

**St. Mary's Parish Church with the Seckford Chapel  
Woodbridge**

**Chairman's Annual Report 2013**

John 20.1-18

<sup>1</sup>Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' which means Teacher. <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' <sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

This, our Easter gospel reading this year. Three aspects of the story are significant for my purposes this evening.

1. Mary doesn't recognise Jesus straight away
2. After she has done so she clings on to him:
3. She announces to the disciples 'I have seen the Lord'.

I try and have a different approach to this report every year. Last year I began by saying: 'Episode 3 of *Titanic, with Len Goodman* was shown on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012. The programme ended with this comment, and I quote 'the story is not about the ship – it's about the people.'" This year my story is about ship and people.

Mary doesn't recognise Jesus straight away for all sorts of reasons. One of them is that she is so caught up in her own world of grief that she fails to see beyond it. I'm not making a judgement about grief or grieving; that is a vital process in our emotional response when someone has died. My comment serves only to help us understand that sometimes our eyes become blinkered to a world about us. Sometimes this is justified, sometimes not. Our Annual Report is a mechanism through which, once a year, we can evaluate for ourselves the contribution we personally have made to the overall wellbeing of our parish church, as building and community, and value the contribution that so many others have made too. Just for a moment, let's be blinkered and ignore the outside world!

The number of individual contributions in the report, as in the past, is evidence of so much going on. Day by day, and week by week, the life of our community thrives and is served by each of you witnessing to your commitment to God. As always a lot of background time and energy makes the show possible. A play in a theatre is much more than the actors on the stage. So it is with us. What I want you to do with me, just for a moment, to isolate in mind those who never write a report, nor offer their name or service given in print, but knowing that without their contribution to our church, and community, our life would be the poorer. I acknowledge therefore now the contribution you all make, whatever that is, and say thank you. Unlike Mary we need to open our eyes, look beyond ourselves and really appreciate what we see: a building well maintained in its structure, a place of light and love, of prayer and peace, and filled with energy; a spirituality which congregation and visitor are drawn to and clearly appreciate. This is the home of our daily prayer and praise, and our Sunday worship. Thank you to those who make it possible. And, as we are in this room, thanks to Susan for the shop, Heather for her unstinting work and loyalty, and Myrtle for keeping the building as a well-used and living place.

We have witnessed considerable upheaval with on-going repairs and there is more to come. I am extremely grateful for the response that generated the Friends of St. Mary's, and wish to publically acknowledge my thanks to those who are working so hard to raise the money that will support our on-going repairs over the next quinquennial period, and hopefully, support projects that the Parochial Church Council feel appropriate to pursue. To help stimulate some real thinking about both those things, I have asked a number of experienced people to meet with me as an informal building strategy group. Our aim, and I quote from agreed Terms of Reference: 'to produce a Strategic Plan for the buildings of St. Mary's Church and St. Mary's Church Centre. The Plan will be for the next five years and will focus on the primary aim of the church – its mission – and how extended use of the building can enhance the core function of the church.'<sup>1</sup> Their work will be presented to the Parochial Church Council during the year.

I learned to say a marriage blessing in Greek for a wedding in June! The Flower Festival was a tremendous success in July, the Reverend Aidan Platten, a previous curate, came to preach at our Harvest Festival and the Rt Revd Nigel Stock, Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, licensed the Reverend Canon Penny Brown as Assistant Priest in November. Christmas and Easter were as they always are – a tiring but extraordinary rewarding time for everyone. Bishop Nigel came and preached last Friday evening at the town of Woodbridge

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<sup>1</sup> Proposed terms of reference to be approved by the PCC.

Service to Celebrate Community Life (Civic Service). The multi faith feel of the service grew into something ever so slightly controversial and the Bishop led us through it with an outstanding address. Thank you to him. It is to everyone here, and those reading this soon, that I extend my appreciation for all the love and hard work that made these events possible and successful.

Learn on a Monday (LOAM), Monday Talks, Emmaus: all resting at the moment. But a deepening of our spirituality is offered through our worship, prayer walks, quiet days, contemplative prayer and the ministry of healing.

And lastly, looking back, we have been saddened by the deaths of a number in our congregation and I extend our love to all those bereaved.

Jesus speaks and Mary recognises him. In that moment of intense personal encounter she hugs or grabs or holds tight and doesn't want to let go. Similarly we cannot hold on to what has been. We recognise the good and the not so good in the year. We acknowledge our short comings. I don't always get it right. But I try and let it go and start again. As a community of people we must be vigilant so that we don't get stuck in our own ways of doing things, continually expecting the same people to do the same jobs, or relying by default, on the same level or quality of contribution in any given area. People need to rest, to have a change, to be inspired into new ways of contributing to our life. We need not to stifle the working of the Holy Spirit, which seeks always to re-present the love of God with newness and a dynamic which stirs up new life and love within. I am conscious of my responsibility to recognise the wonder, the glory if you like, of who we are as a community, and the glory of God in each face, in each one of you, in the beautiful building behind me, and all that is revealed through that which the building offers to us and the wider community.

This is the spring board for mission, defined as offering what we believe to be true to the wider community. Understanding what that really is, and how we do it, is articulating a vision. My job, I think, is to give a lead, to be a guide, and to encourage you to articulate a vision, to own it, and to reach objectives that will help it be a reality.

Mary announces to the disciples 'I have seen the Lord'. As Christian people, in our pilgrimage to discover the truth, we are commissioned by the gospel and through our own commitment to it, to tell the world that we have seen the Lord. This is dynamic. This is exciting. This is the powerful stuff of a story I believe it is possible to relate to and own. It helps me understand who I am. I want to invite others to have the same experience of living. However this is worked out in everyday life in this place must be a strategy that we all are comfortable with and can work with. What we then do we must do together:

'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all

prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.’<sup>2</sup>

Then we move into the famous chapter 1 Corinthians 13. Sharing our love affair with God is our task.

I cannot do this by myself. I need your help. The support of every member of our church is vital. I need the resources of all the groups represented in our report. I need the resources of the Churchwardens, clergy, Readers, Parochial Church Council, Elders; those of us with particular responsibilities: we all need to wait on God. We need to pray that he will manifest himself through the gift of the Spirit in each of us. As Penny said on Sunday: ‘The challenge for each of us as individuals and corporately as the body of Christ in our churches is to speak less, listen more, listen for the voice of the Lord calling us to follow him and to echo the words of Christ each day ‘Thy will Lord not mine be done.’”<sup>3</sup>

You and I are called. We have a vocation. So we listen to the voice of our God and hear his voice in each other. We reach out to those who want to search for the truth, as we do, and we reveal that love is everything as we confront the injustices of our world and say, yes, we are here for you.

I cannot do this by myself – will you help?

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12.27-31: NIV

<sup>3</sup> Reverend Canon Penny Brown: Sermon Sunday 210413