

Lockdown Stories

I felt personally sad and disappointed that church doors were closed at the very time I think many people would have valued coming through them! I think at least some parishes could have managed it, one way or another, but the decision-makers thought differently....



Social Distancing at St John the Divine

Revd Neil Summers

Being unable to come together to celebrate and share the Eucharist felt like a real deprivation, and we really missed the choir and music that is normally such an integral part of worship. Having said that, we soon got into the routine of videoing services for Sundays. And our director of music, Ben Hunt, did a fantastic job during church closure by getting choir members to record parts in their own homes, and then collating them through a computer programme, so that we could include some hymns and anthems in the recorded services, along with his organ voluntaries.

Pastoral care and regular church life continued as best they could via Zoom, telephone, email, text, etc. The technology and communications are definitely things to be grateful for, though no substitute for face-to-face encounters and conversations. A real plus, though, has been

that former St John's members now in different parts of the UK and around the world were able to join in our church's life once again! We've also appreciated the virtual 'coffee mornings' on Zoom as a way of keeping in touch with each other.

It's been lovely to be back in church for the past few weeks. We are now live streaming services so that those who can't come back yet, or who remain anxious, can still be part of church life and worship.

Revd Neil Summers

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'; the opening words from Charles Dickens' Tale of Two Cities seem to sum up how I feel as I look back over the last few months. Being asked to write a 200 word reflection on my and St Matthias' experience through lockdown seems an impossible task, but here are the things I will remember most: - bright moonlit nights and deep blue skied days; peace and quiet and time to read; garden sanctuary and the buzzing of bees; spring time abundance and strolls in the Park (no cars or bikes); neighbours' chatting over tea in Cambrian Road and weeping together at David's hauntingly beautiful bagpipe lament every Thursday night; a church family caring for one another; the kindness of strangers and the longing for a hug; tears and laughter in equal measure; art and poetry to lift the spirits and deepen faith; Florence Nightingale and Mother Julian of Norwich; ++Stephen Cottrell

Continued overleaf



Deer in Richmond Park

Julia Keddie

Lockdown Stories - continued from page 7

in York reversing tradition (weren't we lucky to meet him?); Vera Lynn and VE Day remembering; church doors locked but God's arms open, zooming his love through our worship and prayer; the joyful dawn chorus on Easter Day and noticing the planet sighing and healing; new babies being born and grandparents waiting for cuddles; weddings postponed and holidays cancelled; virtual birthday parties and quiz night celebrations; pain and loss, sadness and grief, unbearable shocks and people in need; our floodlit steeple shining out as a beacon of hope; Greville House staff embodying Christ's compassion; Churchwardens' support at a time of need; flower filled encouragement and - most of all - LOVE.

The Revd Anne Crawford

Dear Friends

During lockdown it has been a privilege to offer some reflections at our pre-recorded services and to undertake some additional learning in order to be able to take funerals, if needed. I also preached remotely for two other churches and went to preach at Christ Church Clapham as soon as we were able to offer a church service - this is a church in a deprived community. Many of you know I connect with this church around once a month. There were fewer children there but some new adults from the large housing estate which dominates that parish, drawn to church as they try and find meaning during these unsettling times.

I cannot pretend it has been easy on the work front. Like others I felt very stretched managing remotely, and not being able to see colleagues. I am sure for many of us the Easter season with the stories of the disciples isolated behind locked doors and not knowing what might happen, resonated in a new and poignant way. As Christians we come together as members of the body of Christ with our different gifts and holding on to this will be important as we continue to go forward in faith and grace. Thank you for the privilege of serving you as your Reader.

