



The Parish Church of  
**St Peter Great Berkhamsted**

## **Annual Report 2023**

**Agenda, Reports and Financial  
Statement for the**

# **Meeting of Parishioners**

**and the**

# **Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

Sunday 28 April 2024 at 11.00am



## From the Rector Fr Stuart Owen

Dear Members of the Electoral Roll,

I have pleasure in introducing these Agendas, Reports and Financial Report in readiness for our Annual Meetings which take place this year at 11:00 am on Sunday 28 April 2024 at St Peter's Church.

Do please make every effort to be present at these meetings when they happen. They are a significant occasion in our communal parish life.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart', written in a cursive style.

Fr Stuart Owen



**KEEP CALM AND RING FOR THE KING**

CORONATION BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY 2PM-4PM  
Have a go at bell ringing in St Peter's Bell Tower!  
No experience necessary. Ages 12+



"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" Isaiah 9:2

# Advent Carols

by Candlelight  
Sunday 3 December 6pm

Everyone is very welcome at St Peter's, whether you are a regular worshipper, exploring faith or just





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# **Annual Meeting of Parishioners for the Election of Churchwardens**

**11.00am Sunday 30th April, 2023,  
St Peters, Berkhamsted**

## **AGENDA**

- 1 Prayers
- 2 Apologies for Absence Philippa Seldon, Lallys, Clive Freestone.
- 3 To Receive the Minutes of the previous Meeting of Parishioners (4th April 2022)  
The minutes were accepted as a true record.
- 4 Election of Churchwardens for 2023-2024 Carolynn Charman and Tim Hennessey were elected unopposed.
- 5 Closure of Meeting



# Annual Parochial Church Meeting

11.05am Sunday 30th April 2023

in St Peters, Berkhamsted

## MINUTES

1. To receive the Minutes of the last Annual Parochial Church Meeting (4th April 2022) The minutes were received.
2. To receive a Report on the Electoral Roll. The new roll has 196 people.

## Elections

3. Affirmation of ONE All Saints representative to the Parochial Church Council for 2023-24 Richard Hackworth agreed to stand.
4. Election of new members of PCC Martin Moore and Will Gore were elected.
5. Election of two Deanery Synod representatives – Carole Dell and Susan Holmes.

## Other Business

6. To receive the Annual Report and Financial Statement of the Parochial Church Council. Proposed by Richard Hackworth, seconded by Barbara Groet.
7. To re-appoint Hillier Hopkins LLP, Chartered Accountants, or another qualified firm if advantageous to the PCC, as the auditor or independent examiner, dependent on the requirements of charity law. Proposed by Richard Hackworth and seconded by Nicholas Miles.
8. To receive a report from the Churchwardens on the Fabric, Goods & Ornaments of the Churches. A vote of thanks was given to Alan Conway in his work to make the Court House Cottage available for a refugee family. A new priorities spreadsheet allows us to see at a glance what work is needed on the fabric.
9. To receive the other written reports of Parish Activities as circulated herewith.
10. Questions and discussions on any matters of Parochial or general Church interest – including Safeguarding. Training was taking place online and in person as required. Rachel Below has joined Hilary Elliott to support.
11. Rector's report. Fr Stuart thanked everyone who supported worship in St. Peter's. He specifically thanked Richard Hackworth for his service as treasurer. And he paid tribute to Mark Grego who was stepping down having served as Churchwarden through two interregnums. Fr Stuart emphasised our role in ensuring the fabric of the church was preserved for future generations. And he emphasised a theme of renewal for both building and our relationships with the wider community.
12. To note the following date: **PCC Meeting Tuesday 9th May 2023**



# **Annual Meeting of Parishioners for the Election of Churchwardens**

**11.00am Sunday 28th April 2024,  
St Peters, Berkhamsted**

## **AGENDA**

1. Prayers
2. Apologies for Absence
3. To Receive the Minutes of the previous Meeting of Parishioners
  - i. (30th April 2023)
4. Election of Churchwardens for 2024-2025
5. Closure of Meeting



# Annual Parochial Church Meeting

11.05am Sunday 28th April 2024

in St Peters, Berkhamsted

## AGENDA

1. To receive the Minutes of the last Annual Parochial Church Meeting (30th April 2023) The minutes were received.
2. To receive a Report on the Electoral Roll.

