

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Lives changed through God's love

ANNUAL REPORT

VICAR'S INTRODUCTION

"It's a good problem to have," I said to the Archdeacon recently, "but the congregation at our 10am Parish Eucharist at Holy Trinity has grown so much this past year, we're beginning to run out of room!". It's good to be able to report good news, even if it does present some challenges!

Along with this growth, it's been another busy year across the parish, and there is much to give thanks for and celebrate. Some highlights include:

- celebrating the Coronation in the Parish Centre with a wonderful tea party;
- the day in July at Coventry cathedral which saw Thomas Powell ordained priest in the morning and our new curate, Emma Harrington ordained deacon in the afternoon;
- the dedication of a stone in memory of the Rev. Neville Beamer on the North Path;
- blessing the newly acquired community apple orchard in Luddington following the Harvest Service at All Saints';
- celebrating the work of the Clifford Charities with a full church for a special service at St. Helen's in September;
- the Community Fete in the RSC Gardens in September which raised money for the Organ Fund (£53,666 was raised in 2023 and we are now set to cover the total cost of the work; our thanks to the team who worked so hard to achieve this).

There were a number of significant comings and goings in 2023, including:

- The Rev. Steve Jarvis moved to a new post in a parish in the city of Liverpool at end of November, following period of sabbatical leave.
- Our Mission Partners, Tom and Verity Claire, returned from Uganda and are no longer with CMS, so we are currently reviewing possibilities for a new partnership.
- Lola Spetsioti went on maternity leave and Liz Marshall was appointed as our Interim Operations Manager. We are delighted to have welcomed Lola back as Visitor and Marketing Manager since the birth of her son, and also that Liz has stayed on in the new role of Parish Safety & Compliance Officer.

The life and work of this parish is only possible because of the contribution of many, many people, who are offering their gifts and time for the building of God's kingdom. I am often humbled by the remarkable dedication and generosity shown, and would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone involved.

As you read this report, please pray for the work and ministry of the different groups and teams whose reports are in this booklet, and thank God for those who serve through them.

Finally, is God calling you to play a part in seeing lives changed through God's love through this parish? If so, we'd love to hear from you!

With my prayers and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Patrick Taylor

Vicar of Holy Trinity Stratford-upon-Avon
with All Saints' Luddington
and St Helen's Clifford Chambers

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CLERGY AND STAFF

Clergy Team

The Revd. Patrick Taylor	Vicar
The Revd. Kay Dyer	Associate Priest
The Revd. Emma Harrington	Curate
The Revd Thomas Powell	Curate
Mr Philip Harper	Children and Families' Minister

Ministry Team

The Revd. John Hall-Matthews	Assistant Minister (Honorary)
The Revd. Diane Patterson	Assistant Minister (Honorary)
The Revd. Jenny Rowland	Assistant Minister (Honorary)
The Ven. Brian Russell	Assistant Minister (Honorary)
The Revd. Graham Wilcox	Assistant Minister (Honorary)
The Revd. Penny Harrison	Assistant Minister (Honorary)
The Revd. Dr Paul Edmondson	Assistant Minister (Honorary)

Readers Licensed to the Parish

Mr Paul Gifford
Mr Philip Harper
Mr David Harrison

Music

Mr Douglas Keilitz	Director of Music
Mrs Rebecca Mills	Assistant Director of Music
Mr Stephen Dodsworth	Organist Emeritus

Parish Office

Ms Lola Spetsioti	Visitor and Marketing Manager (from January 2024, when she returned from Maternity Leave)
Ms Sarah Cushing	Office Administrator
Mrs Liz Marshall	Operations Manager (until January 2024, when Lola returned from Maternity Leave)
	Safety and Compliance Officer (from January 2024)

The Parish Office, Old Town, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6BG

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ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 9th May 2022
4. Matters arising
5. Election of Churchwardens
6. Parish Charities

Liz Roome
Honorary Secretary

MINUTES OF THE 2023 ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS

The Annual Meeting of Parishioners was held on Sunday 14th May 2023 in the Parish Centre Hall, commencing at 11.30 am. The Vicar, the Revd Patrick Taylor, took the chair.

- 1 The Vicar welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2 66 people were present at the meeting.
- 3 Apologies for absence were received from Anne Blair; John & Sally Cohen; Christine Cottrell; John & Hilda Craig; Stephen Dodsworth; Samuel Jupe; Ron & Faith Piper.
- 4 Minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 9th May 2022 were accepted.
- 5 There were no matters arising from the above Minutes.
- 6 Election of four churchwardens: There were four nominations for four vacancies: Helen Warrillow, Paul Lageu, Sherron Guise and Tim Raistrick, who were duly elected. The Vicar expressed his appreciation and thanks to the churchwardens for their commitment and dedication during the past year.
- 7 Parish Charities: The Treasurer reported on these.

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th May 2023
3. Matters arising
4. Vicar's Address
(delivered as the sermon at the 10am Parish Eucharist)
5. Consideration of
 - a) Electoral Roll

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- b) Proceedings of Parochial Church Council
(Please see report for Charity Commission)
 - c) Accounts and Finance
 - d) Stewardship and Gift Aid
 - e) Appointment of Auditors
 - f) Clerk of Works Report
 - g) Deanery Synod Report
 - h) Safeguarding
6. Elections
Parochial Church Council
7. Any other business of parochial or general church interest.

Liz Roome
Honorary Secretary

MINUTES OF THE 2023 ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting was held on Sunday 14th May 2023 in the Parish Centre Hall, commencing at 11.50 a.m., chaired by the Revd Patrick Taylor, Vicar. There were 66 people in attendance.

- 1 **Apologies** for absence were received from Anne Blair; John and Sally Cohen; Christine Cottrell; John & Hilda Craig; Stephen Dodsworth; Samuel Jupe; Ron & Faith Piper.
- 2 **Minutes** of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on Sunday 15th May 2022 were adopted. Proposed by Anthony Woollard; Seconded by Heather Fletcher.
- 3 **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the above Minutes.
- 4 **Vicar's Address**
(given as the sermon at the 10am Parish Eucharist)

If, like me, you can still remember the stress and pressure of school or university exams, spare a thought for the 10- and 11-year-old Year 6 pupils who last week sat their end of Primary School tests, known as SATS. The English reading test was so difficult that many of the pupils were left in tears and even the most able couldn't finish the paper.

Of course, those responsible for education in this country are already under the spotlight with deep concerns about the culture of OFSTED inspections, which many headteachers feel are unnecessarily blunt and pressurised. There's surely something wrong with the values of an organisation if it leaves children's confidence shattered as they leave primary school because of impossibly hard tests, or headteachers clinging onto their mental health because of the pressure of school inspections.

Why is this relevant to a vicar's address for the parish annual meeting? It's because our values matter and make a difference. I think most people would agree that it's a good thing to measure pupils' progress as they leave primary school. I'm sure we'd all agree that teachers and heads should be held accountable for the standards in their schools.

But, as important as those things, it's the way in which they are done, the culture and values that are lived out, that make all the difference in the end.

Many of you will have heard a phrase that's often used in business, "culture eats strategy for breakfast", meaning that, no matter how good or noble your plans are, it's how you behave, and the values you express as you go about those tasks, that has the most significant impact. An important moment for our parish in 2022 was the launch of our new five-year plan (leaflets available from the back of the church). It's our plan, or strategy, for what we believe God is calling us to make a priority at this time. There are six focus areas: Worshipping God, Making Disciples, Outreach and Engagement, Welcome and Care, Buildings and Environment and Financial Sustainability. These are described in the leaflet, and there is also a video on our social media channels.

That's all very well, but as those setting SATS tests and running OFSTED inspections have been reminded of recently, it's our values, how we go about implementing these plans, that will make all the difference. So I want today to say a little more about our three parish values, printed on the back page of the plan: Holiness, Humility and Hospitality.

We've often in the past shown these linked to the three fish of our logo, an ancient symbol for the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Fish had a special significance for the early Christians. The first letters of the five Greek words for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour' mean 'fish'. As we have three values, it's convenient to link each one to a fish.

The First Value is Holiness. Please put out of your mind the idea that being holy means trying to be more like a nun or monk. Holiness is not about being pious or spending all day on your knees in prayer. It means recognising that God is present in every part of our lives and world, and seeking, before anything else, to be aware of that presence to help us to serve God's purposes by following the way of Jesus Christ. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit 'abides with' us and will be with us for ever (John 14.17). So holiness is also about being open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit among us. It means seeking to do God's will rather than pursuing our own agenda. As Bishop John, the bishop of Warwick, has written, "The Christian life can never truly be lived with the attitude of 'God on my terms' but only 'God on God's terms'."

So holiness sets us on the right track, making sure our starting point for all things is the God in whom 'we live and move and have our being' as our first reading from Acts puts it.

Our next value is the one I think it's fair to say, we get the least: humility. Important to stress what this is not! Humility, or being humble, does not mean putting yourself down, to 'know your place' in a way that means being passive and subservient to others. Far from it. Humility is a right understanding of our role in God's creation. It means seeing that our role as a church is to serve the needs of our community, rather than seeing the community as being there to support us! It means recognising that on our own, both individually and as a church, we do not have the resources needed, and so we must work in partnership with other people and other organisations.

We've also applied this value to how the PCC members conduct their meetings. Last year, we adopted new guidance which says that all members should listen to other points of view carefully and consider their merit in humility, recognising that a different opinion is not necessarily a wrong opinion.

The last value is the one I think we do best at putting into practice: hospitality. When we welcome everyone, especially those who may be different from us, we're reflecting God's unconditional love. So being inclusive, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, mental or physical disability, is really important to us. However, we can only claim to be a church that follows Jesus Christ if we show respect and kindness to each other, as well as to those who come to us as guests or visitors. Hospitality is also about reaching out to our community. Whether it's a home communion visit, a service in a nursing home, or the Ken Kennett Centre "Coffee Stop" or "Stay and Play", there are many ways in which we express our hospitality.

So those are the three values we seek to live and work by in this parish: Holiness, Humility and Hospitality.

They don't specify what we should do, they tell us how we should behave, especially towards one another. They also show to people outside the church what sort of community of faith we are and aspire to be.

I would like to finish by thanking all of you who contribute in any way to the life of this church and parish. Thank you to those who give regularly and generously as part of our stewardship scheme; thank you to those who volunteer in whatever way, whether that's supporting the young or elderly, or keeping this church open for visitors and services throughout the year. Thank you all for all you do and all you give.