Ruth Martin

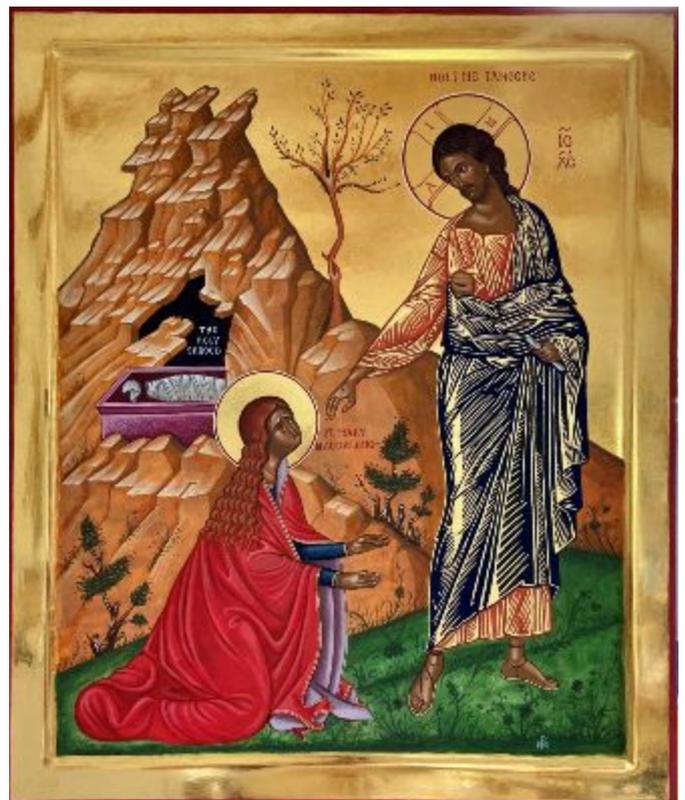
Emma Meredith, churchwarden at St Mary Magdalene says:

'Although I missed being in church with everyone our online services were special and focused the mind on the words and music. Charles Stiller has been a total superstar in ensuring that all the content for the weekly services was ready, edited and that images were added and all uploaded online for the Sunday morning. A huge amount of work went into that.

I found the Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons before services resumed but people could come in to pray, very powerful. It was a privilege to be there for them. When we were first open the relief on people's faces was apparent as they could finally be back in a church and see people again (albeit in a socially distanced way). We have had a mix of the congregation and new friends coming in for a prayer, to light a candle or just to look round the church.

The first Sunday back in St Mary's for an actual service was incredible and we had very close to maximum numbers. It was a truly

Continued overleaf



Lockdown Stories - continued from page 8

special atmosphere, of being back with each other as well as receiving the beautiful icon of St Mary Magdalene at the first Easter into church for the first time and I found the experience really emotional. Since then we have had a nice number attending each week, including some new people, which is lovely. The church looks beautiful and like a church again!'

Reasons to be Cheerful – A Lockdown Survival Technique

It started as a challenge to myself to find a way through lockdown: find a reason to be cheerful each day, take a photo and share it on Facebook. It became a treasure hunt – what would I find today?

Often it was watching the spring unfolding our daily walks through Sheen Common and Richmond Park: a bird singing, bluebells in flower, discovering new pathways we hadn't walked down before, but there were domestic pleasures too; a family game of scrabble, a glass of prosecco shared with my husband on a "date" night in front of the National Theatre YouTube channel. Our cat featured several times, as did my son's excellent cooking. Reasons to be cheerful? They were all around me – I just had to learn to look out for them.

Julia Keddie, St Mary Magdalene



Butterfly

Julia Keddie

Walking

Cidalia Araujo of St Mary Magdalene had always walked before the lockdown anyway but began to take walks everyday as allowed by the Government guidance - through Ham Lands Nature Reserve, Ham Common Woods towards Richmond Park, the riverside towards Teddington Lock and beyond. The sight of beautiful flowers, birds, meadows, the frog pond at Ham Common Woods all helped during the difficult early days when Cidalia could not see her family and grandchildren.

Although Cidalia walked on her own she met lots of people along the way who became friends, whilst all keeping social distancing. She recorded bird song and took many photos, shared on Facebook, specially for dear friends who were shielding.

Cidalia returned to work in April, but continues to walk every day after work and at the weekends. Cidalia says 'The walks were very therapeutic and they brought me some peace, and serenity. I was grateful for where we lived. Enjoying the beauty of nature was the best medicine for those very difficult days.'

