

ST NICHOLAS CHURCH WITHYCOMBE

Report to Parish Assembly 2018



St Nicholas Church Withycombe is a Grade 1 Listed Building situated ✓ in the heart of the community. There has been a place of worship at this site since the 13th century. Because of this, the Church is a very important part of both history and worship and its white paintwork makes it stand out in the beautiful surrounding countryside and attracts many visitors on the popular walking route of the McMillan Way.

Sadly, however, the number of regular Sunday worshippers has diminished in recent years with an average number attending services at an all time low of 10 persons. This is mainly age related but there are some promising signs with more younger families settling in the village and this is borne out by the fact that our annual Nativity Service attracts the largest congregation of the year.

But St Nicholas Church is not just a place of worship. It is here for everyone to enjoy and I would urge all members of the community to call in and witness the peaceful atmosphere whilst enjoying some of the building's historic artefacts including the memorials to our first Norman incumbents, Lucy and Walter De Merriett, the delicately carved wooden rood screen thought to have been the work of travelling Flemish craftsmen, the pagan stone carvings of mythological "Green Men" and also the more modern metalwork

sculpture of St Nicholas, our patron saint, crafted and gifted by the renowned Rachel Reckitt of Golsoncott. Excellent pictorial leaflets outlining both the history of the Church and that of Withycombe village are available in the Church - the work of the late Stanley Dische and Derrick Fowler.

The ancient yew tree in the Churchyard is one of the oldest in Somerset and near to it stand the remains of an ancient stone preaching cross. In the Graveyard almost opposite the main door stands the grave of Madam Carne of Sandhill, perhaps unfairly historically deemed to have been a witch. I am sure that many of you will be aware of the ancient folklore appertaining to Joan Carne.

The Churchyard continues to be one of the best kept in West Somerset but that does come at considerable cost mainly in regular grass cutting. We do have a current problem of dogs running loose among graves which has resulted in complaints to the PCC

It was sadly necessary to discontinue the mains water supply to the Church mainly due to a huge length of old piping under then owned Crown land needing considerable renovation which would have been at the Church's expense, whilst possibly still not improving the water flow. However, two water butts installed in the Churchyard provide adequate water for persons tending graves and bottled water is available in the Vestry. If anything the current system is better.

* The past year has been one of considerable expense for our village Church. A Quinquennial Architect's Inspection prompted the need for * expensive work to be undertaken to the fabric of the Church over the next 3 years, the most important being to address a serious ingress of water to the bell tower which alone will cost in the region of £12,000. The slated roof to the Vestry also has to be replaced at similar cost. Sadly our application to a National fund for a grant towards these works failed and we are about to commence the works once faculties

have been granted and finance for these projects will come from our restricted funds.

Such restricted funds come from previous generous legacies which are becoming seriously denuded in order to preserve this ancient site. Day to day running costs such as payments to Clergy, organist and administration come from weekly contributions made by regular worshippers and other kind donations.

Sadly we are no longer able to ring the Church bells on a regular basis due to the lack of local ringers. However, we are grateful to our friends from Carhampton who visit and ring on special occasions and I am pleased to report that plans are in hand for a group from Susan Mews's Carhampton team to be trained to ring here more frequently

Floodlights are available for anyone to in the community to request at a cost of £6 per night.

The War Graves Commission have now placed signs on the gates of many Churches where war graves are to be found. We shall have one such sign on the main south gate of the Church, as the grave of wartime pilot Herbert Case is situated in the Churchyard

A small band of dedicated Parochial Church Council members oversee all the necessary work and expenses for St Nicholas Church in a dedicated and responsible manner.

We support the Childrens Society with funds from our popular annual carol singing around the village, and the Royal British Legion with our collections from our annual shared Remembrance Day services with Carhampton Church.

We are proud custodians of such an historic and peaceful village Church which is, as always, available for use by the whole community for christenings, weddings and funerals as well as general worship.

We always welcome newcomers to the Church and are greatly encouraged by the regular kind words which are written in our Visitors Book, especially by the many walkers who call in and enjoy free tea and coffee in a wonderful peaceful rural environment. One such visitor enjoyed refreshment in the Church recently whilst on a fund raising cycle ride from Lands End to John O'Groats.

**Roger Hurst
PCC Secretary**

April 2018