

St. Lawrence Café Report 2018

The St Lawrence Café is now ten years old. It was started in 2008 by Simon Shaw and the aim was to create an occasion where people could meet before or after church and have fairly substantial refreshments, so creating a monthly social event.

We have our regulars, some of whom have been to the early service at church and then come for their breakfast, and some who have breakfast first and then go to the later service. Of course, there are also many people who come to the Café who don't go to either service but come simply to meet friends and have food and a chat. We also have a group of cyclists who come quite often as, now they know about us, they plan their third Sunday of the month route to take in a stop with breakfast. It's lovely when you see new faces one week and then they become regulars. You know you're getting it right if people keep coming back! Some people now come almost as soon as we open and are often still there when we start to clear up.

For anyone who hasn't been to the Café yet, we serve bacon or sausage in soft rolls or baguettes, meusli, porridge in the winter, toast and marmalade or jam, fresh fruit, yogurts, an assortment of pastries including croissants, muffins, pain au chocolat and pain a la crème and, of course, tea and very good coffee. There is also a selection of Sunday newspapers; the whole atmosphere is one of warmth and conviviality and is very welcoming. Occasionally we have a stall or two run by people in the village who have craft or similar items to sell, and if we are very lucky the Junior Choir come and sing to us. These are always welcome extras at the Café.

The original Café team were predominantly church goers and the Café's profits went to the maintenance of the Parish Church. None of the current Café team are regular church goers, but they are happy to support the church and so the profits still go to this very worthy cause. We are very lucky to have people in the village who sponsor certain aspects of the Café, and this helps to keep our outgoings down. The bacon, sausages and newspapers are provided by village residents, and a financial contribution to the extras is also given each month by one of our strongest supporters. The flowers for the tables are provided too, and I was lucky enough to organise more sponsorship towards the end of last year from a company in Windsor called En Route, who provide the bread and pastries for BA first class travellers and now provide them for us. So, we are eating first class fare! A huge thank you is owed to these sponsors as without their generosity our profits would be considerably less.

I took over the running of the Café from Simon Shaw last summer when he decided to have a well-earned rest and I haven't made many changes to what we provide or how we do it – why change something which works so well? The Church Choir, who have to rehearse from 10am before the 10.30 service, asked if we could open a little earlier than 9.30 so that they had more time to enjoy their breakfast. We decided that this was eminently do-able so the Café hours have now changed from the original 9.30 to 11, to 9.15 to 10.45. This doesn't mean that the Café is empty from 10.45 – usually there are still people sitting chatting until well after 11, but anyone who arrives after 10.45 may well find that there is no food left. The late attendees usually help us to clear everything up, and that extra help after a long and busy morning is much appreciated.

The Café was originally set up in consultation with the PCC, although now it generally operates independently of it. However, for legal and insurance purposes it is classed as a PCC activity: the PCC approves the appointment of the Café leader, includes a Café contribution in its budgeted income, and receives a report from the Café at the church Annual Meeting. Other than that, the Café is very much left to its own devices, though naturally the PCC and the Café would consult before either made any changes which would significantly affect the other. For instance, next year 'Café Sunday' falls on Easter Day, so we will be discussing with the PCC whether it would be better to change the Café to the previous week, much as we do when it falls on the weekend of the Village Fete.

Although the Café is free, monetary donations have always been requested to help with the costs. Over the past few months the profits from the Café have increased considerably, despite some bad weather on a few occasions. The profits for the 7 months from January 2017 to August 2017 were around the £650 mark, and the profits for the 7 months from September 2017 to March 2018 have been about £1,250, so very nearly double. The increase in numbers might not last, or might vary dramatically through the summer, but we hope the Café will continue to provide a happy social occasion which can be enjoyed by everyone. It's a great way to help the church whilst also having a good chat, good food, good coffee, (as our tag line on the banners states – thank you to Sarah and Simon Kelly for funding the new ones), and all in a great atmosphere.

Finally, I could not possibly let this report on the St Lawrence Café pass without thanking those who make the Café happen – the amazing Café team. They turn up like clockwork to set up, serve, man the dishwasher, be the barista, clear the dirties and generally do all the behind the scenes jobs, and without them the Café simply would not happen. I am not going to name them all, but if you don't know who they are, then you clearly have not been coming to the Café and you are missing a treat!