

SARA HALL

CHRIST CHURCH, EMERY DOWN

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What do you do when you're not helping out at church? My main loves are reading, art and walking my dog, Fifi. My family would add buying books as I have a lot on many subjects! I love the Forest around my home, the peaceful atmosphere, the flora and fauna, the Forest paths, knowing my way around its familiar areas, finding new ones and I used to be able to walk for miles. I'm learning to express myself in paint by going to a class in New Milton and am a member of the Centre Group in Lyndhurst. Another hobby is lacemaking and I'm a volunteer in the reference library at the New Forest Heritage Centre. With Angela Trend and Tessa Davis I was a founding member of our local history group, *How We Used To Live*. Our initial focus was the material discovered at Firry Piece Farm, The Payne Archive, now safely lodged in the reference library. We organise an annual series of talks, interview people with long memories to make a record (so that their knowledge is not lost) and mount occasional exhibitions of our research.

What made you want to help? A sequence of events. When I moved back here from London and then retired I decided that my brain still needed to work, so one of the many courses I did was *Theology Quest and Questions* at Sarum College. It was wonderful being able to drive into The Close and park at the College. I gained a Certificate of Higher Education in Theology to everyone's great surprise as I had had to resit Religious Knowledge 'O' Level three times at convent school in Whitby. My father had retired by then and we started to go to church together, originally our church was All Saints but when it stopped having an 8am service we had moved to Christ Church because my father was still working at Southampton University Hospital. It was lovely doing this together, I liked the fact that Christ Church used traditional language and was pleased when I discovered that each church held Compline in Holy Week – the service I most enjoyed at school. Gradually I was lured onto the PCC, asked to focus on the library and later became one of the Churches Together reps. I did Alpha, its follow-up on Philippians and joined the home group; as well as being welcomed into the Christ Church family I got to know people in all four churches.

What do you enjoy most about it? The people and the friends I've made. We are a small but close community and love welcoming others when they come to join us. We're in the process of applying for a faculty to reorder the church to focus on our beautiful icons and make space for spiritual contemplation and creative worship. Although I enjoy a traditional format for services I value experiencing new ways and formats so that worship is accessible to others. Christ gave us clear guidance on how we should behave and pray; clinging to liturgy just because we like it can be off-putting and exclude those who don't understand it. Whilst the words 'trespass' and 'property' in BCP prayers mean much more to me than Common Worship's 'sin' and 'nature', I realise I'm on the losing side! Oddly, I cannot cope with liturgy in lockdown; music and actions mean so much more - when David raises the last wafer and makes the sign of the cross with it - for us – is just wonderful. That's when Fifi comes to find me, wagging her tail.

Is there anything you have enjoyed during Lockdown? Being at home, although I am missing my family and friends. I've been in touch with family in Scotland and abroad too, more often, which is lovely. I'm so glad that the Welsh contingent were in Lyndhurst for half term, that we shared a meal and enjoyed Sarum Lights together. A good memory to have and cherish. The earth seems to be breathing again which is great, the birds are loudly songful, the sky is bluer, when it's not raining, the Forest is a glorious bright green, the animals have taken over and we are just so lucky to be living here. It's wonderful to see God's good creation in this state. I've loved The National Theatre At Home, Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals but an especial joy has been collective worship with Denzil the Dragon and David's piano playing. For various reasons my volunteer role with the Isolation Support Group is limited to being a telephone buddy, but being part of the outside world in isolation and still feeling useful is good. We have a neighbourhood WhatsApp group and it's lovely hearing about all the bread making and cooking going on, vegetable growing, knowing that lambs were born in Minstead before being moved to the fields here, observing the fierce photographic competitions and relishing the jokes.

What one thing would you like to see happen, in light of the changes from Lockdown? That's a difficult one. There are so many people unemployed, going hungry, becoming homeless and being abused - and that's just in the UK - it's difficult to focus on one thing. Although I could sum it up as 'a better world', a world with a different economic focus and in which everyone's role is valued. The lockdown has brought out the best in our wonderful community. The Lyndhurst and Emery Down Communities Action Group exhibits empathy, cooperation and mutual aid. Very different from the take it, make it, use it and lose it economy prevalent before lockdown. One of my neighbours is making scrub bags for the NHS but did not have enough tape to close them. A cry went up on WhatsApp and within minutes, literally, she had more than she needed. People are sharing food and swapping things. We don't need all that we have in the western world, our focus has changed, we are making do. Living in the Forest we are accustomed to deer, cattle, pigs, sheep and ponies roaming free. In lockdown we have seen pictures from around the world of wild animals walking rather bemusedly but purposefully upon the man-made surfaces of our cities, towns and villages. These images demonstrate how close we are to the natural world, indeed, we have appropriated its land and resources. We are not the only ones who need what God has created. One of the many things that struck me when reading the Lent book by Ruth Valerio, *'Saying Yes To Life'*, was how the sequence of events in Genesis 1 relating God's good creation is not dissimilar to that described by scientists today. We are the newcomers. Humans are part of God's good creation but are the only ones responsible for its care. In summary, I'd like to see a sustainable future which takes account of and values our connectedness with each other and the natural world and which acknowledges our corporate responsibility for that connectedness on a worldwide basis.