If you'd like to get more involved, there are plenty of opportunities. At the moment, the shop desperately needs more volunteers so that it can remain open the same hours that the church is open to visitors. Culture might eat strategy for breakfast, but let's pray that the Holy Spirit, who is among us, will make us more holy, more hospitable, and more humble so that we can continue to see lives changed through God's love. Amen

5 Consideration of:

a) Electoral Roll

Mr T Raistrick reported that the number on the Electoral Roll stands at a total of 351, down from 354, as calculated at the official cut-off date. The number is broken down as follows:

- Holy Trinity: 314 (2022: 314) 7 added and 7 removed.
- All Saints': 18 unchanged from 2022.
- St Helen's: 19 (2022: 22) 3 removed.

Of the total 351 parishioners, 28.2% are non-residents (i.e. live outside the official parish boundary).

The split by gender is 66.4% women and 33.6% men.

b) Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council

These are contained within the Financial Statements of the PCC as required by the Charity Commission. The full PCC had met 6 times during the year. These were accepted unanimously.

c) Accounts and Finance

- The treasurer, Mike Warrillow, reported that the parish surplus in 2022 was £17,893, about £7,000 higher than 2021, but a long way below the 2019 pre-Covid levels of £122,000. Holy Trinity surplus was £17,394, reflecting the reopening of the church to visitors, staffed with volunteers. St Helen's surplus was £3,131, similar to prior years, while the All Saints' deficit of £2,632 was largely as a result of reduced investment values. In 2022, stewardship remains the major source of income and at £129,000 was a slight reduction from 2022.

However, visitor income is key to financial health at Holy Trinity and this doubled to £116,000 in 2022. In 2023 net visitor income is planned to increase by 140% with the appointment of Visitor Welcome Assistants and introducing a charge (with VAT) for visitors to the chancel.

Unrestricted reserve levels at Holy Trinity were £121,000. However, the organ restoration in January 2024 will cost £57,000, reducing reserve levels to close to the £50,000 outlined in our reserves policy.

Acceptance of this report was proposed by Mike, seconded by George, and accepted unanimously by the meeting.

- Parish Charities: Mike reported that there had been little activity this year. Income from interest and investment was £566. There was expenditure of £370 from the Genge Fund for choir pocket money while £1000 was drawn from the Emily Evans Fund to support clergy expenses. Together with £9 bank charges, total expenditure was £1379. The closing cash balance was £9083, an £813 reduction from the end of 2021.
- Mike indicated that he wishes to stand down as Treasurer next year. He appealed for someone else to volunteer to take on this role.
- Patrick thanked Mike for all his hard work.

d) Stewardship & Gift Aid

- Chris Kennedy referred the meeting to the report on page 39 of the Annual Report booklet.
- Patrick thanked Chris for this important work he does for the parish

e) Appointment of Auditors

Mike Warrillow proposed that Mazaar's Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditors, of Dudley, West Midlands be retained as Independent Examiners of the accounts for 2023/24. Acceptance of these Auditors was proposed by Mike and seconded by Chris Kennedy. All were in favour.

f) Clerk of Works Report

- Patrick thanked Mark Sayers for fulfilling this role in 2022, and also thanked David Neale for taking over in 2023.
- The meeting was referred to the report in the booklet on page 35.

g) Deanery Synod Report

- Patrick thanked our representatives who attend meetings and make contributions to them on our behalf.
- The meeting was referred to the report in the booklet on page 12.

h) Safeguarding

- Patrick reminded us of the Safeguarding Report in the booklet on page 33.
- Patrick reported that Jane is standing down as Safeguarding Officer, and thanked her for her hard work in this demanding role.
- It was reported that Lynn Suter will be taking on the role of Safeguarding Officer with Paul Suter assisting in the role of Safeguarding Administrator. He thanked them both for their willingness to undertake this important work.

6 Elections

a) Parochial Church Council

There were 2 vacancies for 3 years. 2 nominations had been received, so no vote was held. The following were elected: Sarah Paine; Lynn Suter.

7 Any Other Business

- 1) George reported that Data held on people needs updating
 - He said that an email will be sent to each person whose email address we have, asking them to reply, indicating various details, thereby confirming the accuracy of the details held.
- 2) Patrick thanked George and Mike for implementing iKnowChurch on the parish computer system.
- 3) James expressed a vote of thanks to Patrick.
- 4) Patrick expressed a vote of thanks to the rest of the clergy team, the retired clergy, the music team, and the office staff.
- 5) Helen expressed a vote of thanks to all the volunteer teams, especially the Flower Team and the Social Team.

The Vicar led us in The Grace, and the meeting closed at 12.50 p.m.

DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

The Synod of Fosse Deanery, to which this parish belongs (and of which our Vicar is Area Dean), had a very challenging year in 2023, and those challenges are ongoing. We face an unprecedented number of clergy vacancies, and great concerns in many parishes about their financial situation and particularly the matter of Parish Shares.

Synod met as usual three times during the year. Our lay representatives (currently myself - ex-officio as a Diocesan Synod member - plus Beckey Barton, Jane Armitage and Teresa Kristunas) attended regularly, but a fifth representative, Richard Hartley, resigned during the year and will hopefully be replaced at the 2024 Annual Parochial Church Meeting. It is very important that our parish should be fully represented at this level, since members not only discuss and take decisions about

crucial local clergy staffing, parish organisation and financial matters, but also elect representatives to Diocesan and General Synods whose decisions are vital for the future of the Church of England as a whole.

Not all of the business is about “business”. The Synod regularly invites speakers on matters of general interest to all parishes and their members. In 2023 we heard from Diocesan speakers on evangelism and on the ministry of the laity, and from our neighbour, Craig Grocock (St Andrew’s Shottery), who has a Diocesan brief for advice in spirituality. Such opportunities to share ideas about ministry and mission are widely valued.

The challenges to which I have referred, however, took up much of our time, inside, and even more outside, Synod meetings. Three of the rural multi-parish benefices are now in vacancy, beginning with Nicki Chatterton’s moving on from Dasset Magna, but followed by the departures of the incumbents of MidFosse and of the Barford group. The first of those vacancies, after much negotiation, it has been agreed will be filled by a half-time clergy post for those four small parishes, rather than a full-timer. Future arrangements for the others are still under negotiation, and the issues are complex.

Obviously, a dimension which cannot be ignored is that of affordability. The total of Parish Shares paid by a Deanery is meant to cover at least the total cost of clergy in that Deanery, and while parishes like Stratford can and do pay in a high proportion of that, some others, including the benefices just named, can pay very little. Discussions are proceeding with the Diocese about whether too much is being asked of the parishes in rural areas, given the existence of certain other funds which can contribute to clergy stipends. Meanwhile, I, as Deanery Treasurer, try to help the Synod to share out the burden as equitably as possible, and this is not getting any easier.

All this may seem a bit remote to a parish like ours, which is largely self-sufficient in terms of both financial and human (clergy and lay) resources. But “we are members one of another”, and involvement in a Deanery with many rural parishes (most of which are not as “failing” as they may appear) reminds us of that and enables us to share both financially and spiritually in many important ways.

Anthony Woollard

THE VILLAGES

ALL SAINTS’ CHURCH, LUDDINGTON

In spite of the losses from the congregation during the last few years, the size of the congregation at All Saints’ has been maintained with new members. The support of Rev. Steve Jarvis and a number of retired clergy has enabled us to hold weekly services of Holy Communion. We are very grateful to the retired clergy, namely Rev. Jenny Rowland, Rev. Brian Russell, Rev. John Hall-Matthews, and Rev. Graham Wilcox for the time they spend with us.

In addition to a warm welcome to the services, after each service, members of the congregation are invited to stay for coffee, socialise and partake of homemade biscuits made by a skilled member of the congregation, who bakes different biscuits each week.

The church is open to the public every day for private prayer or viewing.

All Saints' Church is supported by several volunteers from the village. The volunteers ensure that the churchyard is in good condition, help to keep the church clean and tidy, and are members of the Flower Team who ensure that the church has flower arrangements in place throughout the year. We have teams of readers and flower arrangers from the congregation, but need to re-establish our other teams, namely, sidespersons and cleaners.

All Saints' continues to use energy for heating and lighting from 100% renewable sources, at no additional cost to the congregation.

A number of special services were held during the year including an evening service of 'Hymns & Pimms' as part of the 'Coronation Weekend', and, following the well-attended service in 2022, an 'All Souls Service' at the end of October. The Harvest Service in 2023 was followed by a blessing of the apple orchard located close to the site of the previous church in Luddington.

On the following Sunday, a 'Soup and Crumble' event was held in the Village Hall, raising funds for the Foodbank. Other fund-raising events included the Christingle Service on Christmas Eve, an event in response to an appeal from All Saints' Church, Chedgrove, Norfolk, for financial support for work to their stained-glass windows, and another to raise funding for lights to illuminate the church path over the Christmas period. The provision of lights down the church path was well received in this village, which has no street lighting.

A couple of social events were held in association with the Village Hall Team, starting with an Easter Egg Trail in the churchyard, followed by Easter crafts and a family film in the Village Hall. In July, a BBQ and Board Game Event was arranged. The church team also joined with the Village Hall Team for a Halloween event.

On Christmas Eve, All Saints' Church became the venue for the traditional 'Carols on the Green', which was relocated due to the weather, a good example of the fact that the church building is available for the use of the whole village for appropriate events.

After Rev. Steve Jarvis's absence from All Saints' for 3 months, due to his being on Sabbatical, we were advised on 29 October that he would be leaving the Parish. His last service at All Saints' was on 26 November.

Special thanks go to the All Saints' Team, Chris, Debbie, Jane, Jean, Jenny, Teresa and Tim, and also to Mitz for leading the Flower Team.

Teresa Kristunas

ST HELEN'S CHURCH, CLIFFORD CHAMBERS

2023 was quite a busy year.

We continued to have services on the first and third Sundays each month (with extra feast day services when these fell outside of our normal pattern). The overall average attendance numbers have improved. In 2022 we had 32 services with an average of 14 people attending. In 2023 we had 23 services with an average attendance of 17. Our morning praise service with the Phoenix Band has proved very popular and contributed significantly to the improvement. Attendance at feast day services, in particular the Carol, Christingle and Christmas Day services were back to pre-covid levels.

We still have an enthusiastic and improving bell ringing band who ring at every Service.

Clifford Chambers held a pageant in June in which the whole community was involved. St Helen's church was 'requisitioned' for one of the plays and the bell ringers rang the bells. In September there was a service held to celebrate the work of Clifford Charities and this was very much appreciated.

Once again the St Helen's and Village Hall committees joined forces to provide a soup café every Friday lunchtime between October and March. With the improved heating in the village hall, this has been well received.

