

Churchwardens' Report, May 2025

St Mary's Church Saffron Walden

First of all, may I, Vivian, just say a massive thank you to my fellow Churchwarden, Simon, for shepherding me through my first year in this role, with patience, tolerance and great good humour. Also thanks to Gill, my predecessor, who has been an endless source of information and support and to our four Assistant Churchwardens, Pam, Jan, Patrick and Bill, thanks to whom the daily life of the Church runs so smoothly and apparently seamlessly. I must also mention Steve and Judith Hasler, who between them know everything there is to know about St Mary's and are incredibly generous in sharing that knowledge – where would we be without them?

One of the few legal requirements of a Churchwarden is to carry out an annual check of the Terrier. In ecclesiastical parlance, this is not a small, furry, very opinionated animal, but a thirty-six page document listing every moveable item within the Church and Churchyard, for which the Churchwardens hold legal responsibility. I am pleased to report, that, with help from a small team of volunteers, this has been done and everything found to be present and correct. Incidentally, the definition of moveable is clearly open to interpretation, since the Terrier includes the South Porch and the churchyard tombs, but excludes the coffee mugs and the kneelers! The Wardens other responsibilities regarding the fabric of the Church have been covered at length in the Fabric Report so we don't intend to repeat them here.

We are also involved in the life of the Church, so this is a quick review of the year. Unfortunately, we started off with a break-in last June. The thieves tried unsuccessfully to force the main South Door, before gaining entry through the South Chapel, having first cut the wires to the light above it. Luckily nothing was taken and the damage was minimal, being mostly the aforesaid light and a broken lock on the Vestry door. In the light of this, security around locking the church at night has been reviewed and a second bolt is being fitted to the main South Door.

In July, we hosted an election hustings. This was a Churches Together initiative, being held in St Mary's as the only building big enough to cater for the number expected. In the event, almost every seat was taken and a lively debate ensued. There was a bit of excitement with some hecklers, but order was maintained in impressive fashion by our Rector, Jeremy, and John Goddard from the Baptist Church.

Other special events and Services through the year, included the Mayor-making ceremony, the many school events and Carol services, the Remembrance Day Service, Holocaust Memorial Day, Advent, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Lent and Easter, in addition to our usual Sunday and Wednesday Services and Zoom Evening Prayer on a Tuesday. It is very gratifying to note that our numbers seem to be slowly but steadily increasing, week on week. In the period between our Carol Service on 22nd December and Christmas morning, around two thousand people attended our services.

Our visitor numbers are also growing; on an average fine Saturday, we can easily get a hundred people passing through the church, many of them commenting on how lovely it is to find the church open and how friendly and welcoming we are. In that context, last year we reintroduced Summer Welcoming, with a small number of volunteers giving up a couple of hours on a Tuesday or Saturday (market days), to be in the Church, greeting visitors, explaining particular points of

interest and possibly offering them refreshments. We are hoping to expand on this this year. This is in line with our focus for the year, which is on making St Mary's a warm and welcoming place for the whole community, not just those attending our services, in the hope that maybe one thing may lead to the other. With this in mind, in March we hosted a Mothering Sunday tea and on 5th May, a VE/VJ Day Celebration Tea Party. We would love to hold more social events, both for our own worshippers and for the general public and any suggestions would be most welcome.

Unfortunately, we are constrained in what we can do by a shortage of volunteers. Many of us are getting older and are unable to do as much as we have in the past. We need people willing and able to help in so many different roles, from acting as Welcomers, serving coffees, arranging flowers, reading lessons, etc. Sometimes we hear that people have said that they would like to be involved but no one has asked them. Well, we are asking you now!

We can't finish without expressing our gratitude to the wonderful group of people who run Tinies, our mother and baby/toddler group on Tuesday mornings, and especially Gill, who has valiantly stepped into Matt's shoes in entertaining and, hopefully, educating the pre- and primary school children during the Sunday Morning Communion Services. Your efforts in encouraging the youngest of our church members is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

We must also not forget the deputy wardens at St James's and St John's, Mike and Lynne, David and Helen, who run our two daughter churches so calmly and efficiently.

Finally, we would like to thank Jeremy, Hilary, Ella, Linda and our wonderful retired clergy, for their love, prayers and unending support.

Vivian Falk and Simon Potter
Churchwardens
April 2025