During the lockdown, supporting those who were shielding and could not leave home for various reasons was very important. Simple practical help such as having shopping done or being kept in touch by regular telephone calls made such a difference to people in this position. Grahame Boyes of St Mary Magdalene was advised by his GP not to do his own shopping. He refers to the brilliant support he received from Emma Meredith, churchwarden at St Mary's – 'Not only has Emma been replenishing my food and drink supplies twice a week, but she also queues at Boots for my prescriptions and at the Post Office when needed. But best of all, my shopping always come with at least ten minutes of morale-boosting cheery chat.' Emma in response said that it had been 'an absolute joy to help Grahame just a very little in these strange times and I have always valued chatting with him.' Grahame also expressed his gratitude to Judy Wright for their once or twice weekly discussions about the state of the world.

Lockdown Stories - continued from page 9

World of Work during Lockdown

The world of work has also been much changed by the coronavirus. Fiona Morgan of St John the Divine writes about her experiences as Operations Manager for a local charity which provides activities and therapies for children with disabilities and additional needs :



Being supported at home

Skylarks

'The lockdown affected families who have children with additional needs in varied ways. Some children, such as those with autism, have felt a release from the pressure of having to conform to societal expectations. Not having to put on school uniform with scratchy labels has been liberating for those with sensory processing disorder. But other children need their routine and have been upset by the unpredictability of the situation. All children with disabilities had their legal rights watered down with councils no longer obliged, but only having to make "reasonable endeavours", to provide the support a child needs for their education. Some schools provided excellent support at home but many families felt abandoned.

The charity I work for, Skylarks (previously Me too & Co) had to rapidly adjust the way we

provide support to these families. Hooray for Zoom - we got many services online: from yoga, cookery, singing and signing, art and music therapy for children; to support groups and counselling. About 230 families used our videos and live sessions during lockdown. We also kept in touch weekly by telephone with our 80 most vulnerable families, those with needs themselves, and without a computer. In the summer holiday we gradually started 'real life' activities, meeting families outside in parks but must now address the challenge of returning to indoor sessions in a multi-user building for the autumn term. Risk assessments galore!'

www.skylarks.charity



Thank You

Skylarks

For many lockdown has been a time of quiet and with not much happening but for others the picture has been very different - a hive of activity - as Geoff Bates of St Matthias explains in his own inimitable way:

'With a GP surgery in the front room, a council office upstairs and a golf driving range in the back garden with plastic balls, I then needed sustaining with up to 30 St Matthiasers ZOOMING in for a coffee morning and service for spiritual sustenance plus Tesco home delivery and local Sainsburys to provide the physical food to overcome the smell of 2 rooms being painted!'

Lockdown Stories - continued from page 10

Home Schooling

An important lockdown experience has been home schooling with parents supervising their children's remote learning, whilst carrying on



Home Schooling in the Garden

Edgar Allen

with their own jobs and activities. The Allens of St Matthias spoke to Team Talk about the experience.

Ralph aged 13 said 'Lockdown has been a strange experience for us all, but I think that we are very fortunate in the technology that we have. This has allowed us to connect even though we cannot see each other. I am grateful, and at times stressed and annoyed, by the amount of work that my school has put online. Sadly, as my year group was overlooked by the government's return scheme I spent over a term at home. Lockdown for me hasn't been a terrible experience but it also hasn't been great.

Bertie aged 10 said that the lockdown experience had been tough because of 'staying away from friends and family, cancelled events and not knowing what to do. No school has made me realise how fun school actually is and what I'm getting every day without realisation. Virtual schooling can be a lot harder and easier in different ways but I'm glad that I got a final half term in at the end.'

Finally their father Edgar commented 'We've all had an education in Microsoft Teams and interactive PowerPoints. I definitely feel that I should have paid more attention to some of those IT training sessions at work! It has been great having the children around and having meals as a family, but also difficult to fit a full time job around a home schooling schedule. I'm looking forward to things returning to normal, but have been very lucky to have had lockdown in a busy family and with easy access to lovely Richmond Park'.

Lockdown has imposed a great strain on children and young people. The majority of the 10 million pupils from Reception to Year 10 have had to stay at home, losing months of tuition and normal social contact with their classmates. For the older children considerable added strain and anxiety have been provided by the unfortunate results situation in August with decisions on their A level grades and therefore their futures changing backwards and forwards. We pray for all children returning to school this autumn and for students entering university and colleges.