As with any church, maintenance seemed to take up an inordinate amount of time!

- Our quinquennial inspection was undertaken in April. Fortunately, no major issues were discovered, but the roof and gutters need clearing of moss and debris and the boiler house roof needs replacing. This work will be done in 2024.
- Changing all the lights in the nave to LED became more expensive than planned as all the fittings had crumbled and had to be replaced.
- Following a generous bequest and support from Friends of St Helen's, pew cushions were purchased for every pew in the church.
- The bells were identified as needing refurbishment to ensure that they would continue to be able to be rung in years to come. A quote was received from Taylors of Loughborough for £35,000. Faculty approval has been given and fundraising will be carried out through 2024 with a view to having the work done in early 2025.
- One of the horse chestnut trees in the churchyard had to be removed as it was dead and becoming dangerous.

Our finances continue to be of concern. Although the fabric fund is reasonably healthy at £21,000, our day-to-day account is less so. Having a £6,000 commitment for the Parish Share and annual insurance premium does not leave a lot to cover our day to day running costs. Despite no longer employing someone to cut the churchyard grass (which saves over £1000 per year), and trying to find ways of reducing our £1000 annual gas bill for running the inefficient and costly-to-run current boiler, last year, we again showed a deficit.

The St Helen's management team continues to be grateful for the support of Patrick and the rest of the clergy.

Pat Woolvin

ST HELEN'S BELL RINGERS

We now have a regular local band of bellringers, who ring for Sunday Services and many other Church and Village events. We practise every Monday evening, so all 7 ringers have now achieved level 2 of the Association of Ringing Teachers.

The band entered The Coventry Guild of Church Bell Ringers Striking competition on March 24 and was awarded 2nd place in the Call Change section. This is recognition by the Guild of the band's development and quality for Sunday Service ringing.

On a regular basis, the band rings for Sunday services at Snitterfield, with a long-term aim of service ringing at Alderminster, Halford and Holy Trinity when needed.

Following a report from Taylors, the firm of bell hangers, we are putting in place a scheme to raise just under £40,000 to rehang the bells and strengthen the existing frame. It is hoped that the work can be undertaken in the early part of 2025, so please support the fund-raising scheme when it is advertised.

Mark Sayers, Tower Captain

FRIENDS OF ST HELEN'S CHURCH

The Trustees are pleased to present this, their sixth Annual Report.

The Friends of St. Helen's Church (Clifford Chambers) was established in 2017 to advance the restoration, repair, maintenance, improvement and beautification of St Helen's Church, including the churchyard and the War Memorial which belongs to the Church.

St. Helen's Church is the oldest building in Clifford Chambers. It is open every day to local people and visitors, both for worship and to view the beautiful building, parts of which date back to Saxon Times. It is a Grade 1 listed building. As with any historic building of great age, restoration, repair and improvement are needed on a regular basis if the building is to remain open.

The Friends of St. Helen's Church is committed to maintaining and preserving the church for the people of today and for future generations, as a place in which to worship and as a beautiful historic building to enjoy visiting.

After the pandemic, fund-raising activities recommenced. There was a plant sale in the Clifford garden of Mr and Mrs Pollock, and money was also raised from the sale of Christmas cards. A small grant of £170 was made to St Helen's church for hymn books.

As required by Data Protection regulations, all the Supporters were circulated asking them to confirm that they were happy for their names to remain on the list being held

by the Friends of St Helen's Church. This prompted some renewals, and donations were received from approximately 30 Supporters. This helped the Friends of St Helens to report a surplus for the year of £7,798, which included monies from subscriptions and donations of £7,200.

The charity held funds of £29,718 at the year-end date of 5th April 2023. This is a healthy sum, but we expect to receive increasing demands from the church in the near term to meet the cost of a new boiler, repairs to the church bells, and cushions for the pews.

Since the end of the reported financial year, activities have accelerated. The popular plant sale was repeated in May 2023, there was a generous offer made by our Patron, Sir Peter Rigby, for an Open Garden event which took place in the summer, and finally an auction of promises event which took place in October 2023.

Pat Woolvin

PARISH REPORTS

ADMINISTRATION

REPORT FROM THE OFFICE STAFF

In January 2023, Lola Spetsioti, the Operations Manager, went on maternity leave and in March gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, Dimitris. Liz Marshall was recruited to cover the maternity leave period and, with the support of Sarah Cushing, the Office Administrator, and the leadership team, she soon settled into the position.

As a team we work hard coordinating the occasional offices, as well as church and centre bookings, managing the health and safety of both sites, and numerous other tasks, including bizarre things like organising the re-siting of a beehive from the graveyard. Liz also took a lead role in the reopening of the church to visitors, and coordinating and managing the Visitor Welcome Team.

No day is ever the same, and the year passed quickly. When, in January 2024, Lola returned to work, it became evident that, given the significant number of tasks to be undertaken, roles in the office needed to be more clearly defined. Lola took on the role of Visitor and Marketing Manager, Liz reduced her hours and stayed on in the position of Safety and Compliance Officer, while Sarah continued as Office Administrator.

We work as a team, and together aim to offer the support required to ensure the smooth running of the church and the parish centre. We would like to thank all for the ongoing support we receive.

Liz Marshall

WORSHIPPING GOD

AV TEAM

The AV team livestream and operate the cameras and sound for the Parish Eucharist, other special services, and Weddings and Christenings on request.

The team hasn't grown, but it hasn't shrunk either. As someone leaves, we have usually recruited someone new. However, it would be great to have more members in the team. Currently someone must operate both the slides (words for the screen) and the sound, both of which aspects are busiest during the hymns. The ideal would be to separate these two roles, having three people on duty each week.

To operate the slides simply involves pressing one button. Anyone who has been frustrated by the slides being out of sync is welcome to avoid this by joining the team themselves. There have been some weeks when we have struggled to fill both roles, resulting in there having been some occasions on which I have had to operate the equipment, preach the sermon, and then return to the system. This isn't an ideal set up; any assistance would be gratefully appreciated.

Another role is producing the PowerPoint slides for the service. I am also part of a team of three who take it in turns to copy and paste the service from Word into PowerPoint. If someone were able to help with this to free me for my official role as Children and Families Minister, that would also be most welcome.

The team isn't just about providing the words on the screen and controlling the microphones. Our services are livestreamed on YouTube and then uploaded to Facebook. It isn't easy to get an exact figure of the viewers, because the number of views listed on a post doesn't mean they watched the whole video. However, when we calculated the number of people watching the whole service for the October Statistics for Mission, a conservative estimate of the numbers was 30 per service. Our livestreaming is an important part of our outreach and inclusivity of others.

I'd like to thank all the members of the team for all their hard work over the last year.
Phil Harper

BELL RINGERS

We have had a good year with a full team ringing all 10 bells for the Sunday Morning Service. We continue with teaching new ringers on most Tuesday mornings and early evenings before our normal open ringing practice from 7.15pm to 9pm.

The ringers enjoyed a summer outing to Butlers Marston, Radway and Pillerton Hersey. Then, in the autumn, we had another outing to Stonleigh, Bubbenhall, Cubbington and Lillington. Each outing was well attended by ringers from Holy Trinity, Clifford Chambers and Alveston.

A special thank you to Vicky McCarthy and Mark Sayers for organising the Ringing Tours/Lunches, as well as to Peter Bridges for his hard work undertaking the bell

maintenance required to keep our 10 bells in good order. This year 10 new ropes were purchased and installed at a cost of over £2000, paid for from the tower donation funds from wedding fees and visiting teams.

Charles Wilson, Tower Captain

CHOIR AND MUSIC

2023 was the first year of normalcy since the pandemic for music and liturgy at Holy Trinity Church, and the Choir has met all the musical demands and challenges admirably. Not only has the Choir provided the choral music for morning and afternoon services at Holy Trinity, but it also once again sang at Harvest Festivals, Remembrance Day and Lessons & Carols services at All Saints' and St Helen's, the Victorian Market, and the Christmas Eve walk-through event in 2023. We continued the tradition of offering the Fauré Requiem for the All Souls' service, as well as the introduction of some new repertoire at the Advent and Christmas carol services.

It is easy to overlook specific Choir events because there are so many of them each year, but one must not forget the all-important Friday evening rehearsals without which none of the preceding could occur. Trinity Voices continues to attract new children and introduce them to ensemble singing, and they continue to be an excellent training choir, planting seeds of growth for potential new Top Line choristers.

Holy Trinity Choir, the ultimate inter-generational group where young and older work together and learn from each other, is an ensemble to cherish. They give much of themselves throughout the year, and I am grateful for their service. I am especially grateful to Rebecca Mills, our Assistant Director of Music and my right arm, as we work together through the various challenges we're presented with. She is the ultimate professional in being supportive, creative, and willing to go the extra three miles for liturgical and choral music at Holy Trinity.

A brief word of thanks from myself to all who have supported and encouraged the Choir this past year. It's had its challenges, but challenges always strengthen bonds. I see nothing but a bright future for the choir programme at Holy Trinity as we continue the great tradition of liturgical music in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Douglas Keilitz

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER GROUP

The Contemplative Prayer Group has met monthly in person this year on the first Tuesday of each month. While the size of the group has remained small, several new people have come regularly or occasionally during the year. Anyone is welcome to attend without commitment, to see if this type of prayer suits them.

In the summer months we met in St Peter's Chapel in Holy Trinity Church. From November to April, we returned to the relative warmth and comfort of the Lounge in the Parish Centre. In order to avoid disturbance by the noise of activities in the main hall, we meet during these months at 5.30pm.

The format of the meetings is to have a short time of greeting and sharing of personal news, followed by an introduction to the subject matter for prayer for that evening. This

is usually a text from Scripture, a spiritual writer or a poem. Sometimes there is a short introduction to different ways of praying with the text.

After inviting the Holy Spirit to inspire our prayer, and a guided period of personal stilling in preparation, we share 30 minutes of silent prayer together. Members report that they find it easier to focus on their prayer when in a group than when praying alone. After the silent time there is an opportunity to share our prayer if we wish.

We believe that our meetings help us to deepen our relationship with God, and make a contribution to the prayer life of the parish.

Jenny Rowland, John and Tricia Hall-Matthews

FOREST CHURCH

The Forest Church service is a partnership between Stratford-upon-Avon Methodist Church and Holy Trinity Church. led by myself, Jane Mills and Jemima Strain. The service takes place fortnightly during Term Time, on Wednesday's at 4:15pm. Although at a time to suit children, it is open to anyone, and a variety of ages have attended.

