

**PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF
St MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, GREAT BRICKHILL**

Annual Report and Accounts

For the year ended 31st December, 2023

**St. Mary the Virgin Church,
Lower Way
Great Brickhill
Milton Keynes
MK17 9AE**

Bankers:

**Barclays Bank PLC
Leighton Buzzard Branch
The Aylesbury Group
34 Market Square
Aylesbury
Bucks.
HP20 1TT**

Independent Examiner:

**Mr. D. Beatty
Roxburgh House
Pound Hill
Great Brickhill
Milton Keynes
MK17 9AS**

**Church Architect:
Adrian Ringrose Dip Arch BA Arch RIBA AABC
Stimpson Walton Bond
Chartered Architects
59 York Road
Northampton
NN1 5QL**

Report Of The Parochial Church Council (PCC) Year ended 31st December, 2023

MEMBERS OF THE PCC

The following persons served as members of the PCC from the date of the Annual Meeting, 16th May 2023:-

The Reverend John Waller (Chairman)
Jeremy Hopkinson (Licensed Lay Minister; PCC Vice-Chairman)
Julia Turner (Church Warden)
Phillipa Cook (Secretary) – re-elected
Clare Hankins-Lewis – re-elected
Stuart Jones – newly elected
Sophia Walmsley - newly elected
Joy Wilson – re-elected
Diana Williams – re-elected

Deanery Synod Representative:- Position vacant from 1/10/20

Neil Cook continued in the role of Treasurer, co-opted to the PCC, 27/6/23

N.B. The maximum number of lay representatives on the PCC is 6, as per the prescribed formula for Electoral Rolls up to 50.

OBJECTS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE PCC

The object of the PCC of St. Mary the Virgin Church, Great Brickhill, is to further the work of the Church of England in the parish of Great Brickhill. The Council is constituted under the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 and as amended by the 1969 Measure, and is required to co-operate with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in 2004 provision was made for the annual appointment of representatives on the PCC. All members of the church electoral roll are entitled to vote and stand for election. There is also provision for the co-option of members of the PCC, and the incumbent is ex-officio a member and the Chairman. The LLM, Warden and Deanery Synod Representatives are also ex-officio members of the PCC.

ELECTORAL ROLL AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Membership of the electoral roll is open to any lay person who is baptised, over sixteen years of age and has signed a declaration that he or she is a member of the Church of England and is either (a). resident in the parish, or (b). has habitually attended worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment.

At the start of the year there were 36 people on the Electoral Roll. There was a revision of the Electoral Roll prepared for the Annual Meeting in May; there were no changes and so the number on the Revised Roll remained as 36. There was one death between May and the end of December and so the number at the end of the year was 35, three of whom are not resident within the parish.

The average attendance on a “normal” Sunday was 18, an increase of three from last year. Attendance at special services is significantly higher than the average figure for a “normal” Sunday service.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Reverend John Waller continues as Rector. In February the Rector celebrated twenty years since his arrival in the Benefice in 2003.

There has been no change to the general pattern of services – the Rector takes a Holy Communion Service and a Family Service across the Benefice every Sunday unless it is the week when there is one just one joint service in the Benefice for all four parishes.

Since October, the Rector writes a letter for inclusion in the monthly Newsletters for each of the four villages.

Jeremy Hopkinson continues as LLM and Sharon Sutton from Little Brickhill continues in the role of Admin Assistant to the Rector.

The church remains open every day of the year between at least 10am and 4pm.

Services:

To make it fair for all four parishes, the pattern of services is complex but the services are publicized widely to enable everyone to easily access the information through all the various channels of communication. Each month in Great Brickhill, on the first Sunday there is a 9.30am Holy Communion service and on the third Sunday a Family Service at 11am. On the second Sunday a variety of services are held, which are lay led. Generally, there is no service on the fourth Sunday of the month and a Benefice service is held if there is a fifth Sunday.

