

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich – APCM REPORTS 2020 Group 2
Churchwarden, Communications, Music, Tower House

Churchwarden's Report

Before Lockdown and the Pandemic became so very real, we had enjoyed a very successful and rewarding Advent and Christmas season at SMLT. The Music was wonderful, Liturgy uplifting and services and events were very well attended. Thanks to Chris Borrett, the Music Department and Charles for this. The 10th Grand Christmas Tree Festival was another marvellous success and Donna Joyce, Keith Faull, Canon Charles and an army of volunteers all played their part in this fantastic outreach offering to Ipswich.

I wish to thank Charles for his focus and dedication in dealing with the Finance issues at SMLT, together with the Bookkeeper, Kerry Kendall, and Sonia Docherty as the PCC Finance Committee. With a focus on value for money, due to the financial pressures faced, a staff review was commenced during summer 2019. This was conducted by Charles, Sonia Docherty and myself. Roles and requirements for SMLT were reviewed and all staff were part of this collaborative process. The Lockdown in March halted the final decisions until May, when it was regretfully decided to make the Parish Administrator and Church Cleaner posts redundant. Sonia's expertise in Human Resources helped us through some difficult decisions.

Thankfully, several people have stepped forward to take on various pieces of work as volunteers. A Communication Committee has been formed. People have also stepped in to keep the Church clean during this difficult period. Thanks to all of our new and not so new volunteers.

Giving by members of the congregation and those associated with SMLT has been an issue that the PCC agreed to address robustly in 2020. A group was formed in February, but due to the Pandemic were able to make little progress. However, an Emergency Fundraising Appeal was launched in July and raised over £60,000 including Gift Aid which was excellent. We are truly grateful to all who helped and donated to this appeal. Thanks to Mary Baldry, Sonia Docherty, Richard Handley and Ian Lord for assisting with this, and others who helped deliver envelopes. Going forward, the PCC will be running a Giving Renewal in 2021, as we really need people to give regularly and generously to keep everything that we do at SMLT growing and developing.

I want to thank those who have helped keep the show on the road at SMLT since March. Charles for leadership and tenacity, as well as his electronics skills, Chris Borrett for keeping the Music going during Lockdown One in trying circumstances, and Will Baldry, Lis Rollinson and Matt Heyburn for stepping up in so many different ways. Thanks to Mary Baldry for completing endless Risk Assessments in a very short time to enable SMLT to be Covid-19 compliant.

The Church Treasures are in safe keeping when not in use and the Inventory has been updated. We face considerable challenges at the moment, but with the help of God and the goodwill and generosity of individuals we are continuing to be a Christian presence in the centre of Ipswich.

Jo Jones, Churchwarden

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich – APCM REPORTS 2020 Group 2
Churchwarden, Communications, Music, Tower House

Communications Report

The way St Mary-Le-Tower communicated with its congregation and wider community remained unchanged until the first quarter of 2020, at which point our communications strategy was turned upside down.

The first lockdown meant the start of livestreaming services. Thanks to Charles and Christopher Borrett, livestreaming is now a familiar part of what we do. This heralded a huge change to the way the choir sings and prepares for services, the way readers have to record the readings and email them to Charles and Mary, and ultimately the way we all worship.

PCC and various committee meetings had to take place virtually and we all had to learn how to use Zoom. This meant that people who hardly ever using such technology before, were now having to learn new ways of doing things, and sometimes there were a lot of frustrations when technology failed as it often does.

As the first lockdown came to an end the PCC decided to form a new Prayer and Social Media committee. As a group we had very little, if any, expertise in Social Media and, in our panic, we simply prayed. God listened to our prayers and sent us Stephen Cheek, a volunteer web designer who is also the Secretary of the SMLT bellringers, amongst many other things. Stephen has already been a huge asset as he continues to transform the SMLT website and keeps it up to date which is something we could not do without at present.

We were also very fortunate to have Kate Thompson, a member of our choir, a choir parent, an already successful blogger and a highly capable social media communicator, joining our committee. Kate's knowledge, her engaging style, her networking, and the way she has been managing our social media accounts has meant that SMLT is now well and truly on the online map. We are now getting followers in the hundreds, and at times in the thousands, from different interest groups and from different parts of the country and the world! Kate's virtual Christmas Tree Festival is again likely to draw thousands of people of all ages with lots of different interests from Ipswich and much further afield.