## Elections

3. Affirmation of ONE All Saints representative to the Parochial Church Council for 2024-25

## Other Business

4. To receive the Annual Report and Financial Statement of the Parochial Church Council.
5. To re-appoint Hillier Hopkins LLP, Chartered Accountants, or another qualified firm if advantageous to the PCC, as the auditor or independent examiner, dependent on the requirements of charity law.
6. To receive a report from the Churchwardens on the Fabric, Goods & Ornaments of the Churches.
7. To receive the other written reports of Parish Activities as circulated herewith.
8. Questions and discussions on any matters of Parochial or general Church interest – including Safeguarding.
9. Rector's report.
10. To note the following date: **PCC Meeting Tuesday 21st May 2024**



## Reports from the Parish

This section presents reports about activities and groups who have met, worked and contributed regularly or in part throughout the year within the parish community.

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### **Safeguarding Statement**

The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults).

# Rector's Report

**FR STUART OWEN, RECTOR**

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Before launching into a reflection on last year at St Peter's, I just want to acknowledge and give thanks for the incredible amount of work which so many people do week in and week out to nurture the life of our church community. A review like this inevitably tends to focus on the 'headline' events, but I am always conscious of and grateful for the person who is sweeping up between the pews on a Thursday afternoon, filing away music scores on a Tuesday evening, preparing intercessions on a Saturday night, weeding the flowerbeds on a Wednesday morning and so very, very much more. Thank you. Thank you all.

There was a lot of change and renewal at St Peter's in 2023, involving all sorts of people stepping in to new roles. In twelve months we saw a change in Churchwarden, Treasurer, Pastoral Assistant, Associate Priest and Chair of the Friends of St Peter's. Those changes have brought new opportunities for people to build on the excellent work of their predecessors as well as bringing new vision.

It's always slightly invidious to single out any particular examples in a brief report like this, but I'd like to shine a light on a couple examples of that change and renewal. Our Safeguarding Team have introduced Safeguarding training in the Court House to make it easier for people to access the training they need and that has been very much welcomed by those who have participated. Our Sunday School team has introduced a WhatsApp group and are diligent in encouraging new families to 'sign up'. They're also working to make sure that each time we have a service with a particular focus for children, they're able to signpost families to the next such service we'll be holding.



Last year was another year in which we were able to celebrate all sorts of links with the wider community. In the space of a few weeks last Spring, we hosted the swearing in of Liz Green as the new High Sheriff of Hertfordshire and the collation of Charles Hudson as the new Archdeacon of St Albans. Both were occasions when our teams of volunteers worked together wonderfully well, and of course our musicians were absolutely and gloriously to the fore for both services. St Peter's contributed to the town's celebration of the Coronation with tea and cakes in the Court House and an opportunity for visitors to try out bellringing in the church; both attracted great crowds and the queue to go up into the ringing chamber was substantial and constant throughout.



The year ended with a further mark of our links with the wider community, with the choir from Bridgewater Primary School leading our Town Carol Service; the children were



visibly awed and delighted to be singing in the church and their contribution made it an occasion of unalloyed joy.

The relationship with our friends in the South Bucks Jewish Community, which began as part of our 800th celebrations, reminded us why it's so important to seek to widen and renew our relationships with our neighbours. Our first two events of 2023, a bring and share meal with quiz and a



promises auction, raised money for good causes and were a great deal of fun. The last event we shared in was SBJC's celebration of Simchat Torah on October 7th. As we met on that Saturday morning news was beginning to break of a Hamas attack on Southern Israel, but nobody had any idea of the scale of the slaughter that was taking place even as we prayed together, or of all the violence and misery that would follow. Six months on the suffering continues.

Widening the net of relationships both within the church and with the wider community and ever seeking to renew ourselves and our relationships is not an optional extra but absolutely critical if we ever hope to see God's kingdom come, God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

# Churchwardens' Report

## CAROLYNNE CHARMAN & TIM HENNESSEY, CHURCHWARDENS

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Following the celebrations of our 800th anniversary, this year settled into a form of normality not seen since the outbreak of COVID in 2020.

Our normal busy cycle of Worship continued with daily Morning Prayer, weekly Rosary, Wednesday Eucharist, two Sunday Eucharists and monthly choral Evensong. We then include the Walsingham Cell Masses and the services for our Church schools Thomas Coram and Victoria. If we finally add the progression of Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals, there is no doubt that St. Peters is a busy and thriving Church – all thanks to the dedication of our team of clergy and volunteers.

As well as our own Parish events we were honoured to host two important Diocesan and Shrievalty occasions. On 20th May Bishop Alan conducted the Collation of the new Archdeacon of St. Albans, Charles Hudson; and on 1st April Liz Green was installed as the new High Sheriff of Hertfordshire.



