

Report for Sutton Church 2017 to Parish Council

There are many changes afoot within Sutton Church and we are sitting in one of them now. We hope you like it. But I'll come back to the hall.

Last summer Rev Cathy Sigrist told us she would be leaving and since mid-Nov 2016 we have been without our own vicar. The C of E is now so short of vicars, with around 50% due to retire by 2020 in the Canterbury Diocese, that except in exceptional circumstances, a benefice needs 10,000 residents to have it's own vicar and our benefice of Sutton, Ripple, Ringwould and Kingsdown has 3,500. So we will at present be able to offer only a part-time post.

With this situation 'foreseeable' discussion had taken place several years ago to unite the benefice into becoming one parish. This required all 4 parishes to agree and Sutton did not. But with no vicar and little hope of one, Philip Down our archdeacon met the churchwardens and discussions produced a new proposal which is to unite the benefice as one parish, with Ringwould as the parish church and making SS Peter and Paul church Sutton, St Mary's Ripple and St John's Kingsdown Chapels of Ease.

This is not to be confused with Chapels of Rest. The 'Ease' is in the regulations. Canon Law states that a Parish Church must have a Holy Communion Service every week (we have 2 a month) and morning and evening prayers daily (we have none). Technically Sutton church has been a Chapel of Ease for many years.

During the discussions we were referred to as the Kingsdown benefice, which was found wanting and so the Parish of Cornilo Churches was proposed, and though not universally liked has received an almost unanimous vote from the 4 PCCs Cornilo Hundred is an ancient jurisdiction in which all 4 parishes are situated and is named in the Domesday Book .

The Diocese has also proposed that if we become one parish, and it looks like we will given the progress to date, our new parish will join with the Parish of Walmer (which has 3 churches) and become a new benefice with 1.5 to 1.7 vicars. In the circumstances this is probably the best option.

Now to this hall:

Back in 2012 Cathy suggested that with it nearing it's centenary and in need of renovation and with a desire by the PCC to provide activities to serve our community we make a list of necessities. The PCC called in architects, planning permission was granted, fund raising began, builders submitted estimates and then the churchyard wall started to crumble.

The churchyard wall has been a test of the tenacity and patience for my fellow warden John Boardman, as he has sought to get all the necessary permissions against the unhelpfulness and misinformation of DDC. He has got the price down to £25,000 from £37,000, but it is money that the PCC would far rather spend elsewhere. My very grateful thanks go to John. It is a real pleasure to have the privilege to work with him.

The church organ has also been overhauled for the first time since it came to Sutton church although it has had regular servicing. That renovation cost £9000 but the organ is a gem.

Back to the hall.

The significant cost to the wall was unexpected and unwelcome. The PCC decided to split the renovation work to the hall into 2 parts. Phase 1 which is as you see apart from window blinds, some more chairs and new doors to the kitchen /toilet area for which we're awaiting fire safety advice. The wooden screen and altar have been removed, the kitchen updated, hot water, new floor, new lighting and a disable access have been added. It's been decorated inside and out. And we have this great new screen available to hall users and as a PCC and mission group lots of ideas for using it that will hopefully encourage us as a community to get together eg Messy church, Sunday at 6, sporting fixtures, national events etc

For all this we would like to say how very grateful we are for Steve Manion's Members grant of £2,500, some very generous personal and often anonymous donations, and all the work done by volunteers to raise funds, Ann Ford's table top sales, church fetes, Let's be Sociable etc

Heartfelt thanks also to the hard work done by volunteers for clearing, storing and returning items to the hall. But especial thanks must go to Andrew Fleetwood who has managed all the works, bidding, grant sourcing and timetabling, as well as painting and tiling to ensure the hall was out of action for the least amount of time possible. The decorative design and finishing touches are down to Rachel Fleetwood, whom we heartily thank and I'm sure you'll agree has done an excellent job.

Phase 2 will happen once funding allows, hopefully within the next 12 months, and will consist of an extension to replace the porch, offering a disabled toilet one side and storage the other. We will also upgrade the power supply, add a new window and generally make the hall the 'Go to' place.

So we, as a church, as a PCC, feel we have a very exciting future. Change is challenging but it's the way we respond to it that really matters and the PCC is full of hope.