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THE BRIDGE

December 2023/January 2024

Church and Village magazine for Sweffling

Village website: www.sweffling.onesuffolk.net

Martin, the church wardens and the PCC wish you a joyful Christmas and a peaceful New Year



From the Reverend Martin Percival

Though Advent (literally "arrival") has been observed for centuries as a time to contemplate Christ's birth, most people today acknowledge it only with a blank look. For the vast majority of us, December flies by in a flurry of activities, and what is called "the holiday season" turns out to be the most stressful time of the year. It is also a time of contrasting emotions. We are eager, yet frazzled; sentimental, yet indifferent. One minute we glow at the thought of getting together with our family and friends; the next we feel utterly lonely. Our hope is mingled with dread, our anticipation with despair. We sense the deeper meanings of the season but grasp at them in vain; and in the end, all the bustle leaves us frustrated and drained.

Even we who do not experience such tensions - who genuinely love Christmas - often miss its point. Content with candles and carols and good food, we bask in the warmth of familiar traditions, in reciprocated acts of kindness, and in feelings of general goodwill. How many of us remember the harsh realities of Christ's first coming: the dank stable, the cold night, the closed door of the inn? How many of us share the longing of the ancient prophets, who awaited the Messiah with such aching intensity that they foresaw his arrival thousands of years before he was born?

Mother Teresa once noted that the first person to welcome Christ was John the Baptist, who leaped for joy on recognizing him, when both of them were still within their mothers' wombs. We, in stark contrast, are often so dulled by superficial distractions that we are incapable of hearing any voice within, let alone listening to it. Consequently, the feeling we know as Christmas cheer lacks any real connection to the vital spirit that radiated from the manger.

We miss the essence of Christmas unless we become, in the words of Eberhard Arnold, "mindful of how Christ's birth took place." Once we do, we will sense immediately that Advent marks something momentous: God's coming into our midst. That coming is not just something that happened in the past. It is a recurring possibility here and now. And thus Advent is not merely a commemorative event or an anniversary, but a yearly opportunity for us to consider the future, second Advent - the promised coming of God's kingdom on earth. Such an understanding of Christmas is possible only insofar as we let go of the false props of convention and seek to unlock its central paradox. That paradox, to paraphrase the

modern martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is the fact that God's coming is not only a matter of glad tidings but, first of all, "frightening news for everyone who has a conscience." The love that descended to Bethlehem is not the easy sympathy of an avuncular God, but a burning fire whose light chases away every shadow, floods every corner, and turns midnight into noon. This love reveals sin and overcomes it. It conquers darkness with such forcefulness and intensity that it scatters the proud, humbles the mighty, feeds the hungry, and sends the rich away empty-handed (Luke 1:51-53).

Because a transformation of this scale can never be achieved by human means, but only by divine intervention, Advent (to quote Bonhoeffer again) might be compared to a prison cell "in which one waits and hopes and does various unessential things... but is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside." It is a fitting metaphor. But dependency does not release us from responsibility. If the essence of Advent is expectancy, it is also readiness for action: watchfulness for every opening, and willingness to risk everything for freedom and a new beginning.

That is why the imagery of nativity scenes is not sufficient to explain the Christmas message. Yes, God came into the feeding trough of an animal. But it was not only as a baby that he lay there. This child was the same man who was crucified on Golgotha, and who rose again. Within the manger lies the cross - and the hope of redemption and resurrection. To recognize this requires reverence and humility. It requires faith. We might ask, "What grounds are there for such hope?" Or we might seek to become like children, and believe. Mary did. So did the shepherds and the wise men of the East. So can each of us, wherever we are. *Martin*

Retirement. We are sad to announce that the Rev. Martin Percival will be retiring from the Benefice at the end of February 2024. Martin has been our priest for the last five and a half years and we have been greatly blessed by his ministry amongst the six parishes in the Benefice. He has continued to minister to us well past the normal retiring age for priests and we are very grateful for this and also to Linda for her constant support. Discussions have begun with the Rural Dean and the Bishop regarding the future ministry in the Benefice and we will keep everyone updated. More in the next edition of *The Bridge*.

