

THE 2024 REPORT BY THE LAYHAM LOCAL HISTORY RECORDER

There are times in the life of a village when little of note happens. 2024 was one of those years – although all the well-embedded regular meetings and activities kept the community alive.

The Parish Council, the Parochial Church Council and the Friends of St Andrew's, the Village Hall Committee, the Playing Field Management Committee, the Layham Events Group, the Layham Social Club, Layham Bug Group and the Layham Local History Group were all active throughout the year.

All their activities are recorded in the pages of Letter from Layham in the Hadleigh Community News and more fully in the minutes of their meetings.



In addition to the regular weekly programme of worship in **St Andrew's Church** there was the annual plant sale, the September Suffolk Churches Ride and Stride, the October Layham and Shelley Dog Walk; the harvest festival, the remembrance service, a celebration of St Andrew's Day and the Christmas carol service.

The Parish Council met ten months of twelve at which they continue to press the District and County Councils for improvements in facilities. Notable improvements have been:

- A second Speed Indication Device (SID) has been purchased so there is an indicator at both ends of Upper Layham both of which are solar powered. See below three of the volunteers who look after the system (John Curran; Chris Leftwich and Rob Keeble).



- Due to persistence by councillors on speeding issues, SCC installed Automatic Number Plate Recognition camera for a short period and 256 vehicles were registered being driven through the village at over 35mph. The vehicle owners received formal warning letters from SCC. In addition, the Police Safety Camera Team followed the ANPR activity capturing speeding vehicles speeding near the centre of the village. Several drivers received speeding fines as a result. Parish Council efforts are paying off.
- Emergency Planning is high profile in the village with a team of volunteers making sure everyone is safe.
- Five of the six allotment plots are in use.

- The National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Pylon Project is not popular and has been criticized by the council – they have responded to the review and are lobbying for a project delay of five years to 2035 – giving more time to research alternatives.



The village playing field needed considerable work to keep it safe. The willow dome has been rebuilt (see Ant Owers with his daughter Evie) significant repairs were needed including the complete replacement of the slide frame; a group of volunteers cleaned and painted the most frequently used football goal posts.

The Village Hall is being well maintained by an energetic management committee. They ran their successful book fair again with a choice of



2,500 books – raising £500. Members of the committee took advantage of a small grant to run a 'Warm Hub' and 'Light Lunch' over the winter months. The facilities at the hall are now in good order and dependable.

The Social Club is the most regular user of the village hall. The group meets between 10am and 12.00 every other Monday throughout the year. A small charge of £2 is to pay for the hire of the hall and expenses for speakers. Between 15 and 50 turn up for tea, cakes and talk.

This year has seen an impressive range of some twenty speakers and demonstrators including sessions on local history; family first aid; chocolate making; bricks and brickmaking; Hadleigh Men's Shed; the British Embassy in Holland (Jan Devey in picture below); amateur archeology; Layham war memorial; barn owls; popular music and Christmas customs.



An active group that supports everything happening in the village is LEG (**Layham Events Group**). They have not been as active during 2024 as previously, but in February they offered voluntary groups financial support if they made a persuasive case. Their funds were raised by organising a Festive Fair in the previous December.

The Bug Club has thrived – a small group of children and their parents meeting in, and exploring the wild life of, the churchyard. Outdoor activities, crafts and games are parts of the programme.

Members of the **Layham Local History Group** continue to work on projects which, eventually, will be shown to the public. There has been no exhibition this year.

My report ends with two features worthy of special focus.

Our long-serving church organist

Daphne Leach moved to live in Layham when she was six years old and was soon encouraged by her mother (Evelyn Leach) to join St Andrew's church choir. Her natural musical ability was recognized by Agatha Durrant, the church organist (from 1922 to 1959), who offered to teach her to play the piano free of charge.

Agatha Durrant lived in the old school house and the piano lessons were given there over five years. Attention often strayed to a harmonium that was kept in the old school room – an instrument that fascinated Daphne and which she yearned to play.



It was when Daphne left school at the age of fifteen that Agatha Durrant asked her if she would “like to learn to play the organ?” The answer was clear and somehow the PCC found the funds to pay for organ lessons. Her teacher was Thomas Bates Wilkinson, the organist at St Mary-le-Tower, the Ipswich civic church. This was very convenient, as Daphne's first job was at Boots the Chemist just a short distance from the church, making lunchtime lessons possible.

After a year, lessons shifted to St.Mary's church in Hadleigh on Sunday mornings before services, under the guidance of the organist Frank Davies . This led to Daphne taking on the role of organist at Layham where she served from 1964 – 1969 before getting married (becoming Daphne Parsons) and moving to Barham.

It is no surprise that she kept her hand in over fourteen years as deputy organist in Barham, until 1985, when she returned to live in Layham. It wasn't long before her services were called upon again in 1988 for a further fifteen years – before taking a short break when Julia Handford moved into the village and took over for five years.

You will have guessed what happened next. Julia Handford moved on and Daphne was back at St. Andrews keyboard in 2010 where she has been ever since, playing the organ for all general services and special occasions. That is 34 years of commitment to the musical life of Layham, and 48 years overall as a church organist.

Daphne has no thought of retirement – the organ is such a part of her life that she will continue as long as she is able.

Completion of the development of the Marquis.



During the winter months the development of the Marquis site has been completed. The hotel and restaurant have now extended to accommodate a large venue for weddings and a luxury spa facility. The owner of the Marquis has provided a collection of photographs of the finished buildings and gardens – these are stored in the village archive. Personal observation suggests the business is becoming well established.

Michael Woods

Layham Local History Recorder

January 2025