In addition to our own Christian worship, we continued our interaction with the wider community, through offering a focus for civic events, such as the Festival of Light, Remembrance Parade and on 7th May an Ecumenical service of thanksgiving for the Coronation of King Charles III. This was followed on the 8th by a Street Party, Tea in the Court House and picnic on the Churchyard lawn where we were joined by the High Sheriff. We also continued our interfaith work with the South Bucks Jewish Community, sharing in the celebration of Simchat Torah and Hannukah. While the Court House provided a space for the local Muslim community to have Friday Prayers.



For all this to take place it essential that St. Peters is a safe and secure space – quite a challenge with an 800-year-old building! The state of the roof is one of the major challenges and the Quinquennial Report has been followed up with specialist surveys to determine how to proceed. While the exact scale of the problem is still being scoped, it is clear that there will be a considerable financial challenge. To this end a Roof Fund has been started, and by the end of the year had already raised £25,000.



A welcome project completed was the refurbishment of the bell ringing mechanism, thanks to the generosity of the Below family.

A further highlight of the year was the publication of Dr Christopher Green's book *St Peter's Church Great Berkhamsted 1222-2022*. In this compelling exploration of St Peter's history, Christopher unravels the hidden history within the Church.



More important than the condition of the fabric, is the devotion of the people. In this we have been much blessed with a steady and supportive congregation, guided by Fr. Stuart with the fantastic support of Frs. Anthony, Chris and David, and Richard Hackworth.

We also thanked Mark Grego, who stood down as Churchwarden after 11 years, one of the longest continuous periods in office for over 400 years. He supported the church through two interregna, a Royal visit and a pandemic. In turn we welcomed Carolynne Charman as the new Churchwarden.

An equally important office is that of Treasurer. After many years of keeping the Parish finances in good order, Jenny finally persuaded Richard Hackworth to hang up his abacus. We are immensely grateful to Richard for all his hard work, and to Mike Below for agreeing to take up the challenge as Treasurer.

We were also grateful to Chloe Hopkins, who is moving to a new role in Berkhamsted School, and we welcomed Beth Mitchell as her replacement.

As a previous Curate remarked, one of the ways many of us catch a glimpse of heaven is through music. The choir and organ of St Peter's played a significant role in our worship especially at Christmas and Easter. The level of musicianship displayed by our choir is testament to Adrian Davis and Chris Beauchamp.

St. Peter's is a wonderful place and a centre for a great range of activities. This requires the effort of a large number of willing volunteers co-ordinated by Robin in the office. Sundays together has seen a wonderful increase in numbers since lock down. We are also indebted to the Buildings Committee, the Social Committee, the flower arrangers, the various working parties who beaver away unseen, and all those on the rotas for welcoming, serving, being sides-people and providing coffee.



# Treasurer's report

## MIKE BELOW, HON TREASURER

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The full 2023 Trustee Report and Accounts for the Parish of Great Berkhamsted are now available on the St Peter's website, and copies have been displayed in St Peter's. The report sets out details of the Parish finances for 2023 with the usual supporting commentary. If anyone has any questions, please contact me.

### Overall comment

Like the last few years, expenditure has exceeded normal income. This year has been redeemed by a legacy donation in December of £20,000 which allowed the year to show a positive result.

In addition to that main picture, we have been lucky enough to receive donations totalling £29,000 to the Church Roof Fund. Many thanks to everyone that has contributed to this result.

The Parish remains heavily reliant on the rental income from the two residential properties that are let out.

### General fund

This is the fund that manages all of the day-to-day affairs of the Parish. Money is transferred to and from this fund as is required by other funds. The obvious aim is that this fund should be self-supporting and able to provide money as necessary to areas such as the Buildings fund.

There are four principal sources of income:

Area	2020	2021	2022	2023
Stewardship (+ the associated gift aid)	£160,000	£151,000	£143,000	£125,000
Rental income from All Saints House and the Court House Cottage*	£9,900	£18,000	£17,000	£39,000
Lettings of the Court House	£5,200	£5,700	£8,100	£8,800
Lettings of the Church	£1,000	£2,500	£3,000	£7,000

\* All Saints House was occupied by the Vivians in 2020 thus providing no income, and had a vacancy for three months in 2021. Meanwhile the Court House Cottage was largely unused during 2020, 2021 and the first half of 2022.

