

Arkesden Annual General Meeting – 15th May 2023

Village Reports

Arkesden Bell Ringers – Steve Elvidge

After the restrictions caused by Covid, it has been good to be back to "ordinary" ringing over the past 12 months or so, without being masked up or socially distanced. Needless to say, we were somewhat ropey (no puns please - Ed.) at first but we're improving - though that view is probably subjective as we hear fewer of our clangers (what did I just say? - Ed.) from the ringing chamber than from outside.

We have managed to ring at most of the two Sunday services each month and last year we also rang at all four weddings that took place. The bells also rang out at the carol, Christmas and Easter services. We also rang for the Queens Platinum Jubilee, half muffled for her funeral, and for the Coronation of King Charles III.

On 13 May 2023, at our Wednesday night practices have continued and we're looking forward to being able to return to the Axe to refresh ourselves after all the exertion; the Cricketers just isn't the same.

However, we do need some new ringers. Candidly, we've had to cancel a number of practices as the band is only seven and with six bells, it only takes a couple of absentees for it not to be viable. Similarly, we've had to draft in ringers from other local churches for some of the weddings because of holidays, etc. And moreover, though you wouldn't think it to look at us, one or two of us are no longer in the first flush of youth and without new blood, there is a danger that gradually the bells will fall silent and a long-standing village tradition will die. Given three of the bells in the tower were cast in 1701, so we're talking about over 350 years of bells ringing out in Arkesden, this would be a great shame. So, an appeal (I give up - Ed.), especially to newcomers to the village, to come along on a Wednesday at 8 o'clock and see what's involved. You do not need to be at all musical and the exercise you get is both physical and mental, so it ticks the wellbeing boxes!"

Cricket Club – Craig Dyce

As usual, the Pheasants cricket fixture list in 2022 focused on quality rather than quantity. Our four fixtures started with a visit to Stocking Pelham. This is usually our banker for a winning start to any campaign, but Stocking didn't read the script and we left with our tails between our legs and Captain Crabb muttering to himself.

The less said about the Clavering 20/20 game the better. Naught from two games demanded immediate and decisive action in the form of bringing in ringers. They duly arrived for the Manuden game, and Inigo Grose and mate set about some wayward bowling with abandon. Some excellent bowling from Christou Jnr ensured that the Pheasants romped to victory much to Captain Dyce's delight. The final fixture at Chrishall saw a very youthful team not quite manage to pull off an impressive run chase.

2023 will see the same full fixture list with the first match on Sunday 28th May against Stocking.

Friends of Arkesden Church – Tina McLean

The balance in the Friends account in May was £69,100, plus a further £2,700 which is waiting to be banked once the Friends application for Gift Aid has been approved. The only notable expense was for insurance for running events.

The focus of the Friends activities in the year was more on bringing people into the church than on pure fundraising, most notably the Christmas Tree Festival and the Easter Celebration of Spring.

The Chair asked the meeting to note thanks to Debbie May who recently left the committee and whose hard work and generosity over many years will be missed. We welcomed Wendy Seaton and Sarah

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Roberts to the committee this year and our continuing thanks to the other committee members - Ally Poultney, Sara Evans, Marion Shave, Ann Scott, Suzanne Andrews and Charlotte Pellew.

History Society – Rupert Bull

Last year, we had three meetings (the fourth having to be canceled due to wet weather): firstly a fascinating talk by Jeff Edmunds with exhibits of his detecting in and around the parish of Arkesden dating back to Roman times; secondly a talk by Professor Clark of Exeter University on the appropriation of Parishes by Religious Communities during the late medieval and leading into the disorder caused by the Acts of supremacy and the dissolution; and finally a talk by Simon Coxall in the Church pointing out some, often unnoticed parts that reveal its old history long before the great restoration on 1855 (of the fabric), not least the possible existence of an anchorite's cell just west of the north door. Unfortunately, a field walk exercise just North of Stephen's land and east of the site of Foster's farm had to be cancelled due to wet and hazardous ground.

Activity this year has had to be curtailed due to some personal health problems and an increased need to attend to my parents' needs. I hope these will be resolved by next year and normal activity resumed. I do though now have enough interest to start the archive and hope to finalise a location and get to work in putting it in place.

Millennium Field Review – Tom Macfadyen

Firstly, I'd like to extend thanks to the Forster family for continuing to make the Millennium Field available for village use.

There has been a royal theme to the Millennium Field activities over the last year, from organising the beacon lighting for the Platinum Jubilee to the Coronation picnic on the village green. It was great to have such great village support and turnouts for both events.