Home Schooling with a smile

Edgar Allen

Lockdown Stories - continued from page 11

St Matthias Churchwardens' Lockdown Experience

Despite rumours of the pandemic, the reality of total lockdown in our personal lives and closure of our churches, for what turned out to be nineteen weeks, was something few anticipated. It was hard to take in at first that normal worship during Lent, Holy Week and Easter Sunday was not possible and everything would take place very differently.

Keeping in touch with our congregation, friends and the staff and residents at Greville House Care Home was the priority; and Anne and we churchwardens were in frequent contact to check on how everybody was and what individual needs might be. Thank goodness for technology. It is not for everybody of course. Many preferred phone calls and emails and hard copies of newsletters. Others settled into Zoom and WhatsApp in a big way and became increasingly more comfortable with it.

Anne prepared and led beautiful, inspirational live on-line services. Our worship satisfied so many of us in a way we would not have imagined. We loved the simplicity and peacefulness of it and the time for reflection, whilst meditating on some wonderful artwork chosen weekly by Anne; and being joined by friends from far and wide. On a mundane level, we are better at each others' names, thanks to our Zoom tags. As churchwardens, we became even more closely in touch with our vicar. One of a churchwarden's responsibilities is to be a resource and support for the incumbent. Throughout this period, we have tried to act as a sounding board but, to be honest, the role has been largely reversed and we, along with the rest of the congregation, were resourced and supported by Anne.

If we needed a reminder that "the church" is not the building, but all of us together, this has been the experience to drive home the message. It is probably fair to say that for the most part we have benefited from new spiritual insights, feel more united as a church and have got to know each other better than ever before.

Margaret Morrison and Judith Pearson

Sally Gill says 'My husband and I have been self isolating during lockdown as he is considered to be 'vulnerable'. The weekly Zoom sessions which

have replaced our Thursday Service and coffee and also our Sunday morning Eucharist have been absolutely brilliant at keeping us all in touch with each other and making me still feel connected to St Matthias. Now that our Sunday morning church service has resumed in the building Revd Anne has continued to Zoom the service with her laptop on the altar and this is working so well for those of us who are still staying at home.'

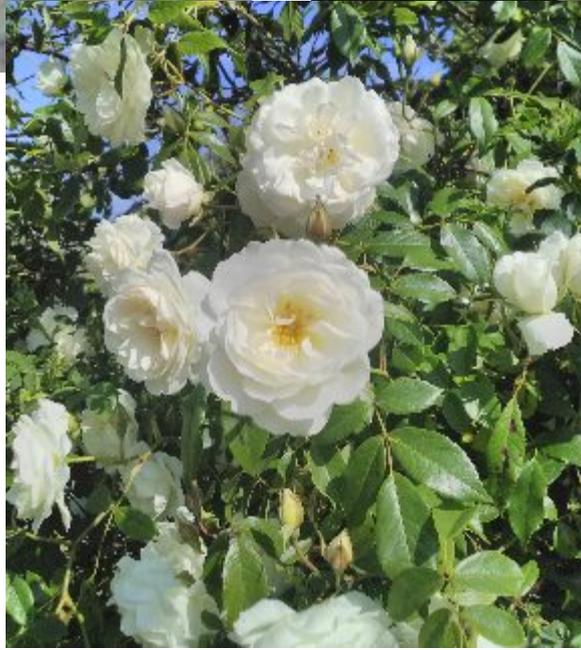
Gill Doling also expresses her appreciation for the Zoom services 'It became quite obvious to me in lockdown that although I could watch services from all around the country, unless I had some connection with the person leading the worship the experience was very unsatisfactory. When the Revd Anne started the Zoom service from home it was wonderful to feel part of the congregation too and to hear familiar voices, do readings or intercessions and to see images for contemplation.'

Richmond Town Quilt Panel



This 10 inch patchwork square has been made by a St Matthias young mum, Sophie Manton and will be included in the Mayor of Richmond's Town Quilt. The quilt will be displayed in the Museum of Richmond as a lasting memory of the Pandemic. Councillor Nancy Baldwin, Mayor of Richmond from 2019-2020, who led the quilt project is a member of St Matthias congregation as well as running the Scallywags Playgroup there.