The Harvest Thanksgiving Service and Harvest Lunch were held on Sunday October 1st. The church was beautifully decorated for festival service with flowers and berries and the many gifts of tinned and packaged goods and toiletries, generously donated by the villagers. A large congregation joined together to sing the familiar harvest hymns and to thank God for all the blessings that we have received throughout the year. Later, when the gifts were packed to take to the foodbank at the Saxmundham Social Supermarket, the boxes completely filled the back of a large estate car. The helpers at the supermarket expressed their grateful thanks for such a splendid contribution.

The Harvest Lunch in the Hut was very well supported and we enjoyed a delicious lunch of Cottage pie and vegetables followed by apple puddings. The proceeds from the lunch and the raffle amounted to £564 and this has been sent to Tear Fund to support their work of famine relief. Thank you to everyone who donated harvest gifts, helped decorate the church, with the cooking or supported the lunch. A splendid effort by all concerned.

The Remembrance Sunday Service was held jointly for Rendham and Sweffling in Rendham Church on November 12th. John Tesh led the very moving service, which commenced with the two minutes silence from the Cenotaph in London. Denis Moore and

Jonathan Stevens laid the poppy wreaths and the names of the fallen were read by Lesley Bennion and Eleanore Fitzgerald on behalf of the two villages. Readers during the service were Charles Seely, Suzanne Stevens, Jo Rogers and Anne Fitzgerald.

Sweffling First Thursday Suppers. Kirstin Stanley writes: After our first two very successful suppers this year, we are in the fantastic position to make a donation of £140 to the St. Elizabeth Hospice. The first supper had a French theme and at our second, we enjoyed the cuisine of Croatia. Ruth and I wish to thank all who have either cooked or contributed to that fantastic sum of £140.

A special thanks goes to Marie Smith for not only her hospitality at the Sweffling White Horse but also her donation towards our chosen charity, and to Dorothy Chapman who has been unable to attend the suppers due to ill health but still contributed to the fund.

At our **next supper on Thursday 7th December we look forward to Caribbean dishes**, and we will be raising funds for a local homeless charity, the Chapman Centre in Ipswich.

French Evening. Amanda Daniel writes: The French Evening at The Hut raised £189.33 for Hut funds and local intrepid first timers joined visiting experienced dancers to enjoy home cooked coq au vin, wine and a cheeseboard. Tables cleared away David Shepherd of Blowzabella taught the dances and played traditional Breton tunes on the fiddle. Thanks to Monica and Lin of On y Va for demonstrating and leading the dances. A lovely evening encouraging some Sweffling residents to try the On y Va teaching in Saxmundham run on the third Tuesday of every month until the end of May. A most enjoyable way to keep fit! Contact Amanda for more information (01728 663341).



Very Many Congratulations to:

Jonathan Stevens who, after years of hard work and study, has achieved a Master of Architecture degree from London South Bank University. He is now continuing with Part III of the course which will lead to him being a chartered architect next summer.

Tracy Spall who entered Orwell Housing's garden competition and won under the category of "All round garden". She came first place and was judged by "Mr Plant Geek" from Ipswich who has featured on TV shows such as This Morning - he's a real celebrity in the plant world!

Mr Plant Geek said "This garden has the feel good factor, not just from the well-chosen plants, but also from being accessorised with lots of personality".

See for yourself!!



Parish Council: The Parish Council meeting was held on November 14th and was concerned largely with budget planning for the next financial year. Draft minutes of the meeting have been posted on the Parish Council notice board and on the village website. It was reported that our Parish Clerk had decided to resign during her trial period and so we are looking to appoint a new clerk. In the interim the responsibilities of the clerk will be divided between Mrs Amanda Daniel and Mrs Jill Abbott.

