

I feel very honoured to be chosen to represent the village in receiving this lovely gift from the Parish Council to the community in general and the village shop volunteers in particular. For the best part of 18 months, in ways big and small, the people of Sulgrave have come together to support each other in these truly unusual and challenging times. During the first lockdown in particular, the village suddenly found itself isolated and thrown back on to its own resources. People were quick to look out for their neighbours, particularly the elderly, making sure that no one was forgotten. It has been my pleasure to record these selfless activities for posterity on the village website.

Looking back through the website, it is astonishing to note that, during this difficult time, the actions of dedicated villagers enabled many of our regular activities and events to take place whilst respecting the Covid regulations. Thus we celebrated VE day; enjoyed a SWAG Treasure Hunt: applauded the NHS; showed off our cultivations and creations at the outdoor Produce Show: remembered the fallen in a unique ceremony on this field; decorated the Bus Shelter before Christmas as usual; acquired and fenced Castle Hill, making it an accessible part of this lovely public open space; picked up the litter: visited the wonderful gardens on open day: and supported the opening of the Manor Tea Rooms. In the background, volunteers were working and are still working on the renovation of the Church Hall with HS2 grant funds.

It was our good fortune to have a community shop that had been established for 16 years, with teams of volunteers well able to cope with the additional work involved in keeping people supplied. Whilst the shop is a veritable delicatessen the basics have never been forgotten and the proud boast that all necessities can be obtained there has been completely justified. To have achieved all this from the tiny floor space available whilst maintaining social distancing is nothing short of miraculous. Behind the scenes the management committee had to work tirelessly to cope with the ever changing Covid regulations. I can look back through many entries on the village website detailing these changes – maintain the two metres separation – one person at a time – don't forget your masks and so on.

By sheer necessity, the shop has become the centre of village affairs but we should also remember and appreciate the efforts of the church to continue to provide a sanctuary. The Star Inn has, of course, been badly affected by the absence of customers but has adapted continuously to provide what it can within the ever changing regulations.

The presentation of this gift to the village is a Parish Council initiative and on behalf of us all I would like to offer thanks to the Councillors for their steady application to parish affairs, struggling with the niceties of Zoom remote meeting technology. Those of us following these meetings have come to

know the inside of Councillors' houses as well as we once knew the Church Hall.

Finally, I am sure you will all agree with me that we are very lucky to live in such a perfect place for surviving successive lockdowns. As someone who has roamed the local countryside for over eighty years, I have found it very heartening to bump into so many people using the footpaths for the first time and thanks are due to the work of our footpath wardens. If only we had our own road menders as we did when I was a boy. It's difficult to believe but I have photographs showing that there were once no potholes! Come back George Clifford and Aubrey Carpenter with your barrows and shovels!

So, once more many thanks to the artist who painted this picture and the Parish Council who commissioned it. May it long hang in the shop in memory of the fortitude of the villagers in the time of the coronavirus, which we fervently hope will soon be a thing of the past.

Thank you.

Colin Wootton