Forest Church isn't simply doing a service outside that would normally take place in church. It's about spending time together in nature, seeing how God may speak to us through his creation, how we may become closer to God and explore our faith through activities, games, prayers, times of quiet and reflection.

The first service was held on 8th November 2023. At our first service, as we explored Holy Trinity Churchyard and the RSC Gardens, we were very excited to be joined by a juvenile swan. After that, things got colder and darker, but we're through the darker times now. We decided to start in the winter months, rather than wait for the Spring, because we want this to be a service which takes place throughout the year, enabling us to see all aspects of God at work through every season, warm and cold.

The service begins with a gathering in the Methodist Church, sometimes with an activity, which then leads us into Holy Trinity Churchyard, where we may find things that suggest a Bible story or help us in prayer. As we journey around the space, we are open to God. During the winter months each session ended with us toasting marshmallows around the fire.

We have had a variety of people join us, some for one session out of curiosity, but we have a few families who have joined us regularly for the service.

Phil Harper

PARISH PRAYER DIARY

The Parish Prayer Diary continues to provide a real foundation for the parish, and an opportunity for individual members of the church family to pray each day for inhabitants of the same road and for the same person on the Electoral Roll, as well as some other item of church or parish life.

The prayer diary icon, on the home page of the church website, leads directly to current and past copies of the monthly prayer diary, which can be printed off for personal use.

A link also appears in the weekly e-bulletin, available via email to all those who have filled in the online contact form. Thanks to Phil Harper, Paul Lageu and Sarah Cushing, printed copies continue to be delivered or posted to prayer diary recipients without internet access.

Christine Cottrell

WORSHIP TEAMS

The four worship teams have continued to meet regularly to plan and help lead the 10am Parish Eucharist at Holy Trinity. Each Team has a coordinator, and these have also met once a term to review progress and address any issues. I'm grateful to Lori Shanebeck for leading the team of co-ordinators over the past year and to every team member for their time and input which is much appreciated. It has been wonderful to see so many new people attending the service, including families with young children.

Patrick Taylor

MAKING DISCIPLES

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Over the last year there has been a lot happening in our work with children and families. I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the different ways this work has taken place.

A large part of my focus has been on the Parish Eucharist, helping families to feel included and part of this service. We have made a start with the Creative Corner, but I have plans for how this can be further developed. A key part of the initial design was that everything could be taken from the Creative Corner by children and their carers to be used in the church. Before a service a selection of items may be taken to a pew to use during the service. This doesn't usually seem to happen; instead the families feel they need to sit in the Creative Corner. I'm aiming to help families realise they can sit anywhere, and to redesign some of the things we are currently using.

Part of my role is to prepare and organise the Christenings for all the churches in the parish. An important aspect of our Christening is the gift we give to children at the time of their Christening. This year I started the Bible Gift Fund since the cost of the simple Bibles we were giving had risen steeply in price. We used to give the Year 6 leavers at Holy Trinity School books to help them with their transition to High School. but nothing that would support them beyond that. People generously donated to this Bible Gift Fund, which has covered the cost of better Bible gifts at Christenings and enabled us to give Children's Bibles to the Holy Trinity School leavers. We gave out Bibles to 58 school leavers and 35 Bibles at Christenings. Thank you to all those who donated and continue to donate.

In July six children were admitted to Communion before Confirmation. I look forward to beginning the process with a new group later this year.

An important part of the role of the Children and Families' Minister is constantly reviewing and adapting the work. I had tried holding a Tot's@Trinity monthly service

for toddlers. Unfortunately, this began at a time when our Toddler Groups became quieter as free childcare was extended. Although we had a few coming, it didn't seem sensible to continue with the service at the time. Our Toddler Groups are beginning to pick up again, so hopefully, in time, there will be a place for such a service again to give families the chance to experience church.

Our informal service, Time Out, was also paused during the year. We were struggling to provide music for this service, and with people moving away it became harder to organise. There is still a desire to develop more informal forms of worship, and hopefully new opportunities will arise.

As mentioned already, the Toddler Groups (Tuesday mornings at Ken Kennet Centre and Thursday afternoons in the Parish Centre) did become quite quieter. However, numbers are beginning to pick up again, in particular the Thursday group at the Parish Centre. I am very grateful to those who help run these groups. The welcome they offer to all those who attend is so important, as is their help setting up and clearing away.

There were some very busy services for the major festivals, with a good attendance for the Christingle and Journey to the Cross, as well as the other services at the time of these celebrations.

We have begun a new Forest Church service in conjunction with the Methodist Circuit. The service is planned and led by me together with Jane Mills and Jemima Strain of the Methodist Church. More details of this service can be found in the separate report.

Our work with schools has continued. We now hold collective worship/assemblies every half term in the six primary schools, and the secondary part of Welcombe Hills School. I have also done specific lessons in the schools on various aspects of the Christian faith. Some of the closer schools have come to us to learn about the Christian faith in Church.

As well as doing tours about the Christian Faith for schools, I have also done them for the uniformed groups, Beavers, Cubs etc. These visits form part of what they must do to earn their badges, but it has also provided a great opportunity to engage with children beyond the school environment.

In Luddington, Debbie Thorpe has been organising events for the children in the village at the major festivals. This work had begun with other members of the congregation, but it's great to have her support in developing these events and ensuring that they continue.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank anyone who has supported the work that is being done with children and families in any way. It is only with your support that we can continue to engage with the future generations.

Phil Harper (Children and Families' Minister)

HOME GROUPS

Home Groups continue to be a valuable feature of parish church life. During the last twelve months 8 groups have been meeting on a regular basis, involving approximately 60 church members. The groups are self governing and choose their own study content, frequency and format of meetings, which are usually hosted by a group member.

The common aim is "To Grow Together in Christ". Although some groups are clergy led they are not intended to be tutorials, but rather to provide opportunities to talk about the faith and to share feelings and experiences.

Most groups like to use study booklets so as to provide a focus for discussion but some sessions are simply based on bible readings. The past year has featured discussions based on a wide variety of topics, including The Book of Ruth, The Parables, The Psalms, The Creed, The Armour of God, Galatians, The Holy Spirit, Prayer and even a Lent course based on the film "The King's Speech".

Some groups have also held social evenings. One well established group holds a home-based Carol Service every Christmas and was also instrumental in organising a Quiet Day Retreat at The House Of Bread Christian Centre near Shipston-on-Stour.

During Lent the home group members formed the basis of the teams which provided and served the five Lent Lunches.

Enquiries about joining a group or setting up a new one should be referred in the first instance to The Revd Emma Harrington.

Graham Hopkins

SOUL SPACE

The workshop ran again in 2023, starting in February. Sessions were led by the team of leaders consisting of Les Albiston, Michael Shanebeck, Patrick Taylor, Chris Tattersall, Rebecca White and Pauline McIntosh, who is the Administrator. Four of the participants went forward for confirmation (including one who was also baptised) at the service in Holy Trinity in January 2024

Patrick Taylor

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT TEAM

The Bereavement Team is comprised of 9 volunteers, one of whom is Team Leader. Three volunteers have left, and three new members joined during the course of the past year. They carry out a variety of roles in support of the activities of the team. The Leader attends the monthly Parish Pastoral Team meetings.

The work of the team falls under two headings in the Parish Plan: Outreach & Engagement and Welcome & Care. The team contacts all bereaved families of those whose funerals have been conducted by Clergy of the parish. Many of the families are not directly connected with any of our three churches and our contact is a form of outreach, as we

offer support and care to them. This is a simple offer of loving care in response to their need.

We offer support over the telephone, in a support group that meets monthly and, in some considered cases, one-to-one meetings. Whatever the level of support offered, recipients are grateful that the Church has remembered them, shown concern for their wellbeing and offered support to them.

We have contacted in the region of 40 next of kin since the last report. The support group meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 2pm in the parish centre lounge. It is informal and all are invited to come. Some come regularly, others attend occasionally as suits their needs. Numbers attending vary from about 3 to 10 and team members are present to offer hospitality and support. Those who come find it useful to see how others are coping with their grief, realise that they are not alone in their struggles, and make new friends.

In November at All Soulside, we provide support in the form of a special service to remember all those who have died during the past year, as well as loved ones whom members of the congregation would like to have remembered by name.

All the members of the team are required to complete the appropriate level of Safeguarding training, and the Pastoral Team is looking at opportunities for further training for volunteers, particularly for new members of teams.

David Harrison

CHOIR SCHOOL

A new aspect of the Choir began in September – the Holy Trinity Choir School, an outreach programme designed to attract new young singers to choral music through education, lessons, spiritual formation, outings, and food!

The choir school began in September with just two members and has already grown to ten, with inquiries still being received. So, we look forward to watching it grow. Many thanks to Rebecca Mills, Kay Dyer, Amelia Parkin, and Marie McDougall for their assistance with this programme.

Douglas Keilitz

COMMUNITY FETE 2023

On Saturday 23rd September 2023, the Holy Trinity Community Fete welcomed the people of Stratford-upon-Avon into The Dell on a glorious sunny day for good old-fashioned fun. It was a day full of laughter, song, and friendship. The stall holders commented that it was extremely well organised, and we all received much positive feedback during and after the event. Here are some interesting facts:

- 4.5 months to organise (it usually should take about 12 months)
- 12 fete committee members, 20 fete committee meetings
- 100s of emails, texts, and telephone calls
- Endless paperwork for Health and Safety, Risk Assessment, and various licenses to operate the fete

- The RSC approved the use of The Dell to hold the fete
- 33 Stalls set up and taken down free of charge by LSD Markets
- 5 Gazebos and 1 marquee erected
- 3000 leaflets distributed
- 10 banners set up around Stratford-upon-Avon
- 75 Church Volunteers
- 12 bottles of Prosecco consumed
- 100 scones eaten and a further 72 sold
- 300 teas and coffees served; 300 cups, saucers and teaspoons washed and dried
- over £1000 raised selling tea, coffee and cakes !
- Fabulous entertainers and acts performing on the stage, including over 100 singers from The Rock Choir
- 100 ducks hooked by 170 children
- 64 tried to trap a rat..... most failed
- Over 200 sponges thrown at the Clergy
- 14 dogs and their owners entered the dog show.... all were winners
- 300 photos taken by the press and George Reah; 12 photos from the day appeared in the local press after the event
- 100s of prizes donated, 100s of books and bric-a-brac donated, and 140 balloons blown up for guess-the-number-of-balloons-in-the-taxi
- An average of 20,000 steps walked individually by most of the workers on the day !
- 2000 People attended.