The next meeting will be held on January 9th 2024 at 7.30 p.m. in Sweffling Hut. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

Sweffling Floods: On Friday, October 20th 2023, Storm Babet hit the UK and Suffolk was one of the worst affected areas, suffering strong winds and continuous torrential rain for hours. The already saturated soil from previous rain could not absorb the volume of rain that fell, and this ran straight off the farmland into the Gull and the river Alde. The situation was exacerbated by high tides on the east coast, which meant that the sluices at Snape were closed, holding back the river drainage. As a result, both rivers overflowed and, as a result, the centre of the village and a number of houses were flooded from the Gull and some houses and acres of farmland along the course of the Alde were also flooded. Although there was a temporary drop in water level when the sluices were opened, it rose again when the sluices were closed for the next high tide.

Our sympathies go to those whose properties were damaged and our thanks to those who rallied round to start help the clean-up and drying out processes.

Below are views from Holden's meadow and Holden's Lane towards the Gull.



For those affected, the district councillor has sent the following information:

Households and businesses that suffered internal flooding between 19 - 25 October 2023 due to Storm Babet may be eligible for:

- A grant (£500 for homes and £2,500 per business) to assist with initial recovery costs.
- Households and businesses that suffered internal flooding between 19-25 October due to Storm Babet may be eligible for 100% discount to council tax / business rates for a minimum of 3 months.
- Flooded property owners will also be able to apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding. Suffolk County Council is working to set this scheme up at the earliest opportunity, but it is not currently available.

Suffolk County Council is working in partnership with Babergh and Mid-Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich and West Suffolk councils to ensure these discounts and payments start during November. Reporting your flood damage is the first step to receiving a potential payout.

If you have experienced flooding to your property as a result of Storm Babet, you need to:

1. Visit: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk>
2. Click on: 'Report It'

3. Then click: 'Drainage and Flooding'
4. Then click: 'Flooding inside residential / non-residential property'
5. Please include as much information as you have, there is also an option to upload photos.
6. Once your report has been submitted, Suffolk County Council officers will contact you to gather further information and prioritise those locations that meet the criteria for an official investigation.
7. Someone from the district or borough council will then contact you to arrange payment, if eligible.

For those who aren't able to submit their report online, please call 0345 606 6171.

Nature notes December 23 – January 24

The Autumn colours of trees and shrubs lasted late this year. At the time of writing (mid-November) few leaves had dropped, and great patches of the hedges were glowing gold with Field Maple. This is our only native Maple species, sometimes growing into a small tree, and an abundant component of the rich hedges throughout the village.

Another common hedgerow shrub is Dogwood, again still very much in leaf (and even, in a few hedges, carrying a second batch of flowers, normally found in Spring). The leaves are turning a quite different colour, a dark purple, contrasting with most of the other shrubs. Dogwood is a relative of several well-known garden shrubs (*Cornus*). These are often grown for the colour of their winter twigs – in the wild form these are bright red.



A lot of the paler yellows we see are Elm, while the Oak trees are still turning to a bright ginger. The Oaks, our last remaining major hedgerow trees after the loss of the large Elms and now much of the Ash, although all of the same species (the English or Pedunculate Oak) are surprisingly diverse. They each come into leaf and flower at quite different times in the Spring, and in Autumn lose their leaves at different times. This shows best in the Autumn colours, and you will be able to see it in the different browns and rusts before the



Oak leaves are shed. One other contribution to the hedgerow colours to mention is the Bracken in the lower parts of the valley. Bracken seems a tough, vigorous and invasive plant, and is not seen as an asset to grazing or conservation diversity on sandy soils. In fact, it has a weakness. Bracken is surprisingly vulnerable to frosts, and starts to die as soon as the first frost hits it. As it dies, it turns the familiar rusty colour, which it keeps well into the winter.

