

## **Achievements and Performance**

2021 began in lockdown with the Priory Church closed, as COVID 19 continued to prevent any return to normality. The celebration of Easter on April 4th heralded its reopening; and April 12th brought opening to the general public.

(COVID safety measures required that any opening hours would need diligent stewarding; the volunteer demographic had restricted sufficient availability for any earlier opening).

However, there was a slow but steady return of regional visitors as restrictions were moderated, stewarding numbers increased - allowing longer opening hours - and thankfully this led to a very welcome small inflow of visitor income.

Opportunities had been identified to utilise digital platforms to sustain the mission of the Church to the Parish, and extend its reach much further afield, and these were gradually being exploited as increased expertise and extra equipment allowed. COVID circumstances have inspired the nascent growth of a hybrid approach to Mission, using Facebook and YouTube offers, alongside development of other Social Media platforms; Instagram and Tik-Tok.

An on-line weekday evening service of Compline (Night prayer) has established a regular 'congregation'.

Digital engagement with the local schools has been a vital element in their support both in education, well-being and Governance.

Website development is enabling promotion of the Priory's activities, whilst exploiting the Heritage value of the Grade 1 listed Priory building.

Accomplishing the transfer to video of the Virtual Reality experience through scoping of an Augmented Reality project involving William Marshal is an ongoing project.

The total denial of visitors or any revenue raising activities during the first three months of 2021 left the Priory dependent on the Government's Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage Grant (CRFH— £69,200 awarded October 2020) to sustain its everyday needs.

An application for a 2nd Round CRFH grant, to cover similar needs from April 1st to June 30th and to provide a basis for future sustainability, was successfully made resulting in a further award of £39,500.

The return of regional visitors remained slow as restrictions were gradually eased. At the end of June, the Priory became the venue for a "Face 2 Face exhibition" in support of Kendal's 'The Lighthouse', the Community Mental Health Hub. This proved very popular with local & regional visitors and the shop was the beneficiary of the considerable increase in visitor numbers. (The exhibition ran for an extra 6 weeks beyond its published closure date). The hard work of all volunteers and staff has allowed 'shop performance' to match contributions to Priory finances in previous 'best years' - and this after being fully operational for only around 6 months during 2021. A noteworthy achievement!

The assistance received from the Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport through the National Lottery Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage has ensured that the end of the year has been reached with finances in a viable position, whilst the efforts made by Priory volunteers have generated hope that sustainable revenue levels are possible and achievable. However, to ensure certainty of such achievement, vigilant control of all expenditure coupled with energetic fund raising will be required.

Dr Fiona Smith (Treasurer)