Matched against those are six principal sources of expenditure:

Area	2020	2021	2022	2023
Parish share (payments to the Diocese)	£131,000	£132,000	£131,000	£130,000
Salaries	£30,000	£25,000	£32,000	£31,000
Other costs	£12,000	£10,500	£8,500	£14,000
Insurance	£10,700	£11,000	£10,000	£10,200
Church gas and electricity	£3,200	£2,900	£4,000	£9,100*
Phone	£1,000	£900	£2,200	£2,300

\*The change in 2023 is due to massive increases in the cost of supplying gas which alone cost £6,750.

## Other key funds

Our other key funds are the Legacy and Building funds (including funds held specifically for Court House building work).

Funds	End of 2022	End of 2023	Comment
Legacy	£67,100	£69,200	
Building and Court House	£41,900	£32,300	
800th	£12,300	£11,900	This fund will be closed down during 2024
Church Roof	£0	£28,900	These funds are being collected in anticipation of significant expenditure to mend the church roof

## What is the outlook?

It is expected that the stewardship income will continue to gently decline, and therefore it is necessary to consider what can be done to balance this reduction. So far in 2024 we are seeing a gentle increase in bookings for the Court House, but this cannot be relied on to continue rising. Hopefully the rise will be sufficient that the Court House will cover its costs in 2024.

The need to maintain the church roof will become more urgent, and costs that are incurred will need to be managed. There will be a need to replace the church boiler, should we be looking to install some form of solar panels on the roof to generate the energy that is required to heat the church?

The buildings (Church, Court House and the two properties) will continue to require a steady flow of money to maintain them in a suitable state.

# Bellringers

## MIKE BELOW, BELLRINGING CAPTAIN

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This year has been very different to others for the bellringers, because of the two upcoming events at the beginning of the year. Firstly we had the opportunity to ring for a Coronation and then there was the work that we had done on the bells.



A great time was had over the weekend of the Coronation with all of the ringers having plenty of opportunity to ring on this special occasion. We also had an open tower event where the public were invited to come and have a go at ringing a bell. This was fantastically supported with about 200 people going up the stairs to ring a bell. We also had a commemorative quarter peal with a small board up on the wall in the ringing chamber.

After the initial apprehension as to whether we would have any bells in the tower to ring for the Coronation in May had passed, we were able to look forward and plan for the changes that were coming. On the day we had a great team of about ten people that came together to help the pair from Whites to dismantle everything and move it all out to their vans. The first challenge was to lower the dove from above the altar and this had to be done prior to the arrival of Whites. I spoke with a number of people in advance and no-one recollected having actually been involved in lowering it before, although there were one or two vague recollections of it having happened. In the event it went very smoothly, and lots of items came down through the hole that was exposed. The bells were out of action for about nine weeks. During that time, the band had great fun visiting other towers in the District. Once Whites were ready to put things back in place we got a smaller team together to help them out and the work went on for about a week. Since then a number of people from around the District and the County have commented on how well the bells ring – so a job well done. Once the work was done we had another quarter peal to mark that completion date.



One weekend in the Summer we had an outing to visit the Lake District and ring in multiple towers there. This was based around Kendal, to where one of ringers had just moved, and we were also able to meet up with three other ex-Berkhamsted ringers two of whom had moved to Penrith and the third (Ed Clarke) had moved to Hexham. This was an extremely enjoyable weekend which ran very smoothly. We are now planning to have another trip in 2024 to Bath.



Over the year we have seen a massive turnover in the group that learn to ring on Friday afternoons, so that we restarted with five new people in October.

Two of those have now stopped, one is continuing to ring but in Hemel and two are continuing their ringing with us. Hopefully we will be able to expand the group again. Having had the adult ringers decline significantly in numbers as well up until the Summer, we have been lucky enough to be joined by five new ringers. Sometime in 2024 we will see them joining us ringing on Sunday mornings as well.

At present the future looks bright though we are in the early stages of building the competence of the ringers.

## Buildings Committee

### CAROLYNNE CHARMAN, CHURCHWARDEN

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**The church roof:** Richard Oxley came December 2023 to inspect the Chantry roof, which is copper, and also the Lady Chapel, which is lead. Both are in need of repair or replacing. For the time being, we have had the lead roof patched up by Darren Lee from Lee and Son, a lead work specialist with 50 years' experience. The cost was £672 plus VAT.



In meantime I have contacted two copper roof specialists to get a quote for the cost of replacing, and I am going to contact two more in the coming weeks. The list of roofers has been given to me by Christopher Green. The roof is out priority for forthcoming year.

