant from Cobham Parish Council and the Friends of Kent Churches. We have also applied to the BBC programme, 'The Repair Shop' for the restoration of the Rose Window in St. Mary's Church Room.

The PCC reported that they had £1,300 set aside towards the renovation of St. Mary's Church Room, while I calculated that they should have £5,357 from donations, fund raising and the Gravesham Council Grant of £3,500 for a disabled toilet. The PCC has not presented their audited accounts since 2016. The Local Funding Group's audited accounts bank balance for 2020 is £26,774. 31 which includes the £3,000 towards architect's fees.

The architect advised that a structural engineer's report was required for Building Regulations. The LFG was able to recommend that Considine, Structural Engineers visit the site, provide structural calculations and drawings suitable for Building Regulations submission, tender and construction @ £1,250 + VAT. The PCC invited the LFG to pay this from money raised towards paying the architect. Instead, the LFG organised a Covid friendly Garden Safari on the 6th September which raised £868. that we paid directly to Considine towards their account.

The hall remains closed until the Elections on the 6th May, when, presumably, it will be deep cleaned and then open for the church and community, under Covid rules.

We seek your support towards restoring this tin tabernacle to a church and community hub worthy of our heritage village. With this in mind for 2021, the following events are planned which will also be advertised on our Facebook:-

27TH JUNE: Strawberry Tea in a Sallows Shaw garden on Sunday afternoon – two sittings at 3.00 and 4.00 pm.

8TH AUGUST: A self-led any time trail through local orchards and vineyards of approximately 11 kilometers (7 miles) with an accompanying quiz. There will also be a local history walk along Sole Street Road and supporting family events held in the garden of Sole Street House. Brunch, Lunch and Teas will be available with the help of Sole Street WI.

19TH SEPTEMBER: Garden Safari. It has been suggested that we should hold this popular event again and hope that other gardens not previously open will be included.

SATURDAY, 9TH OCTOBER: The Meadow Room is booked for a Jigsaw Puzzle Competition. This would commence at 7.00 pm for a 7.30 start with identical puzzles for 12 tables of 6. The competition would last for 1½ hours followed by a lite bite and an auction of about 6 lots. One lot offered is to cook a 3-course meal for 6 guests on a mutually convenient date, at the cook's home, with the menu chosen by the purchaser. (Drinks would not be included.) We will require a prize for the Jigsaw Puzzle winning team suitable for 6 people and five other items to auction. I have reservations for three tables so far.

If Cobham Church hold a Christmas Bazaar we may be able to provide a sweet stall for LFG funds.

8TH DECEMBER: The Meadow Room is booked for a Christmas Design Day – Christmas Door Wreath in the morning and in the afternoon a Table Decoration. Sue Arnott and I will provide all materials. We could accommodate 16 participants to each of the morning and afternoon classes and I already have a list of people who have expressed interest.

12TH DECEMBER: 'Christmas at Home'. A Christmas village get-together with Handbell Ringing, mulled wine and Christmas bites, at Sole Street House.

All to comply with coronavirus regulations and safety precautions.

We look forward to your company as we endeavour to support Cobham Church when they apply for grants to renovate St. Mary's Church Room to show grant giving Trusts that the community are in favour of the project. Thank you to the Local Funding Group and Sole Street WI who work tirelessly in their endeavour to see the Church Room restored as a fit community hub in this heritage village. Thank you too for your patience and your undying support.

Susan Rowe  
Chairman, Local Funding Group  
St. Mary's Church Room

6. There were no parishioners comments
7. The Annual Parish Assembly closed at 7.45pm.