The fete made £4,700 on the day itself and, together with other generous donations received, we were able to contribute £6,700 towards the organ fund. Great fun, a great day, but extremely hard work. It showed that Holy Trinity parishioners can do so much to help put on a big event, and that the people and businesses of Stratford-upon-Avon enjoy supporting and taking part in a fun day out, which Holy Trinity certainly delivered, and more.

Eve Archer

FOOD BANK

We continue to empty the collection chest at the back of church every couple of weeks or so and transport the donations to the Foodbank located at The Fred Winter Centre. They send their thanks and record our donations, along with those from other local churches and organisations. As mentioned in The Weekly Bulletin, they now need even more support because of increasing demand due to the rising cost of living. The Bulletin also contains the list of items currently needed.

Please donate whatever you can to support this vital service.

Enquiries to Lilian Hopkins (01789 268455)

Lilian Hopkins

FRIENDS OF THE MUSIC

The aims of the Friends of the Music (FoM) are to promote and support all forms of musical activity at Holy Trinity Church. This encompasses both music in worship, and music for external audiences.

At the beginning of 2023, the Committee comprised the following members: Caroline Thomas (Chair), Sam Bridges (Secretary), Martin Stanley (Treasurer), John Cohen (co-opted), Stephen Dodsworth, Heather Fletcher, Liz Johnson, Carolyn Lavery, David Lavery, Tim Raistrick and Josephine Walker (co-opted). Douglas Keilitz and Rebecca Mills were Ex-Officio members. Following the Annual General Meeting on 18 June 2023 Elizabeth Murphy was co-opted to the Committee.

Supporting music in worship.

The Friends of the Music have:

- 1) Provided funding for the post of the Assistant Director of Music. The post is held by Rebecca Mills, who has continued to support the Director of Music with the direction of the choir. She has also continued to train Trinity Voices (i.e. children of pre-choir age) and, since Autumn 2023, has supported the development of the Choir School.
- 2) Supported the operation of the newly established Choir School. The Friends provide funding for a hot meal for those young choristers attending both the Choir School (late afternoon) and the choir practice (early evening).
- 3) Provided financial support for an organ scholarship. Amelia Parkin, a long-standing young member of the choir has been supported with contributions towards tuition and course fees. In addition to her choral commitment, Amelia has been given opportunities to both play the organ and conduct the choir.
- 4) Coordinated and funded the awarding of prizes and trophies to young choristers, who had their commitment and progress recognised at the AGM in 2023 with trophies and financial awards.
- 5) Provided full bursaries for two young choristers, Bethany Fletcher and Charlotte Mulryne, to attend the Royal School of Church Music residential summer school in Bath in August 2023. In addition, the Friends organised and subsidised a day trip for members of the Holy Trinity congregation to visit Bath to hear our choristers participate in services at Bath Abbey.
- 6) Commissioned a new work for the Shakespeare birthday service, an anthem for choir and organ by composer, Becky McGlade. The anthem had its first performance at the Shakespeare Service on 21st April 2024.
- 7) Working with the Director of Music and the Organ Appeal team, the Friends facilitated the Appeal in the following ways:
 - Supported a concert given by Holy Trinity Choir in July 2023.
 - Provided front of house support, refreshments and publicity for a series of four organ recitals in Autumn 2023 given by John Butt, Peter Summers, Paul Carr and Charles Matthews.
 - Suggested performers for the Summer Fete.
 - Provided £5000 in match-funding for individual donations to the Appeal.
- 8) In preparation for marking the 40th Anniversary of the Friends of the Music, plans are underway for a day of celebration and reunion, involving former Directors of Music, Organists and Choristers, on 11th May 2024. The day will culminate in a Festal Evensong at 5pm.

Providing music for external audiences – Soundbites

2023 has been an active year in terms of the ongoing promotion and hosting of concerts for external audiences through the Soundbites series, which draws on the rich

musical traditions, resources, and facilities at Holy Trinity. There are no ticket fees, but income is gained from a retiring collection and refreshment sales.

The series of weekly, lunchtime concerts has continued to be successful in terms of both income and the musical life and community outreach of the church. Soundbites provides a welcoming community and has established an increasingly core audience. In 2023 there were 44 concerts with audience numbers ranging between 80 and 120. Notably, in February and March 2024, with the relocation of concerts to the Parish Centre, and on one occasion to the Guild Chapel, in order to accommodate the refurbishment work on the organ, audience numbers remained high, averaging 80 – 100 per concert.

Performers, who are not paid any fees apart from travel expenses, have included local musicians, both amateur and professional, and students from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Soundbites has continued to provide a forum for young performers in particular, and in 2023 we welcomed young musicians from King Edward VI School, Stonyhurst College, and the Houston High School Orchestra from Texas.

In concluding this report, it is important to note our thanks to everyone who makes Soundbites possible: the supportive audiences, the weekly volunteers who help out at each event, and the Assistant Director of Music for her work on identifying performers.

Caroline Thomas (Chair Friends of the Music)

HOLY TRINITY CoFE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Jane Coles has been appointed by the PCC as a Foundation Governor, and she joins the existing church representatives on the governing body: Patrick Taylor as Vicar and Laura Taylor (Foundation Governor). I'd like to express thanks to Val Payne for her time as Foundation Governor.

For the first time this year, the church gave an age-appropriate version of the bible to each Year 6 leaver, funded by donations from the congregation at Holy Trinity church.

The school now has a very good reputation with positive external reports rating the quality of education as good. Under the leadership of our excellent Head, Mrs Hererro, we continue to develop Collective Worship which embodies the Church of England's three basic principles of being Inclusive, Invitational and Inspirational.

Patrick Taylor

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH GIFT SHOP

Building on strong foundations, and some inspired choices of merchandise by my predecessors which are still selling well, Holy Trinity Church's gift shop has gone from strength to strength during the past year. We have expanded the range of merchandise including books and greeting cards, the latter, in particular, attracting local customers as well as tourists. As far as possible in a relatively small space, we aim to cater for both religious and secular visitors and, of course, those interested in William Shakespeare.

A Trip Advisor review commenting that “the Church has a great little gift shop” was heartening and a modest confirmation that we are moving in the right direction. Our efforts have certainly led to increased sales and profits during the year under review.

The installation of a POS (point-of-sale) system has improved stock control and provides considerably more data than in the past to enable us to better understand how we might further increase footfall, sales volume and, most importantly, profitability, enabling us to boost the shop’s contribution towards the mission work of the Church and maintenance of the Church building.

None of this would be possible without the help of a brilliant and committed shop team, consisting of both volunteers and paid staff, and the encouragement and input of the Church’s Treasurer.

We continue to offer a warm welcome to visitors, as well as accessible prices, and feel we are in a good position to proceed confidently into the future.

Sophie Mansfield

HOSPITALITY TEAS

Sadly, this activity has not continued since the end of 2022 due to a shortage of volunteer servers and cake makers, despite repeated requests in The Weekly Bulletin.

Lilian Hopkins

KEN KENNET COFFEE STOP

For six years now, a team from Holy Trinity Church has run a community coffee morning at the Ken Kennet Community Centre on Hodgsons Green from 11am to 12.15 every Tuesday. This regularly attracts around 20 people, occasionally more, mixed male and female, for hot drinks, home-made cakes and biscuits, and lots of conversation. The aim is that people from the local community get to know one another and form community bonds, and also that they become aware of the presence of the Holy Trinity community.

Occasionally we celebrate a seasonal event, such as Shrove Tuesday, Good Friday and Christmas, with special delicacies. The Team Leaders and others try to join the Community for special events, such as the Summer Open Day and Christmas Carols.

Rev. Diane Patterson & Jane Armitage

LAY CHAPLAINCY

At the start of the year, we had 5 permanent and one part-time Lay Chaplain. In January our part-time Lay Chaplain had to move away, but recently, in March, we were glad to welcome our new recruit, Rosie Blumire.

After the winter restricted-opening schedule, a number of paid visitor assistants were employed for the new season of church opening in 2023. This meant that there was less pressure on the Lay Chaplains to answer questions about the church as there were normally 3 visitor assistants on duty, who had extensive knowledge about the church.

From the middle of February to the end of the Half-Term Holiday in November, the church was open for visitors most days of the week. Our normal duties during this period were 11am to 1pm on Mondays & Tuesdays and Thursdays to Saturdays. We do our best to fill all 5 sessions per week.

Our main role is to be a listening ear and to offer comfort and prayer in a non-judgemental way and, by doing this, to act as an ambassador for the church and the Christian faith. This could be to an existing member of the congregation, a local person, or a visitor from the UK or from overseas. We also get a few foreign visitors who are studying or working in the UK.

The visitors come to Holy Trinity Church for various reasons: some to light a candle and pray for a lost loved one or to find spiritual solace in a quiet space, some because they love visiting churches but most come as part of the Shakespeare experience. When we are on duty, we engage with the visitors in an appropriate way in order to improve their experience of Holy Trinity Church. If they so wish, we offer them comfort or prayer and give them a blessing. Sometimes, after we have said lectern prayers, an opportunity may open up to talk about faith issues.

I believe that all of the Lay Chaplains have been called by God to perform this vital service in our church, and all are individuals and relate to the visitors in different ways. However, after most duties, I can honestly say that we as Lay Chaplains feel enriched to have met people who love to talk to us and even feel envious of our lives here in Stratford. We sometimes even get a mention on Trip Advisor!

Each year as a group we affect the lives of hundreds of our visitors. Is there anyone reading this who feels that they would like to join us? Phone Keith on 07733 000148 for an informal chat!

Keith Payne

LENT LUNCHESES

On five Fridays in Lent, between 12 noon and 2pm, the Parish Centre was buzzing with conversation as a group gathered to enjoy a simple lunch of homemade soup, bread and cheese. Each of our home group leaders agreed to lead a team of volunteers who provided and served the lunch, while another team set up and cleared the hall. Many volunteers helped on several Fridays,

From a modest beginning of 30 in the first week, the lunches gained momentum, culminating with an attendance of 50 on March 22nd. Customers included a young family and other people from beyond our own church community. It has been suggested that this opportunity for fellowship, especially for those living on their own, and for outreach is something it would be good to build on. If there is sufficient support among the teams, it may be possible to offer a soup lunch once a month starting again in September.

In addition to all these volunteers, I am grateful to our retired clergy, Diane, John, Graham and Brian, as well as Kay, who gave a "Thought for the Day", providing spiritual "food", which was much appreciated by all present.

The success of this venture was reflected in the generous donations received over the weeks, which resulted in £557.58p being sent to the Stratford Foodbank.