These changes in the way we are now communicating with our community has meant a lot of admin work behind the scenes. We have also made sure that, as well as continually updating our website and social media accounts and by livestreaming, we are not forgetting about those without access to these technologies. So we decided to that we needed a special publication for this group of people. This enlarged version of Parish eNews, which we are calling "eNews Plus" includes various other publications that other people are getting by email, such as Charles' sermons, is being delivered to this group.

As we do not have the capacity at present to produce Inspire, the quarterly parish magazine, we have also decided to start including news from various parts of the SMLT church community, such as the choir, bell ringers, Tower House etc. in both Parish eNews and eNews Plus.

Special thanks go to Susan Jenkin who has updated and continues to maintain our contact list to ensure that no one is being missed. Thanks also to Rosemary Caudle who has recently

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich – APCM REPORTS 2020 Group 2
Churchwarden, Communications, Music, Tower House

volunteered to put the eNews together on a fortnightly basis and the volunteers who have delivered letters in the past and those who have donated postage stamps!

This is new territory for us and we are continually learning and reviewing what we're doing so please send us articles you would like us to publish, let us know if you know of anyone who is not receiving a newsletter and of course any comments on how we can improve what we're doing.

Sonia Docherty, Chairperson, Communications Committee

Music Department

Choir Numbers

The choirs currently numbers around 60 singers, over half of whom are young people. Whereas this is clearly something of which to be very proud, it masks the reality that we have been unable to recruit choristers from local primary schools for the entirety of 2020. As a result of lockdown, the choir has lost 4 choristers (3 permanently). However, due to a growing partnership with Framlingham College, we have gained 3 choral scholars and a former chorister from Ipswich School. We have also gained a couple of very talented young adult sopranos who have moved to the area. We have also gained an excellent alto and a former chorister has returned to sing tenor.

To re-launch our chorister recruitment, the music department has developed an online plan, in which I will "Zoom" into school assemblies and play them a pre-recorded "be a chorister video." This has been planned and produced by the choir community and friends, both to take ownership of the choir's sustainability and also to create the video at no cost to the church. I had hoped to have started this "virtual recruiting" this November but as we cannot meet as a choir, I have postponed it until we can welcome chorister candidates for auditions and rehearsals.

Fallout from Covid-19 Pandemic

Prior to the Easter lockdown, the choir was enjoying a period of stability and growth, both musically and numerically. The weekend proceeding the lockdown was the Justice service at St Edmundsbury Cathedral, it was pleasing how significant a contribution our choir made to the occasion. Following a strong showing throughout the autumn and at Christmas, we embarked upon a plan to record a popular carol CD, to help with fundraising initiatives in the future. This was due to take place in April 2020 but has been postponed to July 2021. The funding is all in place for this project.

During lockdown, choir activities moved online. The choristers received weekly musical tuition (both in groups and individually) as well as a "Sunday School" session. The latter was more crucial than ever and had a huge bearing on the young people staying connected during this time. Furthermore, the choir embarked upon a weekly multi-tracked recording of an anthem to be used during the live-streamed Sunday Eucharist. Despite being a demanding process, the silver-linings were that a few younger choristers displayed great potential in the process of submitting their recordings. During the lockdown, the older members of the choir met weekly for quizzes and on occasions Zoom Compline, which although imperfect was much appreciated as a way of praying together.

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich – APCM REPORTS 2020 Group 2 Churchwarden, Communications, Music, Tower House

Since September, the choir has resumed in person, albeit with social distancing and rigorous risk assessments. The choir have adapted to the new normal much better than I feared. The choristers have done very well despite their lack of ongoing experience. Although the current schedule does not allow for the choristers to sing at the weekends, they are still enjoying singing in a 4-part choir as they are now joined by 6 adults for their midweek services. All the services have been live streamed via Facebook, with microphones and mixing desks used to produce the best possible audio at no significant cost to date.

Lunchtime concerts and Tower Chamber Choir concerts have not taken place during 2020. We hope to host a small number of lunchtime concerts in December.

I am most grateful to those who have contributed to SMLT's social media accounts. Combined with the live streaming, we have expanded our ministry significantly in this respect. I am also grateful for all the audio equipment loaned (gratis) to us by Framlingham College.

Plans for 2021

Plans will depend greatly on when/if social distancing is relaxed. The two main priorities for the choir are to maintain what we currently have in place and launch a well-timed and energetic chorister recruitment campaign. I hope during the early part of the year we can secure funding for a more integrated audio-visual equipment for live streaming. Aside from the proposed recording in July, I intend contact BBC radio 4 regarding a broadcast of a morning service, or perhaps even BBC Radio 3 to broadcast Evensong.

