



***The Friends of St. Michael's
Cyfeillion Eglwys Sant Mihangel***

Newsletter – November 2020

COVID -19 and St Michael's

As for everyone, it has been a very strange and difficult year indeed.

We started the year 2020 with high hopes of achieving lots of goals and welcoming more visitors to the ancient and historic church of St Michael's. However, due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, we were unable to open the church at Easter tide as we normally do, and as I write this, we are in yet another Lockdown.

As a consequence of the Pandemic, we have been unable to open at all this year, except on 3 Saturdays in mid-September. However, those that did visit were appreciative of our efforts. The church is now currently closed to all visitors over the autumn and winter period. We will hopefully re-open in the Spring of 2021, around Easter time.

We did take advantage of the enforced closure to undertake some work on and around the building. During the summer, we did more work in the Vestry, which still needs to be finished. We employed a local builder to repair various window frames and paint them all on the exterior. The main door has also now been treated and looks much better.

We have installed 2 water butts taking water from the Vestry roof, so folk tending graves can obtain water easily. It will also be easier during our Flower Festivals.

The “new” Lytch Gate has been repaired, slipped and missing slates replaced and some timbers replaced and the whole painted. It now looks cared for and welcoming.

We were unable to hold the Flower Festival this year, but do hope that 2021 will see this back in our calendar. As we write, it is unlikely that we shall be able to hold the traditional Candle-light Carol Service in December because of the constraints of Social Distancing. We estimate that maybe only about 12 persons could safely be accommodated so if we do hold the service, it will feel hugely different! For similar reasons, we were unable to hold our normal service of Holy Eucharist on St Michael's Day (29th September) although 4 of the Trustees did share a short service of Evening Prayer. We had our first attempt at recording the service to share with others. A link to the recording



One of the water butts installed over the summer

can be found on our Facebook page (at <http://www.facebook.com/stmichaelsbetws>).

Plans for 2021 and the future

We still hope to complete the Churchyard Trail highlighting several of the more notable graves in the church yard. Several of these need to be repaired and cleaned and plans are in hand to do this. We also want to add information and notice boards in both Lytch Gates and complete the information leaflet about the effigy of Dafydd ap Gruffydd Goch. A lot of research was done about him a while ago, and work was started on a new leaflet. We wish to continue with this.

We also want to re-paint the interior of the window frames, and the main roof beams. The west wall continues to cause issues, and although it is unlikely we shall find any long-term solution to the problem of damp penetration, we do need to repaint that to make it at least look better!

News of Members

At the end of last year, we were saddened to hear of the death of Margaret Dodd, who had been the founding Secretary of The Friends and a stalwart supporter for many years. Sadly earlier this year, her husband Alan also died.

He had been ill for several years, but suffered a fall at home and died in hospital a few weeks later. We offer Jackie and the family our condolences.

We welcome Sue Welsh as a new Trustee of the St Michael's Trust. She fills the vacancy left by the death of Barbara Carter a few years ago. Her knowledge within the world of conservation will be unbelievably valuable.

Special mention must be made to all those who over many years have helped in so many ways to ensure that St Michael's has been both restored and kept in good order for succeeding generations. Much will still need to be done over many years to keep on top of the never ending list of projects, but without the forethought and concern of those who initiated The Friends back in the mid 1990's, we would not be in the very fortunate position that we are in today.

Jim Boughton- Chair

Well, what a year we are all having!

Did you manage to get around to all those jobs you thought you never had time for before? No, I didn't either. However I did manage a bit of one of the jobs I had promised myself to do, namely sort out my garage which has just become a dumping ground for anything and everything but that may come in useful eventually. I am sure many of you share this meaningful thought! I tried to make a start on afore-mentioned garage this week but came up against a hurdle at the start. Every year, I manage to collect a goodly collection of surplus items for the stall which is held in St Mary's church hall in August, courtesy of the WI who hold their 'Special Event' there to garner funds for local charities. The stall gets another outing at the Christmas fete in St Mary's Hall and these 2 events do manage to make needful funds for the continuing restoration of our beloved St Michael's. But not this year.