Another of the features of Autumn is the large number of fungi which appear, especially if the season is warm and damp. 'Damp' might seem a cruel understatement this year, and now that we have had some frosts, many of the more conspicuous mushrooms and toadstools are over. But there have been a lot, which some of you might have seen. Grassland species sometimes grow in circles, (the so-called fairy rings), which can grow quite wide. The circle is caused by the fungus body using up nutrients in the soil, and therefore being forced to grow outwards. Another effect is that this can also fertilise the soil for the grasses, so a fairy ring can be seen as a dark circle in the grass, even when the toadstools do not show. There are a number of smaller toadstools which do this, but larger

ones to look out for include the Parasol, large and flattish with rings of pale brown scales, and a number of more typical mushrooms.

Two things to clarify. Firstly, I tend to reserve the term 'mushrooms' for those fungi which resemble the familiar edible supermarket varieties, and use the term 'toadstool' for the rest. Nowadays, however, many writers use 'mushroom' for any fungus with a cap. Secondly, I shouldn't talk about fungi without reminding you that some of them are poisonous, some fatally so. Even one of the typical mushrooms, which grows in the Townland meadow, can be dangerous. This is the Yellow Stainer, just like an edible mushroom but with flesh that



turns yellow when bruised, or, especially, cut through at the base of the stem. Finally, a toadstool that no-one is likely to mistake for edible (it is both toxic and hallucinogenic) is the Fly Agaric. This is well known from illustrations, a round head expanding into a flat cap, bright scarlet with a scattering of white spots. It is most commonly, but not always, found associated with Birch trees. I was shown a patch at our end of the village, (near some Birch trees), quite spectacular and the most I have ever seen. *Geoffrey Abbott*

Sweffling Church: St. Mary's has stood on the hill in the centre of the village for at least 1000 years, with parts of the present building dating back to Norman times. Over the centuries it has been repaired, added to and updated, with a programme of planned maintenance continuing to the present, which has ensured that the church building is safe, warm and comfortable in which to worship, as well as a precious historic monument. During this summer the first stage of a new phase of maintenance has begun, which will



continue into 2024 and beyond. One of the buttresses at the front of the porch has been repaired by a master stone mason, as has the stone work to the lancet window on the south face of the tower and the louvres in the upper west window have been replaced. Inside the church the bell chamber and sounding chamber have been repointed and part of a wall in the history room has been replastered. The cost of the work to date



has amounted to £6000. We anticipate that the cost of next phase of the work will exceed this amount. We are very grateful to everyone who supports the fund-raising activities of the church and for the grants that we receive from the Townland Trust and the village fete to enable us to continue to carry out this essential work.

2024 Fete and Disbursement of 2023 Funds

At the Sweffling fete Organisation AGM on 12th October - next year's Fete date was set as **Saturday 10th August.**

Please save the date and plan your holidays around it!

Steve Ashurst - the new chairman - will be organising this with the first planning meeting in May. Treasurer Mike Smithson reported that after all expenses had been met, the 2023 fete account balance was £3551.89. The meeting agreed to retain £551.89 in the bank leaving £3000 for division to village organisations according to the fete constitution:

St Mary's Church £1500; Bowls Club £300; Sweffling Hut £300; SPC Jubilee Field £300; Townlands Trust £300

The meeting heard a report of the last **Special Project - Habitat Box Building Day**, March 2020. Covid prevented Fete money-raising, so no projects since then.

Only one application was received this year - a joint submission by Hellen Blackwell and Catharine Loveridge to provide an outdoor tennis table and/or basketball hoop for use by older children and adults. As the equipment is very expensive it was suggested that the project money could be a starting point supplemented by a grant that would have to be obtained through the Parish Council. The venue for these was discussed but more research is needed so that the right location for the permanent installation of such equipment can be found. Hellen and Catharine were congratulated on their application and the money is available to them when further grant funds are available.

Outgoing chairman, Jill Abbott thanked the committee and everyone who had contributed to the running of the Fete and Dog Show making this annual community event a day to remember.

Hut Events: A Spring Flyer for 2024 Hut Events will be delivered to all soon

The Events Committee is planning new workshops and courses for next year.

What would you like to see on the programme?