Blossom & Flowers



Elsbeth Fearn

Elsbeth Fearn of St Mary Magdalene says: 'In the early days of lockdown, going out for my daily walk around the backstreets of Kew and North Sheen was an unsettling experience - no people, no cars, no planes - just absolute silence. But I soon became aware of the wealth of blossom and flowers in so many front gardens. In normal times I wouldn't even have noticed them, because I would be rushing hither and thither in my busy life. But now I was transfixed by the beauty and the colour of the plants and followed them through spring and summer, beginning with magnolias and camellias, on to wisteria and then glorious

roses and many other varieties. These were complemented by the rainbow paintings and drawings that dozens of children had made and displayed in the front windows of their houses. I have a better appreciation now of the wonders of God's creation.

Those wonders are also rekindling a long dormant hobby of mine painting pictures of flowers in watercolour, and I am learning again the skills of observation and patience needed. Once the buildings in Kew Gardens are fully open again I also look forward to seeing masterpieces of botanical illustration in the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art there.'

Lockdown Stories - continued from page 13

Exercise and Photographs

During lockdown it was very important to ensure that I made the most of my allocated exercise so I determined to walk daily in Richmond Park. As a keen photographer this also gave me the opportunity for a lockdown project to document with a few * photos the young birds and animals as they matured * a total of 3462 to be exact! As a means and encouragement to keep in regular contact with friends around the world, I then showed a select few of my photos on social media most days. My daily walks also gave me the chance to take part in the Marsden March during June, raising money for the Royal Marsden Cancer charity.

Nick Messum, St Mary Magdalene



Young stag in Richmond Park

Nick Messum



Ducks landing in Richmond Park

Nick Messum

As it has always done the River Thames continues to flow through our town, with beautiful vistas, the graceful trees on the towpath, the swans sailing majestically by. Our daily walks along the river or viewing it from Richmond Hill meant so much to us at a time when we were restricted as to what we could do.

These river scenes have been appreciated for centuries including by William Wordsworth in his poem from 1790 'Lines written near

Richmond upon the Thames at Evening' of which this is an extract:

Glide gently, thus forever glide
O Thames! That other bards may see
As lovely visions by thy side
As now fair river! Come to me
O glide, fair stream! For ever so
Thy quiet soul on all bestowing
'Till all our minds forever flow.
As thy deep waters now are flowing

Lockdown Stories - continued from page 14

James Arnold of St John the Divine says:

'Lockdown was a challenge for a family of four. Apart from the initial worry of the pandemic and related concerns such as supermarkets running out of stock, we quickly realised just how impossible it was to home-school small children while maintaining full-time jobs. It was a stressful time, but we quickly learnt a few important things. We learnt how



Richmond Bridge

Elsbeth Fearn

The world is in turmoil but thankfully some things remain constant

special it was that we were able to spend so much time together as a family; something that we would never have had the opportunity to do otherwise. We learnt how willing people were to reach out and communicate and offer help and we also learnt how much community spirit there was on our doorstep; we interacted (at an acceptable distance) with neighbours more than we ever had before and made some new friends.

We also learnt how much there was to do in the garden with the kids; planting, pruning, weeding and watering and how much pleasure there was in being around to see the garden grow. My favourite recollection was identifying birds by their song, in the garden with my son. It was astonishing how many birds we could hear - so many more than usual; possibly because there were fewer planes overhead, but I think it also helped that we took time to sit still and listen.'

Blessed by grace with happiness,
yet battling Chronic Pain,
in 'old norm' just some energy,
considered quite the gain!!

2020 a globe of suffering
tragedy all around,
mine of joy & yet guilt, as
in Lockdown...liberty found.

So many in restriction,
freer than ever afore,
life's so 'zooming engaging'
'virtually' able of more!!!

Gone the quiet life of pain
though it's worldly toll still rife,
now resting's never lonely
a Divine new blessing in life

Mish Powell, St John the Divine