Presentations from the Annual Parish Meeting – 20th April 2023

# St Peter’s Church (Rex Stephenson)

2022 CHURCH REPORT VILLAGE ANNUAL APRIL 2023

Saint Peters was open during the Covid pandemic, unlike many churches, as a space for reflection and peace during particularly difficult times. It remains open daily thanks to Chris and Janet Fenton and you are all very welcome to use it as did many visitors in 2022 from Australia, New Zealand, USA, Germany, Italy, and France, as well as many folks from the UK, many of whom were visiting family graves.

2022 saw a full suite of services every Sunday. Many other parishes only have two services per month. The highlights were:

Our Layled Service on every fourth Sunday of the month taken by members of the village, which prove to be very popular. Penny Smales will be taking the service this Sunday St George’s Day.

Our well attended community services such as Plough Sunday, Rogation Sunday where we walked around the Parish, our Patronal Service for Saint Peter with wonderful flower arrangements. In August, we held a successful Hymns and Pimms service devised by Patrick Willis. Harvest Festival was followed by a Ploughman‘s lunch and successful sale of produce, thanks to the excellent auctioneer in Alex Biddulph and we remembered our Fallen at a Remembrance Service in Ansty this year.

Speaking of which, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has designated our churchyard as an official Commonwealth War Grave site and to reflect this a notice was placed on the upper gate. Captain Percy Noad RE received an official CWGC marker on his grave this morning, 105 years after he died of his wounds in Cliffe House, possibly in my bedroom. I am trying to get a similar marker for the Tanner grave. He died and is buried in Gallipoli, Turkey.

The year ended with a well-attended Christmas candlelit carol service with village choir and candlelit midnight Mass.

We held one funeral and 2 internments of ashes this year. There are currently 36 members of the Parish Electoral Roll.

We are fortunate in having a sturdy and pretty church and in 2022 there were no major fabric problems apart from the upper churchyard wall, which started to collapse by the upper gate in November. Colin Avery, an excellent stonemason, has recently completed its repair in early March. All the gutterings and the flagpole were refurbished and repainted by Joseph Peacock this year. We are blessed in having the charity Then Friends of Saint Peter’s Church to help us meet many of these costs. Thanks go out to its Chairman, Jim Carless, the Trustees and all of you who contribute to this fund that helps keep our lovely church in good order. Many thanks.

Financially like many rural parishes we bump along the bottom. In 2022 we had to find just over £14,000 as our annual share to the running costs of the clergy and the administration of the Benefice. We can only meet 2/3 of this requirement despite the best efforts of our fundraising team led by Caroline Willis and her excellent Quiz and Curry nights and the Open Garden event last year. Many of you will have read about the dire straits of rural parishes in the national newspapers and on the radio. Within this Benefice, there are urgent discussions about the future viability of some of our beautiful churches in particular our neighbours Sutton Mandeville. In an increasingly agnostic society, the running of our parishes needs continued and increased support. The Parochial Church Council is vital in doing this and a big vote of thanks goes to them all in particular Nigel Cooke and his volunteers looking after both of our churchyards, Penny Smales and her team helping keep everything clean and spotless and Beth Porter Wright and her flower arrangers producing the most stunning floral displays. A special thank you to Janet Fenton who has looked after the services and who stands down next week.

Looking ahead we have our Annual Meeting on 25th April at 7pm in the Church, Ring For The King on Coronation Day and Sing For the King at the Coronation Service on Sunday 7 May.

Our Church represents the history and the heart of this village with Sir Thomas West and the Abbess of Shaftesbury in the Church porch, our beautiful stained glass windows and our Churchyard with all its history and memories. This all needs your continued and increased support both in using the church but also volunteering to help in its management. The Church can be used for a variety of wider events so do not hesitate to speak to a PCC Member if you would like to use it. Many thanks for your support.

DHR Stephenson PCC Lay Vice Chairman

# Royal Oak (Chris Bryett)

The Royal Oak, Swallowcliffe – Annual Parish Village Meeting 20/04/2023

Firstly can I say, once again, a huge thank you to everyone in the village and immediate surrounding area for your ongoing commited support to the cause of this, now quite rare, English country Inn.