Special Services:

During 2023 we had one wedding, one service of Blessing for a child, eight funerals and two Thanksgiving Services. We were very sad to hear of the loss of three regular members of our congregation, Lady Rachel Duncombe, Janet Blake and Sheila McLoughlin.

A number of special services were held. In addition to our annual services such as Remembrance Sunday, Nine Lessons and Carols, all of which were well attended, the highlights were:

- On Sunday 7th May, a special Benefice Holy Communion service was held at Great Brickhill, which incorporated thanksgiving for the Coronation of King Charles III, including special readings, prayers and hymns from the Coronation Service the day before at Westminster Abbey.
- An outdoor service was held in the churchyard on Sunday, 30th July. We welcomed people from across the Benefice and even as far away as Australia! We were also joined by four four-legged friends. The Treasure Hunt gave a great opportunity to have a good look around the whole of the inside and outside of our wonderful church.
- With thanks to the Turner family, the Harvest Festival was held at Rectory Farm. We were joined in the next door barn by some geese and some splendid cattle. After a lovely service with both traditional and new Harvest songs, a Bring & Share lunch was enjoyed in the autumn sunshine. Contributions were received for the local Food Banks.
- The Village Nativity on Sunday, 17th December. The Cricket Club kindly hosted this event again. We were lucky with the weather, just a bit of wind to contend with. It was as usual a great start to our Christmas celebrations.

At both the Nativity and the Carol Service, the young children were encouraged to come forward to sing the first verse of some of the carols with the choir / music team.

MUSIC & BELLS:

Jerry Breslin plays the organ regularly at the Sunday services and generally at any special services. Rosemary Howell, Stephen Axford and John Wearmouth have also played the organ at times during the year. Andrew and Margretta Smith provide the music for the Family Services and Sophia Walmsley leads the singing.

Jerry continues to lead the choir and the weekly Benefice Choir practices, which are held on Monday evenings at Great Brickhill. On Saturday 16th September the choir gave a concert in St Mary Magdelene (Willen) Church as one of the concerts in their Heritage Week.

Bell ringing practice takes place on a Wednesday evening and the bells are rung before most services. David Middleton continues in the role of Tower Captain and organizes ringers for weddings and funerals as required. David arranged for a quarter peel of the bells to be rung on the afternoon of the Coronation. New ringers are always welcome.

HIGH ASH SCHOOL:

High Ash School is a Church of England school. Reverend John Waller is one of two Foundation Governors, appointed by the Oxford Diocese. The other position is vacant following the resignation of Sandra Maher, the second Foundation Governor.

The Headteacher of High Ash, Mrs Sara Boyce, left the school at the end of 2022 and Mrs Kate Goodger was Acting Headteacher for the Spring term. Mrs Ruth Lewin was appointed as the new Headteacher and started after Easter. Since the second half of that term, she has been on long-term sick leave and Mrs Goodger resumed as Acting Headteacher. An Ofsted Inspection was held at the end of the Winter term and the report was awaited at the end of the year.

High Ash School Services:

The school is now too big to have all the pupils at a single service and so there is a service for Key Stage 1 & Foundation children, and one for the older Key Stage 2 children. The following High Ash services were held:

- Two Easter Services, on 29th & 30th March
- The Leavers' Service on 19th July for the Year 6 pupils (with Year 5 supporting)
- Two Harvest Services on 11th & 15th October
- Christingle service for Key Stage 1 & Foundation on 14th December and Carol Service for Key Stage 2 pupils on 18th December

CHURCH ACTIVITIES:

The Lent Course followed the "Come and See" course which the Oxford Diocese has been running for the last few years. Those who signed up received a short email each day during Lent, Monday to Saturday, and on Sundays a short video from Bishop Steven exploring the theme, which this year was based on the Beatitudes.

There were two sessions each week for the 6-week Benefice Lent Course:- on Tuesday afternoons in Stoke Hammond and a midweek evening session at venues across the Benefice.

The monthly midweek Bible Group for the Benefice continued on the third Thursday evening in the month at The Rectory. The sessions led by the Rector focus on the readings which will be heard in one of the Sunday services.

