

Polstead recorder's Report for 2015 – 16

Polstead had a socially quieter year following a mild winter and spring, which resulted in one of the best gardening years for some time. The wild cherries, preferred by squirrels and birds to larger cultivated varieties, ripened first, leaving the heavy domestic crop at Polstead Heath undisturbed by the usual predators and resulting in the best cherry harvest for 30 years, with a plentiful apple crop to follow. The unusually wet autumn and winter left gardens waterlogged but spring flowers flourished mightily.

Parish Council

Following the resignation of Nick Palmer, due to ill health, Anne MacWilson was elected Chairman. The entire Polstead community was later greatly saddened by Nick's death in September at the end of a long illness bravely born with great cheerfulness. The council welcomed Sue Wigglesworth as a member following her stepping down from Babergh District Council after twenty four years' service; and, following the election, co-opted Mathew Peck as a new member.

A very successful Carols on the Green was organised at Christmas. Once again, it followed on from the Carol Service at the church and was joined by many who had attended the service

Meanwhile, one of the council's main on-going subjects of discussion was the issue of improving the recreational facilities on the playing field, in response to the expressed preferences of residents.

Village Hall

The Village Hall continued to function most effectively as the main centre of village activities, with a broad range of user groups represented on the management Committee. These included the Carpet Bowls Club, the Art Group, Polstead Projects (young people's sport and recreation) and the Play Group (infants activities five mornings a week). Everyone was greatly concerned when the Play Group, one of the major users of the hall, was forced to terminate its activities, which were of many years standing, due to an adverse finding from Ofsted, to which it felt unable to afford to respond effectively. This major blow to the hall's finances was to some extent mitigated by subsequent signs of a pick-up in bookings during the now vacant mornings.



Battle of Britain pictures



Beatrix Potter pictures



Redecorated Village Hall

The monthly showing of films continued to attract large audiences and to generate substantial funds for improvements to the hall. Polstead Films took part in the Dedham Villages Film Festival in October, with a showing of Sir Richard Attenborough's *Battle of Britain* (to commemorate the 75th anniversary) and of Sir Frederick Ashton's ballet *The Tales of Beatrix Potter.* The *Battle of Britain* showing was introduced by an inspiring talk from Air Commodore Bob Lightfoot DFC AFC about the role of Fighter Command, followed by a recording of Churchill's broadcast to the nation on 7 September 1940, at the height of the battle. Also on display was Churchill's account from *Their Finest Hour* of the crucial events of 15 September 1940, which featured in the film.

Further fund raising included two highly successful quiz nights and a charity auction. Live theatre events, by Eastern Angles and the Common Ground Theatre Group, also contributed.

Sue Wigglesworth, Chairman of the Committee, received her MBE, awarded in the 2015 New Year Honours, from HRH Princess Anne on 25 June. HRH remembered visiting Polstead in 2006.



Sue Wigglesworth and family at Buckingham Palace

The main improvement to the hall over the year was the complete external redecoration and the installation of a bell drip, the latter being the subject of a grant from Babergh District Council.

St Mary's Church



Polstead Church in Spring

St Mary's Church was sad to say goodbye to Rev Adrian Mason and his wife Maria in April, on his taking up an appointment in his home diocese of Lincoln for family reasons. The subsequent interregnum, in the five parish benefice of which Polstead is part, put extra strain on the volunteer Ministry Team, most notably Rev Jackie Sephton who was herself coming up for retirement in 2016.

The new Priest in Charge, Rev Mark Woodrow, who was appointed in late March and will be licensed on 21 July, will be taking over as the new Deanery Plan comes into operation, involving closer collaborative working with other benefices and parishes in the Hadleigh Deanery and changes in the pattern of services.

Improvements in the church and its surroundings during the year included most notably the rebuilding of part of the west wall of the churchyard and the refurbishment of the magnificent 19th century Easter frontal, by the Broderers' Workshop at Norwich Cathedral.



Repaired Churchyard West Wall



The Easter frontal



Broderers' Workshop, Norwich

Community Shop

The Community Shop carried out major improvements in the remodelling of its interior and the conversion of the storage shed into a sorting office for the post office, in order to create the necessary space inside the shop. A successful dinner for shop volunteers has held at the Cock Inn on 15 January.



Remodelled Community Shop



New Post Office sorting office

Recorder's activities

The report this year, at the request of the Suffolk Local History Council, has concentrated more on current events than previously, while seeking to avoid duplicating the LSPN (Community News for Leavenheath, Stoke by Nayland, Polstead and Nayland).

The recorder's team have continued their work on the records we hold, most notably the notes on the complete set of parish records going back to 1559, on which Martin Mitchell has continued to do magnificent work. We decided not to hold a further Open Day until we had further significant records to share; and to keep the holding of further open days under review. Meanwhile our existing records are available to anyone who is interested. The Community Shop is planning a calendar for 2017 featuring historic views of Polstead and we expect them to draw on some of our records.

We are particularly interested in developing a full record of the history of the village hall and in developing a full contemporary record of the built environment to keep up with the continuing slow development of buildings in this picturesque hinterland village.

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