I am constantly lifted by the camaraderie, positivity and devotion of our village folk, not just regarding the pub, but village life and the necessities of the parish in general… Well done all, long may it continue.

Past Year:

The pub has enjoyed another fairly successful year and we continue to strive to be the best in the area with regards all aspects of food,drink and service.

The Summer saw an increase in drink sales, thanks to the wonderful weather, “it were cracking flags” as they say in North Yorkshire. The food stayed relatively buoyant and similar figures to the previous year.

The Autumn was fairly tough and we saw a slight fall on previous FY over the months of September, October and November.

Christmas was a success and with the giant tree and excellent work the housekeeping team do decorating the interior of the pub, I do believe we have the best looking Christmas pub in the surrounding area.

The team enjoyed looking after the village once again with the annual Village Christmas evening and hope you all enjoyed yourselves, we look forward to the get together again in December.

We feel we deliver the bigger functions and get togethers as well as anyone, especially considering the quality and structure of our food offer, something the kitchen team will not compromise on, and I feel this is emphasised by the support of you villagers who have entrusted your special occasions with us on many occasions over my time here … these are never easy but please keep trusting

January to March has been pretty successful and we enjoyed a YOY (year on year) increase of 26% for this period … in the main due to us being able to understand the winter footfall here from what was the first period we were open after Covid this time 2022. The decision to drop prices on our rooms Sun-Thurs and our 2 course lunch offer certainly proved effective top line although bottom line suffered as it was forecast to do.

We do take pretty good money through the tills for a country pub yet the increased cost of quality produce, utilities, oil, labour and other services is seriously decimating any profit lines. The myth that you open a pub, well a successful one anyway, and you then reap the benefits is now a complete misconception … ask all the dedicated publicans who have closed their doors for good in 2023. Please continue to support … We need you all.

Upkeep:

 Its been a tough year to warrant any great spend at The Oak although we have been quick to recover and replenish behind the scenes as a lot of kitchen equipment needed attention/replacing

We have committed to …

• Car park pot holes will once again be professionally filled and compacted with a steel tamper. Again this will only serve temporarily but is still the most cost affective way of maintaining the parking area.

• The damaged wall (or rubble pile) running parralell to and alongside the stream has now been sympathetically rebuilt at a fair expense as it required quality masonry skills and Ed Closier certainly was the skilled man to do it.

• All the ugly brambles and overgrown bushes to the left of the car park as you drive in have been chopped and removed and we will look to further the area by the stream … and no still no commitment to start work on the stone outbuilding but watch this space!

• You will notice the external back garden chairs and tables have been temporarily placed to the front of the building (how temporary I am yet to decide) this is due to us having to concentrate our efforts on trying to improve the grassed area to the rear of the property which has certainly taken a battering over the summer months, autumn leaf fall and indeed winter frosts … Can I just take a moment to thank The Bright family, Chris especially for their advice and assistance with this area and ongoing monitoring and tending to the lawn it really is appreciated. Sorry all Coronation exterior plans were shelved.

Other News and Whats ahead…

• Pétanque grows at The Oak, after a really enjoyable season 2022 our 2 teams celebrated at Sue and David Brights at the end of the season then over Christmas Supper in Dec. Great camaraderie and a real warmth amongst the 2 teams looks like it may increase our players this next season … Well done all involved great efforts

• You may have noticed the departure of most probably the best chef in the area, Jonny Sutcliffe in September but then his return at the beginning of April which we are all delighted about I hope you are too and please support us as we are putting together some themed food and wine evenings over the next few months

• Quiz Night continues to thrive and remains one of our busiest evenings each month so thank you to all in the village who show up each first Monday of the month. Please support where you can.

• We are looking to put together an external afternoon event or 2 but stay non committed until we see how our lawn develops but again watch this space … I promise it will be worth a visit.

If anyone needs further information from me or the pub or indeed if you have ideas, upcoming celebrations or functions please do not hesitate in contacting me/pub

Thanks again all of you this is a fabulous little community and am proud to be a part of it

Chris