We plan to run the family camp out again this summer, as well as some new activities. The ideas include a village dog show, a children's five a side football tournament and a rounders match.

We are starting to plan for the replacement of the main climbing frame and rubber matting which are getting closer to end of life. Substantial fundraising will be required to finance the replacements, which will need to come from a combination of grants, donations and fundraising activities.

We are always looking for volunteers to join the committee so please get in touch if you would like to help.

Parochial Church Council – Holly Greenhow

Arkesden PCC has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent in promoting in the Ecclesiastical parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical. The PCC was glad to welcome Holly Greenhow in June. They were then sad to lose the membership of Susan Erb but was most grateful to welcome Allison Poultney in her place.

With the challenges facing the PCC and congregation following the pandemic with reduced church attendance and losses of membership, the PCC felt that it would be wrong to proceed with the re-ordering project without consulting the village on their wishes for the future of the parish church. A meeting was held in May which was attended by the PCC and 52 village residents. There was widespread support for the continuation of the church as a place of worship but also willingness to consider other uses and for the community to take more responsibility for the upkeep of the building.

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A working group of PCC members, church members and non-churchgoing village residents was formed and met three times subsequently. The relationship of the church and the village hall has come under question and the working group is now planning on a second village consultation to discuss how that might work.

The worship pattern has been changed to one Morning Prayer service on the first Sunday and one Holy Communion on the second Sunday, both at 9.30 a.m. We continue to enjoy the services of John Evans as our organist on those days, supported by his wife, Jenny.

The joint Messy Church between Arkesden, Wicken Bonhunt, Clavering and Berden had been held at the Clavering Christian Centre six times in 2022. This had got off to a rocky start during the pandemic and attendance continues to be patchy but support is growing. The team is led by Jane Woodhouse from Clavering and supported by Cathy Miles as well as members of the other churches.

In Autumn 2020 the church architect undertook the Quinquennial Inspection and submitted his report. It was decided that the bulk of the external repairs would be undertaken along with some minor internal repairs. The majority of the internal repairs were of a minor nature and it was decided that it would be prudent to delay these and include them as part of the proposed re-ordering project. Following a selective tendering process held during 2021, FW Valiant were appointed to undertake the works during the summer of 2022. The works included repairs to the tower's lead roof, the restoration of the weathervane, stonework repairs and conservation, some slate roof repairs and other minor cleaning, decoration and repairs. Separately the shed roof was replaced.

Church Attendance

In 2022, the number of parishioners on the Electoral Roll dropped to 28 as a result of a couple moving away. The average weekly attendance has increased to pre covid numbers this year to 14. In the autumn Arkesden welcomed 22 congregants for the Harvest Festival on 9th October and had a very generous response to our Foodbank appeal. The Carol Service was attended by 72 adults and 6 children and the Christmas children's workshop was well supported. Arkesden had 61 persons celebrate together on Christmas Day with 28 communicants. This year we had a Christmas Tree Festival in the church with village organisations and individuals filling the church with trees.

- The full PCC met four times during the year – March, June, September and November.
- In 2022, there were four weddings, one baptism and one funeral.

Four Deanery Synod meetings, including a Deanery Service at which the new Diocesan Bishop, Rt Revd Guli Dehqani, were held in 2022.

Village Hall – Simon Coop

The balance as of 1st June 2022 was £18,607; the current balance as of May 2023 is £8,364. Most of the recurrent income derives from Village Hall hire, the lion's share from Dyce Fitness. However, the Village Hall did successfully secure a one-off grant for drainage work. The Village Hall thanked, as always, the Parish Council for their annual donation.

The main expenditure over the last year was works for drainage, installing acoustic panels and the purchase of new chairs. The October Quiz night and Christmas bash were well attended and continue to be enjoyed.

Plans for next year include the Christmas Bash on 3rd December and the quiz at a date to be confirmed in October. Additional activities include aspirations to gain funding to repair, sand and varnish the floor.

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Village News – Rupert Bull

Last year, we published five editions with the extra Jubilee supplement that I hope you all enjoyed and a bumper Christmas edition. We are just completing the second edition of this year which will include a centre section on the coronation. It is important to remember that the magazine is dependent on your contributions, a highlight last year was the Clerk's description of the great pilgrimage route of the Camino of St James. We would love to hear of your year off travels and works, or events that happened years ago, or your sporting endeavours at a local sports club, football, hockey, Rugby or Cricket for adults or children (this information can be useful to other parents or new arrivals), please send them in. Please also send me your Children's birthday dates so that they can be celebrated in the magazine as well.