A Coffee Morning was held on a Saturday 13th May when the Rector gave a very informative presentation of photos he took during his trip to Israel in autumn 2022. Donations were collected at the Coffee Morning in support of Christian Aid Week. We

no longer hold a Christian Aid House to House collection in the village but encourage anyone who would like to make a donation to do so online.

The Monday Morning Coffee Club is held every Monday in the church during term time, between 9.30am and 11.30am. Anyone is welcome to call in for a coffee and chat, open to all ages from the elderly, to mothers with young babies.

The Food Box is available in the church porch for anyone to help themselves if they find themselves in need, either in an emergency or in the longer term. Since the introduction of the Food Box in 2019, there has been a varied amount of demand. We are grateful to those who donate suitable items for inclusion in the Food Box.

CHURCH EVENTS:

The following were the major events held through the year:-

The Snowdrop Walks:

After the disappointment of the last three years, we were blessed with good weather and a large number of visitors on both days in February. The snowdrops looked wonderful and the church was buzzing with atmosphere as everyone enjoyed the delicious tea and cakes. On the first Sunday, an incredible £1762.40 was raised, which included a very generous donation of £150 from the Monday Drop-In, followed by £1248 on the second Sunday, giving a total for the two weeks an amazing £3000.40. Thanks go to all who helped with the teas and provided the delicious cakes, and most of all, to Sir David and Lady Sally Duncombe for allowing us access to their grounds.

Plant Fayre, Sunday 16th April:

After a three-year break due to Covid restrictions, the Plant Fayre returned to its normal venue, the Parish Hall and cricket field. As one of our two big fund-raising activities of the year we were delighted that an amazing £2472 was raised. 315 people came through "the door" and, whilst the main aim is to raise funds, it was equally rewarding to host an event which is clearly enjoyed by all those who attended, both from the village and further afield. A large number of people contributed greatly to the organization of the day and without their support, the event could not have taken place.

Christmas:

The Christmas Coffee Morning was held in the church on 25th November and raised £1,030. There were less people than last year but it was a lovely occasion with a great atmosphere, and everyone appeared to be having a good time catching up with friends.

Carol singing round the village took place on Thursday 14th and Monday 18th December and the weather was good on both evenings. The total collected was £693.

The Advent Windows lit up the village again from 1st to 31st December.

COMMUNICATIONS:

A major revamp of the Benefice website took place in October. The website providers completely rewrote all of the public facing part of the website, i.e. the Home page. There is a different way of navigating through the various sections, allowing better access via mobile phones. The content of the sections remained unchanged, only the Home page was affected.

A weekly e-mail is sent out to those on the database and the website is continually updated to provide all the up-to-date information regarding services and activities. Items are also circulated on the village WhatsApp Group. A Pew Sheet is produced for all services and a report is sent each month to the online Parish Newsletter.

Parish Newsletter: A printed copy of a scaled down version of the online monthly Parish

Newsletter, which includes just the news items, is available in the church porch and a copy is delivered each month to those known to be in the village who are not able to receive the Newsletter any other way.

WORK ON THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH:

In November we were delighted to have a new notice board at the church gates. Marcus Feinhols of Fine Home Properties kindly sponsored the board and we are very grateful for his support. The new notice board houses all the main notices and the old notice board will be refurbished to have the large service boards on display, easily visible from a distance.

Two very successful workdays were held, an industrious morning on 12th August and 2nd September, followed by a relaxed lunch for those who could stay. A lot of jobs were achieved, both inside and outside. Among other things:

- the church gates were painted
- drains and gullies cleared
- foliage cut back in several areas
- behind the altar and the children's area were cleaned
- extension roof cleared of leaves
- bird proofing done

Andrew Smith carried out a thermal survey of the church. Many of the recommendations in the survey have been carried out to make the church more energy efficient. More work is planned for 2024. A programmable thermostat was fitted to the boiler in January to enable the heating to come on at specific times to cut down the heating costs.