Computer Courses or Troubleshooting sessions? Craft workshops? Photography or Art? Something different? Please email your suggestions to Swefflinghut@gmail.com

Don't forget Rural Coffee Caravan each 4th Wednesday of the month 10 - 12noon!

Coffee, Cake and Chat in the Sweffling Hut:

On the first Monday morning of each month, from 10.00 a.m. until 12.00 noon, there will be coffee and cake in the Hut, and the opportunity to chat and socialise. You are more than welcome to bring some craft to work on whilst you chat but this is not essential. Just come and meet with old friends and hopefully make some new ones! Everyone welcome!!

CHURCH SERVICES December 2023/January 2024

Date	Venue	Time	Service
December 3	Sweffling	9.30 a.m.	Advent Sunday. Holy Communion
December 10	Rendham	9.30 a.m.	Morning Prayer
December 17	Sweffling	5.00 p.m.	CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT
December 24	Rendham	9.30 a.m.	Holy Communion
December 24	SWEFFLING	11.30 p.m.	CHRISTMAS EVE MIDNIGHT HOLY COMMUNION
December 25	BRUISYARD	10.00 a.m.	CHRISTMAS DAY BENEFICE HOLY COMMUNION
December 31	Rendham	10.00 a.m.	Benefice Holy Communion
January 7	Sweffling	9.30 a.m.	Holy Communion
January 14	Rendham	9.30 a.m.	Morning Prayer
January 21	Sweffling	9.30 a.m.	EPIPHANY CAROL SERVICE
January 28	Rendham	9.30 a.m.	Holy Communion
February 4	Sweffling	9.30 a.m.	Holy Communion

Children's Society Home Collection Boxes and Coffee Morning: A very big thank you to everyone who has had a home collection box for The Children's Society. This was the last time we will have used them and £387.98 has been banked.

This is in addition to the £688.09 raised at the Coffee Morning on October 28th. So, together we have raised and banked £1,076.07 A magnificent achievement.

We are very grateful for your support. *Diana Smith & Lesley Bennion*

Thank you from Diana Smith: A very big thank you to everyone who bought my dahlias. They did so well this year thanks to all the rain! The proceeds of £150 are going to the hospital in The Gambia.

**“CHRISTMAS BRASS” CONCERT in SWEFFLING CHURCH
FRIDAY DECEMBER 8TH, 7.30 P.M.**

Leiston Royal British Legion Brass Band will play a concert of popular and Christmas music, with Sing-along Christmas Carols. **The perfect start to Christmas in Sweffling!**

Tickets: Adults £8.00, Children £4.00 to include interval Refreshments. Book with Diana (663578) or Sheila (663518) or pay at door. Proceeds in aid of St Mary's Church



**PHOENIX SINGERS CONCERT
“GLORY AT CHRISTMAS TIME”**

**Saturday 16th December 2023 7.00 p.m.
Framlingham College Chapel**

Tickets £15 (under 18s free), includes refreshments after the concert from: Hall Farm Butchers, Framlingham; Choir members; william@glasse.org.uk or at the door.

**OR
Two free tickets have been donated to the raffle at the Christmas Brass Concert.**

Come and support these and hopefully win your tickets there!



CHRISTMAS SERVICES IN St. MARY'S, SWEFFLING

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT

SUNDAY December 18th 500 p.m.

A service of Lessons and Carols for Christmas

CHRISTMAS EVE MIDNIGHT HOLY COMMUNION

Service will begin at 11.30 p.m.

ALSO

EPIPHANY CAROL SERVICE SUNDAY JANUARY 21ST 2024 9.30 A.M.

Please e-mail any news items, events or short literary items for consideration for inclusion in the February/March edition to john.tesh@talk21.com before January 12th.

The editors welcome contributions for The Bridge but reserve the right to edit. Accuracy of the content is the responsibility of the submitter. We are limited to 8 pages and so may not be able to publish everything we receive. Dated items of village interest will be given priority. Please include your name and contact details in case we need to get in touch. **The Bridge is sponsored by St. Mary's Church and is delivered free to all houses in the Village.**