

The Friends of St James Church Swimbridge Newsletter Spring 2021

Dear Friends and supporters of St James Church

We do hope you are keeping safe and well during Covid-19. Things do seem to be improving at last, although our Spring talks in March will still need to be held via Zoom. This Newsletter gives details of two of our talks – we may be scheduling more – plus a report on progress from David Netherway on our projects.



The Snowdrops donated a few years ago by Jessica Duncan, a member of the Friends, put on a fantastic display in the Streamside Garden this January.

Swimbridge Q&As Spring 2021

Dates for your diaries:

Thursday 18 March at 7.30 via Zoom

Mark Haworth-Booth: *The Listed Buildings of Swimbridge*

Mark will pick out some of our most interesting sites and buildings, listed by Historic England for their architectural or historical interest. These include the Deserted Medieval Village at Welcombe Farm and the Model Farm built for the Duke of Bedford at Dinnaton Barton in the 1850s, plus the workers houses built nearby. We also have the grander houses at Tordown and Dennington where the Rev John Russell ('Parson Jack') lived, plus many beautiful farmhouses, our Grade 1 Listed church itself and the park, gardens and house at Castle Hill.

Thursday 25 March at 7.30 via Zoom

Paul Scott: *From slums to suburbia – a family history journey*

Paul writes: This story is based around my great-gran and a few generations of her family; starting in the 19th century it follows their move from the countryside to an urban

environment. Like many thousands of others they found themselves living in hastily constructed, densely packed housing surrounded by poverty and disease. Over the decades following, they gradually moved from these areas to live relatively comfortable lives in better conditions. This is an attempt to follow the events in that journey and the lives of those around them. It may be closer to home than you think!

Please email markhaworthbooth@gmail.com for the Zoom links to these free talks.

The Friends' Projects in a year of Covid-19

The Old School Room

Funding had been obtained in the previous year for the refurbishment of the Upper Room in the Old School Room. Grants, enthusiastic volunteers and local business support resulted in a really well received upgrade of the room and set it up for hosting more events and art exhibitions.



This was happening with the growing popularity of the Parson Jack's Studio Café events, (with many thanks to the drive of Rita Woodhead) and art display – further events were booked and art exhibitions planned when Covid intervened.



Parson Jack's Studio Café – Covid compliant with notices, spaced out tables etc

Unfortunately, as with everything in 2020, it all had to stop. We hope 2021 and beyond will be better.

Work on the planning of the major upgrade of the Old School Room and the local community and Jack Russell archive has continued. By the end of the year plans had been agreed. The complex problems of balancing the importance of the historic fabric with the need to meet the needs of the 21st C – including accessibility plus a proper toilet for the church, Upper Room and Preschool – had been agreed. Planning Consent and a Diocesan Faculty have been obtained for the work.

The challenge now is to obtain the funding. This is a bigger challenge now as most of the major funders reduced or paused their grants and focused on Covid recovery. Normal fundraising events have been impossible. However, let us not despair. We have all the plans and consents in place to start work as soon as funds are there. We have had an offer to meet the cost of the new kitchen. There may be ways to break the project up into smaller elements delivered over time. With local help there are ways that cost could be trimmed. Funders are beginning to open up again. The popular Antiques Road Trip TV show last year focused on Jack Russell and his terriers and gave some welcome publicity to the village and our heritage.



Antiques Roadtrip presenter putting terriers through their paces

Throughout the pandemic the Preschool has operated within the Covid rules to provide for our village young children. This is a service the church is happy to support.

The Churchyard and Streamside Garden

Volunteers, working within the Covid rules, kept the churchyard and Streamside Garden looking well cared for. A generous private donation and support from the Friends enabled maintenance work to be done – before the lockdown – on the yew trees and the trees along the stream boundary. As this work affected trees with preservation orders, or within the Conservative Area, local authority consent was required. This had delayed the work from the previous year. Lower branches of the yews were encroaching on graves beneath. The trees were tidied up and brambles and ivy removed. Large alders on the riverbank were thinned out, letting in more light and allowing views of the church. Dead elms were

removed. Funds donated to the Friends in memory of Anne Hayes, and from an earlier Open Gardens fundraiser, were used to replace a dying cherry tree with a crab apple. A new Stepping Stone Path was installed in memory of Anne Hayes: the stones are engraved with the words of the hymn 'One more step along the road I go'.



Martyn Fry and David Netherway installing the new Stepping Stone Path

The Pulpit

Trustees and members will know that structural problems and an act of vandalism meant that repair and maintenance work are needed on the medieval carved stone pulpit.

The Friends organised, and with the help of a ChurchCare grant, paid for investigation and reports by McNeilage Conservation. After negotiations and advice from the Diocese a faculty was granted later in 2020. The cost will be about £12,500 (plus recoverable VAT) including work on the mediaeval paintwork. Grants have been offered from ChurchCare, Devon Historic Churches Trust, Swimbridge Ecclesiastical Charity and the Archdeacon's Fund. These total £8000. Other applications are waiting for responses. Any suggestions for fundraising welcome are, of course, very welcome.

Finance

We have managed better than expected through lockdown thanks to the generosity of you, our Friends and supporters. The Donations Button now installed on the church website – www.swimbridgeparishchurch.org – has also helped. If you can Gift Aid your membership subscription or donation that is much appreciated. We offer grateful thanks for the generous donations made in memory of Mrs Elspeth Harland. We mourn the loss of one of our founder members, Arnold Bradbury. A warm welcome to our newest members, Andrea and David Chance. Finally, warmest thanks to Rita Woodhead, who gave so much time, imagination and effort to our community: we wish Rita all the best in her new life in Surrey. Thanks to David for the photos.

With gratitude and best wishes to you all,

Mark Haworth-Booth, Secretary of the Friends of St James 20 February 2012