**General repairs:** Stephen Lally has set up a work party to deal with several jobs:

1. Painting the Court House balusters with wood preserver
2. Re-pointing the flint wall in NW corner of the churchyard, which needs be done with lime mortar
3. Filling gaps between brick and timber in parts of the court house walls. This can be done with cement (from Richard Oxley's report from December 2023)
4. Digging soil away from wall on the N and E sides of the Lady Chapel – we have been told that this is higher than the inside floor, and may be causing damp in the Lady Chapel walls

**Electrics:** This year we been given electrical certificates for 5 years for the Church and the Court House.

**Nave lights:** (Tim Hennessey) we have taken one light down from the nave, so that Mike Smith can give us advice on whether we can fix them with a different bulbs or we may need to replace the whole lighting system.

**Heating:** the burners underneath the church have been updated with four burners finally working.

**Current priority: to get the roof fixed**

# Castle Federation Schools

REBECCA ROBERTS, EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER

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“Flourishing in learning and love within a happy, Christian family.”

'Do everything in love.' (1 Corinthians 16:14)

I would like to introduce myself as the new Executive Headteacher of the Castle Federation, I began this role in January 24 and have been made to feel so welcome by the Federation community, I am acutely aware I have huge shoes to fill!

It has been a very productive and busy first term in post. I have worked closely with Mrs Freeman, Miss Hill, and the governors implementing the school development plans and the Federation action plan, to ensure consistency across the Federation. Both schools are diligently addressing areas for further development identified in their recent Ofsted inspections.

With relatively recent changes in leadership at both schools and with a new Executive Headteacher, it is an exciting opportunity to engage with the community of the schools to create a five-year strategic plan. Leaders of the Castle Federation are keen to collaborate with pupils, parents/carers, staff, Governors, and the local community to develop a refreshed, distinct, and vibrant vision for Victoria Church of England School and Thomas Coram Church of England School – supported by clear, liveable theologically rooted set of values and vision.

The process will carefully consider how to connect the schools' uniquely Christian characters and deep-rooted connections with the Church and community, with the Federation's strategic ambitions to drive the quality of education, sustainability, and financial stability of the schools. Many thanks to Fr Stuart for his brilliant support with this process.

You can read more about the Federation, including governance in our termly newsletter, *Castle Calling*, on the Federation website.

Further information can be viewed on our websites:

[www.castlefederation.org](http://www.castlefederation.org)

[www.victoria.herts.sch.uk](http://www.victoria.herts.sch.uk)

[www.thomascoram.herts.sch.uk](http://www.thomascoram.herts.sch.uk)



# Electoral Roll

## OLIVER FRADGLEY

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In the Church Electoral Roll 2024 revision, a total of 199 people are on the electoral roll.

Two new people were added as part of this 2024 revision and no names were removed.

# Mothers' Union

## MARGARET BURBIDGE

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Members of this branch worship at St Peter's, All Saints and St Mary's Northchurch, and belong to the MU family of over 4 million members worldwide. Prayer and worship are at the heart of MU and are included in every meeting.

During the year there were 2 Eucharists. At the Wave of Prayer service members remembered dioceses overseas linked to St Albans. The branch celebrated the coronation of King Charles and Queen Camilla, Mary Sumner Day, Lady Day, and Shrove Tuesday with a pancake feast.

The International Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence was marked in November. The Mothering Sunday project Make a Mother's Day was promoted in the parish. A Travelling Crib was hosted by Victoria and Thomas Coram Schools and families during Advent.

Members attended meetings and services further afield linking with the wider MU in the diocese and the country. At the National Gathering in York Sheran Harper, the Worldwide President, spoke of the effects she had seen of violence and abuse on women and girls in Uganda and of the MU programme to rescue young girls. She challenged those present: "Will you stand with me against domestic violence?"

MU members are Christ's hands that reach out to transform lives and communities across the world.

# Music

## ADRIAN DAVIS

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Following my Report on the Church Choir last year, regrettably I have to report that there has been a continued dependence on the hardiness of choir members trying to cope with the extremely cold conditions in church, for the regular hour-and-a-half-long practices and services held during the winter months. This has taken its toll with several members of the choir who have often opted to forego important practices and rehearsals during the winter. Some choristers and adults have been seemingly impervious to the cold, and have soldiered on bravely. However, the warmer weather brings the whole choir out of hibernation, and all became well and refreshed – with the choir ready to learn and experience new music.



