

Report for Great Bealings PC Annual meeting 21st May 2025

Last year's report referred to the role which the church has played in the village for many years, over and beyond that of being the venue for regular church services.

The church has over those years been the setting for many other events, concerts, exhibitions, cultural evenings, talks etc. In the past year we have held a tribute concert to the late Jill Ganzoni, a figure of county-wide significance, which produced a full church and raised around £1000. We also held a Pride in Heritage Day, again bringing in people from way outside the village – one young man coming from as far as Sussex to pay tribute to a distant ancestor of his, who funded our very valuable organ. The church matters to people way beyond this village. The most recent event has been the staging of an exhibition commemorating VE Day plus 80. This was just the latest of those special days and commemorations of national significance which have been celebrated in our church for hundreds of years, with congregations probably reflecting quite a wide diversity of beliefs. There have been few weddings recently, a reflection of current demographics, but three recent funerals, all of which being for people now outside the village but with strong links to it.

So our reach extends way beyond the parish boundary. For many people, practising Christians or not, it is an integral part of the village, and a focus of a range of activities. For that reason it should be in the collective interests of the parish as a whole to keep it going, both as a place of religious worship, and as a place for community events.

To that end the PCC is moving forward with plans to make the back of the church more suitable for more social gatherings, for events of wider community interest. While the PCC is fully aware that there are joint social facilities in Little Bealings, St Mary's Church is the only possible focal point for activities exclusive to this, our own parish. It offers a beautiful setting, and a special ambiance to all.

Its future remains uncertain. Our Benefice link with St Mary's, Woodbridge offers advantages - the support of a larger church, its excellent choir, and significant additional attendance at some services. There are also challenges, in that our interests could easily be swallowed up by those of our larger neighbour. There was talk of our becoming a Festival Church, with no regular services. That could still be a possibility, if that were the only way of securing our financial security, but has so far been resisted. The PCC is fully persuaded that an independent village needs to preserve its own identity, with a regularly practising church, if financially viable. We are challenged financially, given low attendances, but we have a loyal, stable and committed PCC, determined to maintain that special village identity, and to keep

fighting for a church which can continue to offer something for a wide range of village residents, not just those who do attend the church services.

We welcome all the support that the PC and its members offer us, particularly help with maintaining the churchyard. Our annual churchyard clear-up morning brought in some 20 people, many of them not regular churchgoers. We would like to see this as evidence that concern for the future of an active church extends way beyond those who regularly attend services.

Norman Porter. Churchwarden May 2025. (A personal view – not shared with other PCC members)