So, what did I find in my garage regarding this store for the stalls? The ubiquitous books, of course. And all those items that we hope folks simply can't do without and which we hope our visitors to the stall will find they can't live without either! We definitely do get some bargains and all items are noted as being at 'silly prices'. We just don't want to be taking these little gems back home again for storage! But this year has proved to be something of a problem. What with the sorting out of my own home (only partially

successful) which has added to the stall collection, items being generously donated by folks who know I get up to this sort of thing each year, well, I am beginning to run out of space. I had hoped that current restrictions would be lessened on the run-up to Christmas and perhaps we would be able to put on a village event, as usual. But it is doubtful that this will be the case and so the pile grows and grows with nowhere to go. Trying to look on the bright side, I guess next August's stall will be a thing of wonder, with masses of bargains and things we can't live without! All we would need then are the folks to visit and purchase. It used to be that the August event could be held outside the church which always acted as a good draw but, sad to say, the weather has been pretty dire for a good number of years now and August mostly cold and wet.

The Christmas event was always a very cheerful occasion and Kathy and I really enjoyed meeting and chatting to the visitors and promoting our wonderful St Michael's. We tend to take this little gem of a church for granted, blessed as we are in Wales and throughout the UK with many such amazing buildings. But for us, the 'Friends of St Michael's', we feel this simple little church is something rather special. Even when one is on one's own in the church, it never feels spooky. And often when one is there on one's own, it is a privilege to feel the company and character of all those folks who have worshipped there in the many centuries before. We are very fortunate in our small committee (quality, of course, if not quantity!), and you, our band of devoted supporters, without whom we would feel bereft. Thank you all for your continued support, it is so much appreciated. So, in an effort at positivity, we look forward to seeing you at the next fund-raising event in St Mary's church hall on **Tuesday, 3rd August 2021**, when hopefully some sort of normal life will have resumed.

Jill Sanders—Secretary

Finance Update

With the lack of visitors this year, our finances have taken a hit, however, the enforced closure has enabled us to get on with some necessary maintenance work over the summer.

St Michael's Betws-y-Coed Trust

It has always been the case that we maintain a reasonably low balance in the

St Michael's Betws-y-Coed Trust account, and transfer money over from the Friends of St Michael's accounts as and when we need it. To date (1st November) we have transferred £4,500 over, the highest figure in recent years. However, we have also spent just over £2,500 on repairs and maintenance to the church building this year. Other than this, the Trust expenses are for electricity (£487) and insurance (£1,379), both of which are similar to last year, and our Trust bank balance which started the year at £1,151 is currently £1,248.

Friends of St Michael's

The largest proportion of the Friends income this year has been members subscriptions which have been around £600 per annum, and which are currently £440 YTD. Thank you all for your continued support! However, income from sales of guidebooks, postcards, candles, and crosses has dropped from £1,573 in 2019 to just £139 in 2020 - a reduction of 91%. Similarly, donations in the wall box are also well down, from £1,349 in 2019 to just £61 in 2020, a reduction of 95%. We bought 500 crosses at the beginning of the season and have so far sold none of them (an ideal Christmas gift perhaps?)! We have also spent £1,094 on repairs to the new lychgate, plus tidying of the churchyard, both of which are the responsibility of the Bro Gwydir Ministry Area, but we felt it only right that the Friends should foot the bill.

For the second year running, we have been unable to hold a Flower Festival, which usually brings in an extra £600 in funding. And in readiness for our COVID -19 secure reopening, we purchased £165 worth of PPE equipment, but sadly in the end were only able to open for three days. On the plus side, we now have enough hand sanitiser in stock to sink a battleship!

Over the last few years, we have seen an excess of income over expenditure of around £2,000 per annum, but this year, the reduction in income from sales of goods, wall box donations and Flower Festival income is in the region of £3,300, which combined with the expenditure on repairs, means that the Friends accounts are showing a net loss of £6,082 year to date. We started 2020 with a healthy bank balance of £23,194. This has now reduced to £17,112 as of 1st November. We are not in financial difficulty (yet!) but having taken the opportunity to do so much work this year, we will need to



Jon getting ready to welcome people back to the church. After carrying out a risk assessment and acquiring lots of PPE we only managed to open three Saturdays before the local lockdown in Conwy foiled us. But we are all ready to go in the Spring.

keep a careful eye on expenses until our income returns to normal levels.

To give you a truer picture, as a comparison our end of year bank balances for both Friends and Trust accounts over the last few years are as follows:

2016 - £18,991

2017 - £20,297

2018 - £22,629

2019 - £24,346

2020YTD - £18,361

Jon Richmond -Treasurer

Flower Festival

The church is filled with flowers and their wonderful perfume. It greets you as soon as you step inside this ancient church.