The choristers, having had a couple of departures to university and work overseas, soon maintained the high standards we have come to expect, and with the adult members giving excellent support, achieved some very impressive musical results. It is good to have welcomed two new boy recruits to the choir. We have at present 12 choristers and 20 regular adults in the choir, with some ‘seasonal’ extras. The ‘highlights’ of the past year include:

- **April 1<sup>st</sup>** A service to welcome the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire – with much civic pomp and ceremony and grandiose music
- **May Day** Madrigals from the church tower and the grass sward – Chris Beauchamp directing from aloft, and ASD on *terra firma*
- **May 7<sup>th</sup>** Coronation Celebration – Parry’s ‘I was glad’ and other jubilant music
- **May 20<sup>th</sup>** Collation Service – Rev Charles Hudson – special music by Tallis
- **June 2<sup>nd</sup>** Choir sings for Fr Stephen’s First Mass at Christchurch, Brixton
- **Sept 9<sup>th</sup>** Choir Tea for choristers’ parents and friends
- **Nov 3<sup>rd</sup>** Choir adults’ celebratory drinks and cake at the Mad Squirrel – with Thoby Davis performing his very attractive and varied programme of songs and instrumental favourites
- **Nov 5<sup>th</sup>** Choir sings Duruflé’s ‘Requiem’ for All Souls Day Mass. With Beatrice Murray, soprano, and Madeleine Murray, ‘cello (soloists)
- **Nov 12<sup>th</sup>** Remembrance Day service
- **Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>** Advent Sunday Carol Service – musical highlight
- **March 9<sup>th</sup>** Sang Choral Evensong at St Edmundsbury Cathedral in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
- **March 24<sup>th</sup>** Stainer’s ‘Crucifixion’ (with Phillip Brown, tenor, and Christopher Foster, bass, Christopher Beauchamp, organ)

It is always a joy to listen to the organ playing of Christopher Beauchamp, before, during and after the Services. His versatility and breadth of repertoire is very impressive – and much

admired. I appreciate his huge contribution to the smooth running of the choir, and his initiatives with regard to the RSCM Training schemes.

I wish to thank Barbara Groet and Hilary Armstrong for their sterling work with the music library – sorting and searching in a mountain of folders, loose sheets of dog-eared music and more.... And for devising, checking and sending out information and requests from ASD – to all choir members – the sometimes vain hope of getting a response!!



**RIP:** In November 2023 and March 2024, we are very sad to record the deaths of Jean Cooper Smith (formerly organist at St Peter’s Church), and Susan Beuttler, musician and a member of the St Peter’s Church Choir.

As there is increasingly a common problem with the recruitment of choristers, not only at St Peter’s, I welcome any suggestions and advice on how one might attract new singers (6+). It is very noticeable that youngsters of a suitable age are conspicuously absent at church on Sundays. As I reported last year, the Chorister Training Day held in September drew a scant response – and clearly, parental support and encouragement is desirable. It is obvious that schools with their numerous activities (sports especially) and academic demands will exert a lot pressure on pupils, but the huge benefits of a musical training are well established. Over the past recent years, St Peter’s Choir has been able to record a chorister intake of 24 + singers. The training they receive is free of charge and can lead to some very accomplished performances and overseas tours to many famous and prestigious cathedrals, abbeys and palaces in Europe and in the UK. Many of our choristers have gone on to study at Universities and Colleges – a training for LIFE.



# Pastoral Care

## PHILIPPA SELDON & HILARY ELLIOTT

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**Philippa Seldon has been leading the Pastoral Care team for over 20 years, offering support to people going through times of distress and bereavement. St Peter's owes Philippa a great debt of gratitude for all that she has done.**

### **Philippa writes:**

Having co-ordinated the Pastoral Care team for many years, I would like to thank the members of the Pastoral Care team, past and present, for their hard work and support. Fr Michael formed the present group from the old Grief and Loss group and he, Fr Tim and now Fr Stuart have always encouraged and supported us in every way they can. We are also blessed by the many members of the congregation who 'look out for each other' by visiting, providing lifts and general acts of friendship and friendliness.

### **Hilary writes:**

In January this year I took over the co-ordination of the Pastoral Care Team from Philippa. She has led this team magnificently for more than 20 years so many thanks to her. She is a hard act to follow, but she is still on the team so will keep an eye on us!!

The Pastoral Care Team continue to meet regularly, sometimes in person and sometimes on zoom, to support and encourage each other and share news of those we are visiting. These meetings are confidential.

We have continued to visit parishioners in their homes when they are unwell, help with shopping or lifts to church, or to medical appointments when needed. Father Stuart and 2 members of the team who are licensed to give Home Communion also visit on a rota system.