Christine Cottrell

MUNICIPAL CHARITIES

In September we successfully completed the change to being a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) which improves the governance and operational running of the charity.

Financial

Because of the change to the CIO, the financial year was changed and the total income for the 18-month extended year was £938, 813. After taking account of administration expenses, there was an excess of income over expenditure of £238,752.

Relief in Need

During our financial year 2022-23, grants of £80,991 were given out. Of this figure, grants of £33,512 were paid directly to individuals, with a further £20,272 via Citizens Advice, South Warwickshire. Grants totalling £27,207 were paid to institutions, including Entrust Care Partnership, Parenting Project and Stratford Foodbank, in respect of a variety of types of financial support.

Almshouses

We have 47 residences and in the year under review had an average occupancy of 95%. We have continued with our programme of upgrading kitchens and bathrooms, ensuring that electrical facilities are up to date, and looking to implement energy efficiency in our buildings. In addition, we have been looking at ways to increase the number of residences and hope to use part of one of our properties in Guild Street to do this. By employing our own handyman, we have increased the efficiency of minor repairs being undertaken to the improved satisfaction of our residents and have saved money in the process.

Other

The Tuesday coffee morning at 14 Guild Street has expanded into a Warm Hub for residents and others to attend. A garden party, held at the Church Street almshouses in July, was well attended despite the atrocious weather.

Tim Raistrick (Trustee)

NOVEL THEOLOGY

The Novel Theology group has continued to meet, usually monthly, with a membership of around half a dozen, sometimes supplemented by one or two from the equally small Faith and Film group.

Our reading has, as always, been varied. Some books have had obvious religious aspects, not least Paula Gooder's novel about the Church in first-century Philippi, "Lydia", and Michael Arditti's "The Choice". Others, like a couple of Robert Harris novels and Ian McEwan's recent "Lessons", have made connections with religion/spirituality but much less directly. Our venture into Agatha Christie was mainly just fun!

We are in no way a learned theological book group – just a reading group which happens to consist of church members – and no prior theological knowledge is required. We simply offer a relaxing opportunity, so necessary in a busy town and a busy church, to engage honestly with literature, with faith, and with each other, in ways which may enable us to grow. New members, and new ideas for books to read, are always welcome; please contact me on 01789 204923 or on agbw44@gmail.com .

Anthony Woollard

SOCIAL TEAM

We were able to draw on our experience from the Platinum Jubilee Lunch to provide an opportunity in May for the church and wider community to come together in the Parish Centre to watch the Coronation of King Charles 3rd on a big screen. Bunting, provided by the children of Holy Trinity School, created a celebratory atmosphere for 90 people who enjoyed coffee and cake during the service followed by a shared lunch at 1pm.

Events during the summer included a Skittles and BBQ evening in June, a circular walk between Clifford Chambers and Preston-on-Stour, with lunch generously provided by Julie Renfrew, in July, and culminated in the Parish Community Fete in September. The Social Team and our volunteers, together with teams from Hospitality Teas and Sunday Coffee, provided a cake stall and refreshments in the Parish Centre, raising over £1,000.

Harvest was celebrated with a Bring-and-Share Lunch, and Christmas-Wreath Making attracted enough interest to run 2 sessions in November. A new venture was undertaken in January with a Burns Night Supper which was well supported and enjoyed by all. Shrove Tuesday saw a mixed age group of 60 enjoy Lily's Waffles and Pancakes.

We are very grateful to Marie McDougall for providing such excellent food at our catered events, and to our group of hard-working volunteers without whose help on the day these events would not happen.

Christine Cottrell

STRATFORD CHURCHES TOGETHER

The ministers or representatives of the churches of various denominations in the Stratford area have continued to meet every other month. We share news, enjoy fellowship, and consider ways in which we can work together and support the churches in our Christian witness and service to the town. The Town Centre Chaplaincy and Street Pastors also send representatives who share updates on their important ministry in the town centre.

Churches Together organised the Good Friday Walk of Witness and a joint service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Joint advertisements for the Easter and Christmas services in all the churches were placed in the Stratford Herald, and a contribution was made to the Herald's funeral guide, giving a Christian perspective on Funerals.

Patrick Taylor

STREET PASTORS

Street Pastors in Stratford upon Avon is part of a nationwide initiative which started in 2011. Teams of three, drawn from many of the churches in Stratford, go out every Friday evening to walk the streets of our town with the aim of helping, listening and being a friend to those who need us: there are many who do!

We may be confronted with a variety of situations, ranging from visitors needing to be directed back to their hotels, or advising them where to get the best kebab (!), to helping those who are more vulnerable, in need of warmth, food, or just someone to treat them as ordinary human beings and talk to them as a friend. Over the last year we have helped more than 100 such vulnerable folk, and our presence has always been greatly appreciated.

Although we are few in number, we have a strong team, who are always ready to fill patrols. We are supported by a team of Prayer Pastors, one of whom is available to be contacted regularly throughout the patrol to keep them informed of events which may be happening, and which need the help of prayer.

We feel we provide a valuable service; the public and the 'authorities' in the town are also grateful for our input in keeping Stratford a safer place. To be a Street Pastor is, for us, an important and practical way to show the love of Christ to our fellow men and women. It is both fulfilling and enjoyable – win win!

Any Christian is eligible and welcome to join us. You have to be over 18, but there is no upper age limit – many of us are in our seventies. I think some of the young lads out there give us the respect they keep for their grandparents, which makes our job easier if they start being too 'rowdy'! Training and a uniform are provided, and we would encourage interested parties to join us on a patrol to see for themselves what happens. Please contact me for more information.

Linda Horrocks, Stratford-upon-Avon Street Pastor Coordinator

TRINITY COFFEE STOP

This ministry continues, its primary mission being to provide a community facility with locals in mind, but visitors are also made welcome. It is a monthly event held on the third Saturday from 10 am to 12 noon at the back of church.

The secondary objective is to raise funds for outreach and ministry and, in the last twelve months, we donated over £1,300 for this purpose.

The regular team who provide and serve the coffee, tea and cakes are only three strong and additional volunteers are needed.

Enquiries to Sian Wade (01789 294947), Brenda Pitt (01789 205594) or Lilian Hopkins (01789 268455).

Lilian Hopkins

TRINITY FELLOWSHIP

Our year runs from September to July, but for this APCM I am requested to write a report from May 23 to March 24, I hope that members reading this will understand why not all our events are mentioned.

At our May meeting we had a river trip on the Avon with afternoon tea which was well supported and enjoyed. In June, we heard of the work of the Coventry City Mission and made a donation to them, and in July we enjoyed a strawberry tea followed by a musical concert. It was decided in September that we would change our name from Trinity Ladies to Trinity Fellowship in order to make our group more inclusive, and so far we have had an average of 4 men attend our meetings.

We have had various speakers and, at our AGM in November, it was decided to give £100 to the Organ Fund, £150 to Guide Dogs for the Blind and £50 to Christmas Lights. Rev Emma Harrington kindly led our Carol Service for us.

So far in 2024 we have had a talk on “Food through the Ages” and the paintings in the Guild Chapel. In March, the Rev Thomas Powell told us about his life’s journey to Stratford-upon-Avon, which everyone found very interesting.

I would like to thank our Committee, consisting of Rev Diane Patterson, Diane Edwards, Tina Allen, Anne Blair, Gillian Nunn, Barbara Bartos, Sian Wade, Ruth Davies and Frances Walker for all their hard work. I would also like to thank Joan Forbes and Eithne Mulryne for organizing the raffle each month.

If you would like to join us, please come to the Parish Centre on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 2 p.m. We will be pleased to see you.

Gina Lodge

TRINITY PLAYERS

This year we looked again at our Easter Play, “Message of the Cross”, part of our repertoire since 2008, and instead we devised “Witnesses”, in which characters tell the story as if they had been in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. Rather than a play, characters engage individually, directly with the audience, aiming to persuade them of their viewpoint. It took place in the Chancel as part of Holy Week, and we appreciated that our audience recognised that this was, in fact, an act of worship and so did not applaud. We were much encouraged by the appreciative reception afterwards that we will consider repeating this format with the usual changes in choice of music, poetry and, if needs be, actors, though mention must be made of Pete Cubitt who has inhabited the character of Peter since the first performance. This year, the retiring collection raised funds to provide bibles for children leaving Holy Trinity Primary School.

On 21 April a large audience joined us for our annual celebration of the Bard’s Birthday, “Coffee, Cake & Shakespeare”. This began in 2009 when Jon Ormrod, Head Verger at the time, suggested we provide some ‘Shakespeare’ for the visitors. Our thanks, as always, go to Lillian, Brenda, and Marie for the Cake and Coffee and to David White, who continued the tradition of Verger carrying the cake.

Our major production was “The Holy Trinity Mystery Plays”. I spent the summer adapting the medieval Mystery Plays so that they would communicate to an audience today bible stories ranging from the Creation to the Nativity. My grateful thanks to those who believed from the start that this ambitious project could be staged by November; James - the Creation film; Tony - Staging, Lighting and Effects; Tim (God); Margot (Lucifer) and my very supportive Assistant Director, Chris. This was an ensemble production with everyone playing between two and four parts each – some speedy costume changes in the broom cupboard! The Play received a splendid review in the Stratford Herald under the headline, ‘A Triumph of Biblical Proportions’ and we were included again in the Highlights of the Year. The good news is that we were able to put £1900 into the PCC account: the bad news is that this was the last year in which Lori and Michael Shanebeck were treasured members of Trinity Players, as they have headed back to the States.

We still meet most months to read a play or share readings we love, and David and Jane Southead lead a small team offering Words and Music to Retirement Homes and Community groups.

Ursula Russell

TRINITY TIMES

Our parish magazine has continued to chronicle our common life in its usual ten issues per year (available for free on our website or, for a £10 annual subscription printed copies). We have once again recorded, in words and not least in many brilliant colour photographs, all the main events in the life of our parish, with particularly valuable features written by Judith Dorricott on both events and people, and we have been given much to think about through the contributions of our leadership team (one of whom writes each month’s editorial) and a number of others.

A major change took place at the end of the year when Felicity Howlett stood down after some years as design editor. This job, putting the final thing together, is vital, and we could not have coped without her expertise during the changes of recent years. She has been replaced by Claire Clack, who by her own admission has nothing like the same level of relevant experience and technical expertise, but is proving a fast learner. Our gratitude goes to them both, and to those (especially Phil Harper) who have given support during the transition.

Contributions are always welcome, and each edition gives the cut-off date for contributions to the following one. We often approach the deadline wondering how we will fill some spaces, but we always do fill them – exactly! Please keep your material coming in.