Margaret Dodd brought this wonderful celebration into being many years ago now, with Lilian Boughton heading up the organizing crew between 1999 and 2018. It really has become something of a tradition in Betws-y-Coed and beyond. It has been my privilege to open the church on the day before the actual festival so that the many floral arrangements can be delivered and some often assembled in situ at the church. It is a time when folks get to meet and have a little time for a chat and a catch-up. The bonus for me is that I often meet folks whom I haven't seen since the previous

Flower Festival so there is a lot to catch up on! I have absolutely no talent for flower arranging so can only marvel and admire the many varied and skillful arrangements – how do people manage it?

We have a flourishing Flower Club in the village and their craft adds enormously to the festival. At the end of the set-up day when I eventually turn the key in the monumental old door, I turn and take one last look and drink in the perfume of the flowers, and hope fervently that the weather for the next 3 days will be promising and bring in the visitors which, thankfully, it usually does.

But not this year. Our Flower Festival became yet another casualty of the pandemic. So sad. Apart from the loss of this most enjoyable of fund-raising events for St Michael's, the camaraderie of the local contributors and visitors has become yet another missed opportunity to build on the essence of our community. We are so fortunate to live in this wonderful area and the Flower Festival gives us so many opportunities to show-case all that is so good about life here. In the hustle and bustle of life in the cities, we never take it for granted the preciousness of our environment. Although we so sadly lost our dear Lilian in 2018, the Flower Festival remains a testament to her commitment and hard work, her kindness and her love of her community. So, in the spirit of optimism, we have set the date for the **Flower Festival in 2021, 10th - 12th September**, determined to make it better than ever to make amends for the lost experience of 2020.

Jill Sanders - Secretary



Flower Festival 2018, remembering Lilian



Flower Festival 2013, Margaret's arrangement for SSAFA

Events 2020 - 2021

Subject to any further restrictions or constraints that may be placed or imposed on us during the on-going Coronavirus-19 Pandemic, we hope that we may be able to host and take part in the following events during the remainder of 2020 and throughout 2021.

Candle-Light Carol Service 2020

It is hoped to hold our Annual Candle-Light Carol Service in St. Michael's Church on **Sunday 27th December 2020 at 6pm** subject to any restrictions that may still be in force at the time. The service will consist of seasonal secular and biblical Readings and popular Carols.

It may be necessary to restrict the numbers attending, but full details will appear on our web site, and our Face book page (at <http://www.facebook.com/stmichaelsbetws>) nearer the time. Seasonal refreshments will hopefully be available after the service.

Open Doors – European Heritage Days 2021

It is hoped to open the church on a daily basis throughout September (10am – 5pm) to mark this anticipated annual event. This was cancelled this year because of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

WI Special Event 2021

St Michael's will have a stall at the WI Special Event on Tuesday 3rd August 2021 at St Marys Church Hall

Flower Festival 2021

The dates will be Friday, Saturday and Sunday 10th, 11th and 12th September 2021, 10am – 5pm daily.

This was not held in 2019 (mainly due to lack of available Stewards) nor 2020 (due to the Coronavirus-19 Pandemic), but we hope it can return in 2021, bigger and better than ever!

St Michael's Day Service 2021

Wednesday 29th September, 6pm (to be confirmed). Holy Eucharist. Light refreshments will be served after the service.

Candle-Light Carol Service 2021/2022

The Annual Candle-Light Carol Service will be held in St. Michael's Church

on **Sunday 2nd January 2022 at 6pm.** All villagers and visitors are welcome to come along for a service of readings and carols. It is often referred to as "The Alternative Carol Service" and has proved extremely popular over recent years, featuring readings of both seasonal secular and biblical tone. Seasonal refreshments are served after the service.

Contacts

Membership and Newsletter:

*Kathy Laws, Afallon, Tanygrisiau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Gwynedd LL41 3RH
Tel: 01766 830 328.*

General:

*Jim Boughton, Dalar Deg, 11 Nant y Goron, Nebo Road, Llanrwst LL26 0SN
Tel: 01492 643 526*

Finances:

*Jon Richmond, Maenllwyd, 12 Castle Terrace, Dolwyddelan LL25 0NJ
Tel: 01690 750 222*

E-Mail:

friends@stmichaelsbyc.org.uk

Web Site:

<http://www.stmichaelsbyc.org.uk>

You can renew your membership, (or become a member!) and download a standing order form or catch up on the latest news via our web site.

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