Every month a lunch is organised at The White Horse Bourne End when any parishioner who is lonely or bereaved is invited. Lifts are provided for this. This is a friendly, supportive group. There is a lot of laughter and the fish and chips are recommended!

Last November the annual Requiem Eucharist at Souls Day took place where anyone who has been bereaved in the last 2 years was invited. The names of the departed were read out, the congregation lit candles while listening to the choir. It is a very peaceful service, which brings comfort to many.

The Pastoral Care Group members also support the clergy during baptisms.



# Sunday School

**SARAH ELDER**

Our Sunday School is offered to all children of primary school age who attend the 9.30am Sunday service, during school term time. We also welcome siblings and younger children, who are accompanied by an adult.

This year we said goodbye to Chloe from the team of Sunday School leaders and welcomed Beth. We were also delighted to have a new volunteer, which makes us a team of five. Each of us plans and prepares craft materials for the sessions we lead, usually centred on the Gospel reading or festival. We are keen that the children enjoy Sunday School and feel that they have a place in our congregation.

We always include some level of reflection on Christian teaching, but it is often the discussions that unfold as we work on the crafts together that are particularly meaningful and illuminating. We would love to welcome more people to the team and encourage anyone who has ever thought they'd like to have a go to do so. Even if you have just one thing you'd like to do/share with our young people, please get in touch! The children really value opportunities to engage with other members of the congregation, maybe people they have been seeing week by week all their lives and never spoken to.

We are being a little more strategic in keeping in touch with children and their families. This has meant signposting to the next event whilst they are present (eg at the Blessing of the Backpacks they were encouraged to attend for Harvest). We have set up a whatsapp group which we invite new families to join and update with information on any events that might be of particular interest to children. Fr Stuart hosted a family picnic at the Rectory in July, which was a welcome opportunity to socialise.

We are keen that the children develop a sense of being part of what is happening within our worship. To this end, we have trialled the children gathering around the reading of the Gospel and then taking the Gospel with them into the Lady Chapel for Sunday School. This has worked well but when fewer children attend, they are less keen. We will continue to do this at key times of the year. Many members of the congregation have commented that they value seeing the children take part in this way. On key Sundays the children have presented their Sunday School creations during the notices slot. Again, many people have commented that they enjoy hearing from the children and the children certainly enjoy sharing their creations.

Attendance week by week remains fairly low (post-Covid return has been a challenge, exacerbated by the on-going clash with sports activities, which children were able to return to before they could return to church). It is in keeping with the national picture that children are unlikely to attend church every week and so while the weekly numbers at Sunday School are lower than pre-covid, there are at least 20 families who attend at various



points throughout the year with one or more child, or regular members of the congregation who bring visiting grandchildren.

### **Sunday School highlights of 2023:**

- **Easter Sunday** – treasure hunt around the churchyard to find pieces that created a banner. We were delighted to welcome 25 children for this activity.
- **Churches Count on Nature** – Susan Holmes instigated a survey of the churchyard wildlife as part of her Eco-church role. The children enjoyed exploring this area under the expert guidance of Astrid Biddle.
- **Blessing of the backpacks** – we were encouraged that more children attended than the previous year. They planted lettuces to bring back to sell as part of the Harvest fundraising, tied to the idea of ‘growth’ at the start of a new school year. They were given cross keyrings to keep on their bags. We enjoyed refreshments and played garden games outside the west door at the end of the service and this was a welcome opportunity to meet new/visiting families.
- **Harvest** – the children enjoyed selling the lettuce plants to the congregation and made £23 for the Harvest appeal. They loved interacting with members of the congregation and were particularly buoyed by the words of encouragement.
- **Advent Sunday** – Children made advent crowns and then stayed with their families at the end of the service for hot chocolate and chocolate angels.



2023 has been exciting and encouraging. We look forward to building on what we can offer children and their families at St Peter's in 2024.

## **Sundays Together Report**

### **CAROLYNNE CHARMAN, CHURCHWARDEN**

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Sundays together is a luncheon which is laid on every 1st Sunday of every month. It's particularly aimed those people who are on their own at a certain age. It consists of a welcome drink when people arrive, followed by two-course meal.

It seems to grow each year in numbers; now we have 32 on our list. This year unfortunately we have put our price from £5.00 to £6.00, due to most groceries going up in price.

Most desserts are donated by members of our congregation – this helps to keep the cost down. Sadly this year we have lost Claude Honey, who always cooked us delicious desserts every month without fail. We have missed him and his desserts!