The 5-year Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR inspection on electrical installation) was carried out in December. One piece of wiring has to be replaced and then a clean report will be issued.

DEANERY SYNOD:

Our Benefice is in the Mursley Deanery, which is the smallest and unusual in that there is no urban setting – 20 parishes, small population with 5 clergy, plus House for Duty, a post which is currently vacant.

The position of Deanery Synod Representative for Great Brickhill remains vacant. No replacement has been found for the treasurer's position and so Jeremy Hopkinson has continued as Acting Treasurer. Annie Copper took over as Lay Chair from Gavin Merrylees who continued as Acting Secretary until Malcolm Oliver took on the role of Synod Secretary in November. Revd Val Plumb continued as Area Dean.

The outgoing Lay Chair, Gavin Merrylees attended our Annual Meeting on 16th May and presented a good summary of the year.

The Deaneries were asked to consider the Diocesan Review of C&YP (Children & Young Persons). An additional PCC meeting was held in October to discuss associated questions raised by the Deanery. The meeting was an opportunity for detailed discussion of how we might develop ideas for involving children and young people.

There was a Confirmation Service in the Deanery, on 5th November at Stewkley. There were three candidates from the Benefice, one from Great Brickhill.

POLICY DOCUMENTS:

The Health & Safety check was carried out on 24th October. The annual review of the

Safeguarding Policy took place at the November PCC meeting. No changes were made to the Policy. A Domestic Abuse Policy was also approved.

An annual safeguarding report was prepared for the November PCC meeting. For the year to 31st October the report is a nil report – no safeguarding incidents had been reported in the last twelve months.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was last updated in May 2021. The annual review took place in November. There were no GDPR issues to report and no further change required to the Data Privacy notice.

All the Policy documents are on display in the church porch and available on the website in the Great Brickhill section.

CHURCH FINANCES FOR 2023:

The accounts, produced on a receipts and payments basis as in previous years, showed a deficit of £763. There is a big increase in receipts. The figure for PCC Surplice Fees is higher due to more funerals being held. The income from Special Activities is £3,465 more than last year due to the success of the two main fund-raising events; the Snowdrop Walks raised a record £3,072 and the Plant Fayre £2,677 (last year combined total £1,374).

Despite the general rise in gas prices, the cost for Heating, Lighting etc shows a decrease of £1,364 due to last year's figure including an end of contract charge, and the change to the thermostat allowing for more efficient times the heating is comes on.

As an end of year deficit was projected, only £14K was paid towards the allocation of the £21,433 Parish Share to the Diocese (£8K was paid in 2022, £16K in 2021).

Restricted Items: As well as general income the PCC has received donations which are restricted as to their use, the money having been given for specific purposes. Under the Charities Act accounting regulations, the restricted funds have to be identified separately in the main accounts. The PCC is able to confirm that it holds sufficient and appropriate assets to meet the conditions of expenditure of all restricted funds. Details of the balances of funds and the assets which are held to represent those funds are contained in the Statement of Assets and Liabilities.

St Mary's Fund: Receipts included donations, grant money, fund-raising items and two legacies. Payments were made out of the funds re the snagging issues with the New Facilities. The balance at the end of the year was £65,169.

UPDATE ON THE NEW FACILITIES AND ROOF REPAIRS:

Due to a mains water leak in March, the water had to be turned off. Simon Elbrow, the original builder located the leak under the new path and did the repair; a flagstone now covers the area of the repair on the path

DJ Hutchings carried out the defects work on the New Facilities under the direction of the architect who will negotiate any outstanding payment due to Simon Elbrow.

The Roof. Successful grant applications were made to the following:- Benefact Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, Bucks Historic Churches Trust, National Churches Trust (Wolfson Foundation and Headley Trust) and the Archdeacon. The project was also put forward successfully for the National Churches Trust "Last Chance Churches" appeal. This meant we have enough funds to carry out the repairs on the roof and possibly the ceiling panels. A meeting with the contractor and architect is scheduled for early January when a start date for the roof will be confirmed.