Anthony Woollard

TRINITY VOICES

Trinity Voices is now in its seventh year (albeit with a break during the pandemic period). The group at the moment is made up of around twelve children aged between four and nine, who have great fun in rehearsals on a Monday evening. Here they are given a snack and some games to wind down after school, before learning their songs and taking part in musical educational activities. There is a pause in the middle for an interactive Bible story.

The children come from a variety of educational settings and have bonded very well over our circle-time activities, where we talk about what has been on their minds that day.

I'd like to thank Phil Harper and Marie McDougall for all their help with the games and snacks. Also, huge thanks go to Amelia Parkin, our Organ Scholar, who has been an invaluable support as our pianist and deputy. We will miss her immensely as she moves on to pastures new next academic year.

The children have sung regularly at services over the last year, and I have been impressed by their clear diction and their memory for the songs. Feedback received suggests that they enhance our worship and lift our spirits!

The group now functions very much as a training choir, and we have already had one child move up to the main choir this year. Continuity is important and my presence in both groups means that I can help them settle in successfully. They will also have had prior experience of singing before a large congregation.

As ever, we are on the lookout for new members: if you know a child who may be interested in joining, please email rebecca.mills@stratford-upon-avon.org
Rebecca Mills

WELCOME AND CARE

HOME COMMUNION TEAM

Holy Trinity offers home communion to those who live in care homes, and to individuals at home who are unable to attend church. Home communions are overseen by our clergy team, working together with lay members of our pastoral visiting team, altogether a group of 12 to 14 people.

In the past year, members of our team performed regular (usually monthly) group communion services at three care homes in the parish: The Limes, Briar Croft and Scholar's Mews; and gave communion to individual church members in other care homes, both in and out of the parish. Care home communion follows a shorter liturgy patterned on our regular church services, with prayers, Bible readings, homily, communion, and blessings. Discussions are now underway with two additional care homes – The Bentley and Trinity Manor (a new care home near Waitrose) – which have requested monthly communion services.

At any given time, our pastoral visiting team provides communion at home to about five or six individuals or couples. These follow a pattern similar to care home services and are provided either by clergy or (from the reserved sacrament) by lay members. Emma Harrington and I are now conducting an assessment of our home communion services, with a view to understanding how our team can best meet the needs of the community.

Thomas Powell

PASTORAL CONTACT TEAM

The pastoral team of clergy and lay leaders has continued to meet monthly to review our pastoral care needs and arrangements. We have worked on developing a more streamlined system whereby the team try to look out for people who are not already in touch with one of the existing groups across the church family, aware that someone who does not belong to a church group or team of some kind may be more easily missed. Also, those who do not yet belong to a group might be encouraged to join one if they wish.

An updated notice has been put in the Weekly Bulletin encouraging people to contact the Parish Office if they or someone near to them is ill, has been bereaved or has some other pastoral issue that they would like followed up by the team, or that they feel the clergy team should be aware of.

Kay Dyer – Associate Priest

PRAYER MINISTRY

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Ephesians 6:18)

For many years there has been a tradition in Holy Trinity Church of providing Prayer Ministry during the Sunday Morning Eucharist service for any member of the congregation who wishes to take advantage of this opportunity. This practice is normally held in St Peter's Chapel, which is a private space. It is accessed during the distribution of Holy Communion, and members of the congregation should feel free to walk to the chapel after receiving communion from either communion station.

There are always two members in each Prayer Team and anyone can go for prayer during communion; one doesn't have to give a reason - one can just ask for a blessing. All prayer requests remain confidential: they may be for a family member or friend, for a problem situation, or just to have the relief that a problem shared is a problem reduced.

From time to time, all of us feel the need for prayer - whether it's for ourselves or for friends and family who may be ill, awaiting an operation, in difficulty or anxious. The prayer can only be short during the service, but, if more prayer is required, this can be arranged.

If nobody comes for prayer, the prayer team will pray for people who they know need prayer and/or pray through the lists on the Pew Sheet.

In April, three of the team members attended an enjoyable training course designed for church Prayer Teams at The Well Christian Healing Centre in Leamington Spa.

Currently we have six prayer team members. If anyone else would like to be involved in this ministry, please contact Keith on 07733 000148 for an informal chat and to learn more about the training requirements.

Keith Payne

PRO-WARDENS AND SIDEPEOPLE

The Churchwardens would like to thank their team of dedicated Pro-Wardens and Sidespeople, who have assisted at the services in Holy Trinity throughout the year. They have helped to ensure that everything has run smoothly, and we couldn't have done our jobs without their invaluable help.

We'd also like to thank the teams at St Helen's and All Saints' who have helped keep their services on track.

Paul Lageu

SAFEGUARDING

I should like to begin this report by thanking Jane Armitage, the former Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO), for her dedicated, hard work in fulfilling this role on behalf of the parish and PCC for many years. Jane stepped down after last year's APCM and was replaced by Lynne Suter (as PSO) and Paul Suter (as Safeguarding Administrator).

Lynne and Paul completed the enormous task of identifying the Safeguarding requirements of the Parish post-covid. They worked closely with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and were able to establish the DBS checking and relevant training requirements for each Team operating under the PCC. They also updated the Parish Safeguarding Policy. Unfortunately, Lynne and Paul are moving out of the Stratford-upon-Avon area and therefore have not been able to continue in their roles. We are indebted to them for the valuable work they carried out.

Since then, Liz Marshall, as the newly appointed Safety and Compliance Officer in the Parish Office, and I, as the newly appointed PSO, have been continuing the work, following up on DBS checking for Teams involved with Children, Young Persons and Vulnerable Adults. We have started a process of meeting with all team leaders to ensure that they complete their relevant Safeguarding Awareness training and support all their volunteer team members to do the same, as required by the Church of England.

I am pleased to report that all staff and volunteers requiring a DBS check (those involved in the Teams listed in the Parish Safeguarding Policy) have completed their checks as well as the associated Higher Foundation level of Safeguarding Awareness Training required of them. All paid staff have also either completed their training or, in the case of newly appointed staff, are expected to complete it promptly as a condition of employment. The PCC are all DBS checked as trustees and have completed the Foundation level of Safeguarding Awareness Training.

The Parish Safeguarding Team is working closely with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to ensure that we fulfil our requirements as a PCC. The hope is that all members of the parish, across all the parish churches, will help develop a culture of safeguarding awareness, transparency and mutual respect to promote a safer Church.

Helen Warrillow (Safeguarding Officer)

SUNDAY MORNING COFFEE

Would you like to join a worthwhile ministry by supporting Sunday Morning Coffee?

Diane and Tina are pleased to report that more and more parishioners are taking the opportunity to stay and enjoy a hot drink and socialise after the 10am Sunday Eucharist. This is great news, but we desperately need new members of the congregation, both male and female, to join our excellent but dwindling group of willing volunteers in order to help spread the load. Serving refreshments is an enjoyable task and is on a rota basis, usually in a group of three people, and should only occur about once every six weeks or so.

If you think this is for you, please see either Diane or Tina after the service. Your help would be most welcome.

Diane Edwards and Tina Hillyard

WELCOME TEAM

The Welcome Team has continued to look out for and help new worshippers to Holy Trinity receive an easy transition into Church life. Even though it is mentioned in the Service and advertised on the screens that new members should fill out a Welcome Form, it usually takes one of the team, or sometimes a member of the congregation, to ask new worshippers to fill one out. The Welcome Form is important as it means I can follow up, welcome them, and help them with any questions they may have. I am considering if we are able to add the form to the Holy Trinity website so that it can be submitted online.

We have now changed the Welcome event to a Welcome Mingle. This is held in St Peter's Chapel after the 10am Service on a Sunday morning every 6-8 weeks, depending on the numbers of new worshippers. This gives us a chance to invite Clergy, Wardens and members of the congregation to mingle with the new worshippers. It seems to be working, as there is no detachment any longer from the service and it feels more natural to bring people together in this way. The event is finished off with a tour of the Church by Patrick which everyone finds extremely interesting as the description of the Christian life journey is explained from the font to the pulpit to the high altar. It allows the new members to get a sense of the church and the interaction with life and God in a most fascinating and educational way. If you have not had the pleasure of being on one of these tours, I suggest you sign up to the next Mingle soon to learn more about it.

Recently there has been an initiative between Patrick, the Social Team and the Welcome Team targeting new young adult members to attend an informal event. It is split between men and women, with Patrick leading the male interaction, and the Social and Welcome Teams organising the female new members. It gives us all a chance to have a simple chat over a drink or a nibble or two, and build bonds and relationships between these single, younger adults.

So far this year we have welcomed over 25 new members, but people tend to come and go, and not all are captured in this process. However, we continue to ensure all the congregation are welcomed and that any concerns or happy events they wish to share can be passed on. I enjoy working with the team and the congregation as we continue to build a stronger and friendlier place to worship.

Eve Archer

BUILDINGS AND ENVIRONMENT

CHURCHYARD MAINTENANCE VOLUNTEERS

We are a team of volunteers who meet regularly to keep the churchyard tidy. Our aim is to make the churchyard a pleasant place for everyone who walks through or comes to visit the church. Being there also provides opportunities to talk with visitors and to represent the church community.

Members of the team during 2022 were: Liz Johnson, Marion Mitchell, Bridget Sorel-Cameron, Valerie Thompson, Mary Heron, Melissa McLean and Lindsay MacDonald. We had a two-hour session on alternate Monday afternoons, with a total of 20 sessions between February and November. The total time contributed over the year was 196 person-hours, giving an average attendance of 4.9 volunteers per session. The team continues to be notable for its great spirit of cooperation and camaraderie, and for its “can do” approach. The award for best attendance went again to Valerie, who was present for all 20 sessions, a remarkable achievement.

Litter in the churchyard is not much of a problem, at least when the bins are not overflowing, but there are always lots of branches and twigs to be picked up, especially after a storm. The lime trees seem to be particularly prone to shedding bits in autumn and winter. We pile it all up inside the west gate, for the Town Council team to take away.

Other tasks accomplished during the year included:

- Kept the main avenue, the western avenue and the pathways free of litter;
- Removed grass and weeds along the edges of paths and around the church building;
- Cleared leaves and debris from the drain covers below the down pipes;
- Removed weeds from base of the wall on Mill Lane (outside on the road);
- Cut suckers from the lime trees up to a height of 4 metres;
- Maintained the shrubs in the bed alongside the southern path;
- Maintained the enclosed garden behind the Parish Centre.

