

## St Mary's Village Café at Shudy Church

St Mary's Village Café has now popped up twice: first at the end of February then at the end of April. We have to admit that on the two occasions it has popped up it has been far more successful than we expected. As the Café has been successful and will continue I thought it would be good to give something of its genesis and of what we expect from it in the future.

When I arrived in the Camps last year as team vicar I took over three Churches Castle Camps, Horseheath and Shudy Camps which although they are three separate parishes share worship with each other. Of the three Shudy has by far the smallest indigenous congregation. There are only nine people on the Church Electoral roll. With such low numbers it was felt that we needed to do something to develop the place of the Church in the community and secure its future.

The things in the Church at the moment are what are called fresh expressions of church the most well-known of these are Messy Church and Café Church but in other places fresh expressions have involved knitting groups, language groups for immigrants, walking groups and sports teams. The important thing about such fresh expressions is that they fill a gap in the community in which they are based. It seemed to us then that some kind of fresh expression was what we needed at Shudy. Messy Church had been tried in the past and if it was what was needed would still be continuing now. The Church had a history of successful coffee mornings and Harvest suppers and we normally do very well for refreshments after Sunday service, so of some kind of Café Church might be what we were looking for. But what exactly was a Café Church.

When we began to look into it we discovered that Café Church came in a variety of shapes and sizes. Our research took us to Hadstock and their Café Church which was essentially a Sunday service with the congregation sitting around tables drinking coffee and eating rolls: very good but not what we had in mind. Other Café Churches were services held in local cafes: again a good idea but as we don't have a local Café in Shudy it didn't fit the bill either. A talk at the PCC from mission department and more research on the internet – try Googling Café Church- showed us that in other places the core of the Café Church was the Café and not the Church. There was one village in Norfolk who had a café in the hall and while that was on there was some worship in the Church which people could attend or not attend as they wished.

This was more what we wanted. We were aware that Shudy as a village lacks a central focus a place where people can meet and socialize. Here the Church as the only community building in the village could help. Yes as a Church we wanted to provide some spiritual input into it but mainly we wanted a meeting point for the community. This is why when we thought about what to call it we came up with the St Mary's Village Café and not St Mary's Café Church. Yes we do have the 10.45 slot a time of prayer and reflection in the chancel but attendance is not compulsory. It would have been good if, like the Norfolk church, we had a different building to hold it in, but we don't so we can't.

St Mary's Village Café will pop up again on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June from 10-12 as usual and then at intervals yet to be decided. We will be pursuing some grants to improve facilities. We would very much like input on things we can do, improve or change and, of course, offers of assistance would be much appreciated. One issue we already have is that although the Café was not primarily intended as a money raise initiative, we have made money. Some of this will go back to the Church to cover costs and overheads, but we hope that when we have been running for a year or so we will see what we have made and invite suggestions from our customers about suitable charities which we can donate to.

If you haven't popped in yet do pop in on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and see what it's all about. I hope to see you then.

Ian Fisher (Team Vicar)