This lunch been going for serval years now, long before I joined St Peter's. By all accounts it is very successful in bringing members of the church and the community together every month through food.

# Technology & online

**ROBIN MCMORRAN**

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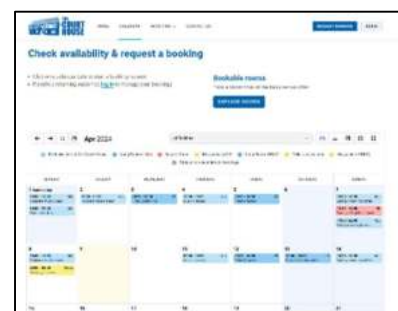
Technology has been supporting St Peter's in many ways, not least in attracting income. These days, the public expect cashless payments in shops and restaurants, the church must move with the times and make it easy to donate with bank cards and mobile phones. In July 2023 I installed the **Goodbox contactless card reader** by the west door (previously, it lived in a cupboard and was only brought out for special occasions). Cathedrals put their card readers in smart wooden cabinets, but as we don't have a cathedral budget, our card reader is mounted on an "upcycled" hand sanitiser dispenser left over from the COVID pandemic! Before the card reader went out permanently, monthly donations averaged around £56 (excluding Christmas and the Coronation). Since the card reader has been installed in the porch, the monthly average has leapt to over £130.



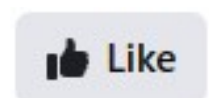
Other **electronic donations** include text message (SMS) donations, totalling £51 in 2023. Special mention is due to website donations, which brought in almost £2460 in 2023! All these donation systems naturally take a small percentage cut on transactions, but the convenience they provide is clearly paying off, and something to be celebrated!

Technology is also working behind the scenes to support the work of the **Parish Office**. The office is perennially busy, but technology offers opportunities to streamline the weekly admin. Pew sheets, news emails, music lists, prayer lists and year's mind all run off databases, which make it easier to manage important and recurring information.

One of the challenges in the Parish Office is all the admin associated with handling **Court House bookings**. As this is a major source of income, booking the Court House needs to be as efficient as possible both for paying customers and for the back office, and so we have invested in an online booking system. Just as the public would expect to book flights or shopping online, we can now offer a web-based booking calendar, which obviates all the endless phone calls and shuffling bits of paper. It does come at cost, but it's worked well so far, and coupled with some more proactive marketing (there's even a new Court House Facebook page!) we hope to increase bookings – and income – In future.



On **Facebook**, we have a steady stream of new followers. Two years ago, we had around 800 followers; this has now passed the 1200 mark, evidence of our "digital outreach". We still have many regular worshippers who diligently react to our Facebook posts but haven't yet 'Liked' the St Peter's page, so if you're a Facebook user, I encourage you to go to [www.facebook.com/stpetersberkhamsted](http://www.facebook.com/stpetersberkhamsted) and click the **Like** button.



**Twitter** famously (and confusingly) rebranded to **X** a few months ago. Elon Musk's changes to his social media platform have had little impact on St Peter's, except that it is now no longer possible to embed Tweets/X posts on our website, making X considerably less useful as an outreach tool. The Diocese recently remarked that St Peter's is the most prolific tweeter in our deanery, but otherwise our posts go largely unnoticed, with no major increase on our 141 followers.

We have built considerable goodwill with **Event Hub Dacorum** ([www.eventhubdacorum.com](http://www.eventhubdacorum.com)), the local events website, who have helped us to promote the Festival of Light, and Christmas and Holy week services most effectively. A lengthy attempt to join NextDoor.co.uk has failed due to their stringent requirements to provide proof of address.

Careful observers may have noticed that **QR codes** are everywhere these days. These mysterious symbols work a bit like bar codes on supermarket packages, except that they are designed for mobile phones. If you point your phone camera at a QR code, it automatically opens a web page on your smartphone without the need to type in a long, fiddly www address. QR codes enable us to offer instant web links on posters and publicity to worship times, concert tickets, etc. This example appears on our pew sheets, giving a link to our donation page. If you've got your phone with you, try it out!



**Video:** we continue to live-stream our Sunday morning services on Facebook, appreciated by a handful of followers. Usually, our videos only attract about five or six viewers, but our candlelit Advent Carol service did attract around 63 viewers (technically, we *reached* around 1300 people, but mostly people who viewed for about 10 seconds and switched off again). We use the parish mobile phone for video streaming, but it is showing its age with ongoing audio problems and the fact that it is now permanently stuck in portrait mode. Ideally, we need to find a replacement system in the near future.

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