

## Garden Party Migrates to the Church

# A Very Present Help in Trouble

Rain didn't obliterate Glastonbury Festival, prevent reasonable play at Wimbledon or interfere in any meaningful way with the Princess Diana Memorial Concert. So Johnny and Jane Graham kept telling themselves as the July 1<sup>st</sup> date for their long planned Garden Party in aid of St Mary's Church approached. Every day it rained; every day the wind blew and the temperature dropped. On the night before the event the heavens disgorged such torrents that gazebos collapsed and were torn from their moorings.

### No Time for an Ark

There was no time to build an ark. The Grahams, their helpers and invited guests repaired to St Mary's. And after all, it was the perfect venue. The directions on the Grahams' gate paraphrasing Psalm 46 said it all.

The sanctuary was warm, dry and welcoming. A groaning board of teatime goodies and glasses of rosé and lemonade awaited as villagers gratefully left brollies in the church porch and chatted with neighbours about the appalling weather.

The speeches, when they came, were low-key and informal. Johnny introduced Canon David Winter, former Head of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, who was well known to most listeners from his regular *Thought for the Day* slot on Radio Four's Today programme. He told us about himself and his experiences as a 'communicator' to validate the Grahams' choice of speaker for this particular occasion.

We soon learned that St Mary's needs wider support than that of its regular

congregation if she is to survive in the long-term. In 2006 the parish ran a deficit of £7,000. Many villagers are not aware that neither the Church Commissioners nor the Government contribute in any way to the upkeep of St Mary's, recently re-valued at £5,000,000. What the Government *does* do is allow tax to be recovered on donations by UK taxpayers. Gift Aid leaflets were provided for guests to take away.

### Keeping Our Church

Canon Winter commented thoughtfully that non-church goers are often among the most aggrieved when a village church closes. After all, the church has always been there and should always be there for everyone. At Harvest, Remembrance Sunday, Christmas and Easter; for christenings, weddings and funerals of beloved family and friends, our village church enfolds us with love and a spirit of community found nowhere else. Johnny Graham pointed out that. £2 is the cost of a London bus fare. If this modest sum were a monthly donation to the church, it would be worth £24 a year - enough to pay the cost of heating the sanctuary for two Sundays during winter. It didn't seem much to ask.

The guests stayed on for a cup of tea and some church 'regulars' tidied up and washed the dishes. Jane Graham provided plastic bags for leftovers and the church cat bestowed her favours among the chosen. As the crowd dispersed, a burst of late afternoon sunlight added a benediction. It all boded well for St Mary's.

**Trudy Yates**