Although there is a significant reduction in department expenses, I would like to integrate more female and BAME composers into our music list. I feel that given our musical ability and growing online profile, it is important to keep in step with the times and debates surround the Anglican Choral Tradition.

I hope that by May 2021 we will be able to host a full season of lunchtime concerts. Given the demographic of the Tower Chamber Choir, we will need to judge carefully what is appropriate, but I hope to restart the ensemble in earnest in the spring.

I would like to record my thanks to Charles, Jo and PCC for their support this year. However, I would like to thank William, Lis and Matt for their efforts on a weekly basis to keep the choir community happy and functioning.

Christopher Borrett, Director of Music

Tower House Project Report

During 2019, work continued to bring new licensees into the building, attend to urgent maintenance matters, and understand better long term refurbishment issues including the heritage significance of Tower House. In May, the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) launched a new five year plan, and several members of the Interim Management Group (IMG) attended a training day for applications. However it was not yet clear how the new schemes would actually play out for the Tower House project.

In August, the PCC learned the precise terms of a major bequest to the project, some £333k for "The Development and Upkeep of the Tower Church Centre Project at 17 Tower St".

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich – APCM REPORTS 2020 Group 2 Churchwarden, Communications, Music, Tower House

This wording closely follows the descriptions in a letter sent to the SMLT congregation in early February 2014 outlining the Tower House project. It therefore clearly indicates that the bequest is intended for the North Wing project for a Parish Centre. This is a transforming amount of money, which is currently invested.

This gave the PCC confidence to increase the hours of the Business Development Manager and for the IMG to appoint a new architect experienced in heritage projects, as advice received had underlined that any support from a major heritage funder would require this. When Nicholas Jacob Architects were appointed, we were then put in touch with Spires Heritage who had a good track record in assisting churches in applying for major heritage funding. The PCC also authorised work to recommence in preparation for refurbishment of the North Wing parish centre project.

Spires Heritage advised that Tower House in itself would not be a sufficiently attractive building to attract major heritage funding on its own, but that a “Whole Campus” heritage project for the whole of the SMLT site, might indeed attract major funding for both development capital and staffing capacity for a project period of up to 7 years. This would be for a heritage development project involving a community centre at Tower House, refurbishment of SMLT church and churchyard as the Civic church with appropriate user facilities, refurbishment of Church House to support the rest of the project, together with significant support for the Choral Tradition of SMLT as an expression of lived heritage.

This was a very exciting prospect, which would bring together many of the long term development aims of SMLT into a coherent whole. However, as the IMG was preparing for an application for an initial capacity raising grant from NHLF (£95k), the Covid-19 Lockdown started and the NHLF scheme was suspended. At the present time NHLF is reopening the scheme, but it is not yet clear what the new application criteria are going to be.

Tower House Licensee Update

During the first lockdown, it was not at all clear what the demand for low cost office space would be post Covid. However now, at the present time, new enquiries are buoyant as community groups with grant funding for Covid and post-Covid funding are needing space.

At the present time, the continuing Licensees are:

- Caribbean and African Health Support Forum
- Disability Advice Bureau, who have taken additional front office space vacated by Ace Anglia as well as keeping their Internet Training room
- Got 2 Read (one to one work with adults learning to read)
- Outreach Youth (supporting LGBT young people)
- Oyster Press/Print Project
- Radius Computing (IT Training)

New business in recent months includes:

- Cards 4 Good Causes (following the closure of the Tourist Office in St Stephen Church)
- BME Suffolk, set up under the Big Local Grant funding stream for NW Ipswich0 , £3,000pa agreed.

St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich – APCM REPORTS 2020 Group 2
Churchwarden, Communications, Music, Tower House

- BSC Multicultural Services (19 Tower St) We are providing food bank storage free of charge in a space that is not suitable for a paying licensee.
- Ipswich Bike Kitchen (enquiry stage)

Looking Forward

1. It seems that for the time being, there is a reasonable prospect that Tower House operations can more or less break even with active encouragement of new licensees and supporting of existing licensees, but that we must expect continuing turnover.
2. The PCC has agreed that with the Bellamy legacy received it is right to explore with purpose, with plans, detailed costs and exploration of fundraising potential, whether a full north wing Parish Centre including a new Song School can now be achieved.
3. Meanwhile the PCC will continue to assess the potential of a “Whole Campus” Heritage Development Project.

Charles Jenkin, for the Interim Management Group