In autumn, the Heart of England Woodturners delivered the first batch of wooden bowls, made from fallen branches of the great cedar tree by the west door of the nave. These had come crashing down in a severe storm in February 2022, and were cut into logs and stored for a year to dry out and season. The bowls are now for sale in the church shop and are notable not only because of their beauty and tactility, but also their direct link with the Garden of Gethsemane. The tree was brought as a seedling from Jerusalem in 1872 by the Reverend Chafy Chafy MA DD FZS FSA, Rector of Rous Lench.

The year ended very sadly when we lost a much-loved friend and valued member of the team, Mary, who died suddenly and unexpectedly in October. She had made a great contribution throughout the year and was always cheerful and full of energy. We continue to miss her.

The experience of volunteering is positive and we work well together as a team. The appearance of the churchyard is maintained at a high standard, and we receive many

compliments from both visitors and members of the congregation. In addition, it's therapeutic and enjoyable!

We welcome anyone who would like to join us, even occasionally, to assist with this satisfying activity in such a glorious situation. These two acres around the church are like a little piece of heaven.

Lindsay MacDonald

CLERK OF WORKS REPORT

It was a busy year with many maintenance items being undertaken by the team:

- Working with our stoneworks contractor, Louis James, we undertook the removal of moss and leaves from the roof parapets, unblocked down pipes, and made repairs, where necessary, to stonework.
- The South Entrance doors have been secured with an antiqued metal bar, following an attempted break-in.
- The areas in the transepts for flower arrangement, and the storage of brooms, and other items, have been rationalised, allowing uncluttered access. Repairs to the dripping tap were completed.
- The lectern stand has been modified to allow for ease of movement.
- A fall of stone necessitated a 'cherry picker' being brought into the church, and our architect followed up with an inspection. All is safe, but recommendations for cleaning, and some repointing, have been made and are now in the pipeline.
- The team was much involved with the organ refurbishment, making sure that the choir stalls were adequately protected, cleaning the clerestory windows, giving access to scaffolders, and organ builders, whilst all the time ensuring that Health and Safety regulations were being observed.
- We have been involved with the re-siting of television screens, fixing, as unobtrusively as possible, brackets to some columns and to the Clopton Chapel.
- The bier house store has been reconfigured to accommodate some of our theatrical fittings by repositioning all of the retained stone for repairs, and is now much more accessible.
- Parish Hall lighting in the main hall has been upgraded to LED lighting, and is a major improvement.
- The rear steps and access ways to the boiler room have been cleared of moss.
- We propose to get a skip in order to remove garden waste and detritus from the Parish Hall garden in the hope that this will encourage the use of this space.
- Parish Hall and office electrics have been extended and updated to accommodate a third desk.
- An extensive investigation to improve the heating systems has been undertaken by Grange Heating, and servicing and repair have been commissioned. We now think we understand what boiler runs what system, and at present all is working as it should.

(NB : DO NOT ALTER ANY THERMOSTATS BEFORE CONTACTING THE OFFICE)

I thank my colleagues for all their work, help, and advice: Dr John Lees, Ian Johnson, Mike Warrillow, Lola Spetsioti, and Liz Marshall.

I believe that the major items of the Quinquennial Report have been, or are being, addressed, and many of the minor items have been executed.

David Neale

ECO-CHURCH TEAM

The Eco-Church team – consisting primarily of myself, Mike Warrillow, Samuel Jupe, Lindsay MacDonald and Tricia Hall-Matthews, and with contributions also from such as Amelia Parkin, Kevin Bond and Tony Guy, has tried during the year to keep before the PCC and the congregation the extreme importance to our mission of the stewardship of Creation in response to the climate emergency.

Last year's report referred to the granting of a Silver Award from the national Eco-Church organisation. Since then, we have continued to keep under review our use of fossil fuels, and, in the absence of major building improvements or the money for them, have worked on such matters as improved insulation. We have continued also with the ecological care of our churchyard.

Some services, especially joint services with our Methodist neighbours, and others at times such as Harvest, have had some focus on the care of Creation, and the ever-growing climate crisis has featured regularly in intercessions on other Sundays. The launch of Forest Church, again jointly with the Methodists, has helped also with the ecological dimension of our worship and prayer.

We continue to provide “eco tips” in our weekly bulletin, and to support the monthly ecumenical Eco Chat sessions.

The attainment of a Gold award, such as our Methodist neighbours have gained, may prove beyond us because of such factors as the nature of our historic building. But the Church at Diocesan and National levels is continuing and intensifying its efforts to encourage progress in all parishes and to issue guidance as to how it might be achieved. The team will continue to look for opportunities to make the care of Creation even more central in our life and witness. New ideas are always welcome!

A fuller account of our progress is to be found on the Eco-Church page on our website (www.stratford-upon-avon.org).

Anthony Woollard

FLOWER TEAM

The arrangements produced by our flower team have enhanced Holy Trinity Church throughout 2023. Our current practice is to have a large arrangement by one of the entrances to welcome both parishioners and visitors into the church, followed by a beautiful pedestal arrangement near the choir stalls, a vase of flowers by the Madonna at the side of the Clopton Chapel, flowers on the altar and, of course, a posy of flowers (often using rosemary for remembrance) near Shakespeare's grave.

While 2024 promises to be a little quieter, last year saw over twenty weddings in church mainly during the summer months. For these occasions, the team provided the standard arrangements as mentioned above, and the bridal party was able to enhance

these, if they wished, with extra floral arrangements, such as pew ends, arches or bowers. The flower ladies liaised with the bridal parties so that the colours of the blooms in church would match the wishes of the bride.

The flower team is divided into four groups of three, so that each group only needs to arrange the flowers every fourth week. Of course, there are no flowers on show in Lent, and only greenery is displayed during Advent. But for Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festival, all the groups join in with great enthusiasm to decorate the church. Nativity scenes with a Manger, an Easter garden, vegetables and even loaves of bread appear over the year.

The designated flower group usually meets on a Friday morning to refresh the flowers, but, when needed, all members are happy to help out and change their arrangements. There are currently twelve members in the team, with three ladies in each group, and more participants are always welcome. There is a wonderful camaraderie within the team with lots of fun and laughter – and even cake!

Please contact Judith Dorricott on judithdorricott@btinternet.com if you are interested in joining the team.

Judith Dorricott

FRIENDS OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHURCH

Following the resignation of former Chair, Kevin Taylor, in November 2022, Diana Owen OBE has been acting Chair.

Our AGM was held in August and the following appointments were confirmed: Cait Fanin Peel as our Clerk & Secretary, Patrick Taylor as our President, Geraldine Caulfield as our Treasurer and Jennie Ewing as our Membership Secretary. We also said goodbye to some of our long-standing trustees with grateful thanks for their support over many years: Jane Hornby, Graham Poole and Jane Armitage. Quentin Willson stepped down as a Trustee to become a Patron of the Friends of Shakespeare's Church. The following trustees were appointed to the Board: Tim Raistrick, Lindsay Macdonald, and Gillian Cawley.

We were delighted to receive a generous legacy from an American supporter and were able to thank his family in our Spring / Summer newsletter. We have made modest grants to the Organ Appeal and to the general maintenance and conservation of Shakespeare's Church.

Our 2nd Friends Annual Lecture in October "Good Kings, Bad Kings: Shakespeare on Power & Authority" was delivered by Rowan Williams, Baron Williams of Oystermouth, and was well supported. We also hosted a number of other events, including in September, "What Was Shakespeare Really Like?" by Prof Sir Stanley Wells CBE in conversation with Dr Paul Edmondson in the week of the publication of his new book. In the spring of 2023, we were delighted to partner with the Stratford Literary Festival to host an event with Maggie O'Farrell in the Church.

We continue to seek a permanent Chair and now, also, a Treasurer - please let us know if you are interested in either of these roles. Our thanks to our Board of Trustees and our Friends for their continuing support.

Mike Warrilow

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

STEWARDSHIP SCHEME AND GIFT AID 2022

Members of the Stewardship Scheme make regular donations to Holy Trinity, either with a standing order arranged through their bank or by using personalised envelopes. The scheme is of considerable value to the church as the certainty of regular donations assists it in planning for the future, in terms both of its ministry and the upkeep of its buildings. In 2023, despite a fall in the total donated through the scheme, it remained one of Holy Trinity's main sources of income.

14 people left the scheme in 2023, but 15 new members joined, so that we ended the year with a membership of 167. Of these, 136 donated by standing order, with 31 using personalised envelopes or the white Gift Aid envelopes that are found in the pews.

The total donated to Holy Trinity through the Stewardship Scheme in 2023 was £118,655, just under £4,000 lower than in 2022, and the average weekly donation of a Stewardship member was £13.66, about 4% lower than in 2022. Notwithstanding these reductions, the figures still reflect a significant and generous commitment to Holy Trinity on the part of Stewardship donors.

Most members of the Stewardship Scheme also complete a Gift Aid declaration, which means that the church can reclaim tax on their donations at no cost to the donor, thus, for every £1 donated, the church receives an additional 25p from the government. The Stewardship total in 2023 was boosted by a Gift Aid reclaim of £27,599 to give an overall total of £146,254.

Stewardship Scheme donations since 2020

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023
Holy Trinity Stewardship (including non-Gift Aid)	£113,443	£125,741	£122,539	£118,655
Members at year end	200	183	166	167
Average weekly donation	£10.91	£13.21	£14.20	£13.66
Tax reclaimed via Gift Aid	£26,122	£30,986	£28,236	£27,599
Total	£139,565	£156,727	£150,775	£146,254

The church also gathers donations for specific causes. In 2023, £519 was donated through the Christmas card amnesty, which, along with a Gift Aid reclaim of £122, was

included in the total distributed to Holy Trinity's Christmas charities. In addition, £3,463 was donated to the Food Bank, £3,035 to the Organ Fund and £100 to Holy Trinity's Community Fund; these totals were boosted by Gift Aid reclaims of, respectively, £846, £759 and £25. Taken together, the amount given to special causes in 2023 was about £800, or 10%, lower than in 2022.

The Gift Aid scheme is also used by visitors to the church who donate using the white donation envelopes. Even though the number of visitors continues to recover from its low point during the pandemic, the income from this source was down this year by about 17% from £5,622 in 2022 to £4,682, which meant that the Gift Aid return was likewise diminished from £1,406 to £1,171.

Finally, under the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme, the church can reclaim tax on offertory donations up to a total of £8,000, and we were able to claim the maximum of £2,000 from this source.

Each year, Holy Trinity contributes an amount of money known as the 'Parish Share' (formerly the 'Quota') to the diocese, and for some time this figure has been taken as a yardstick for the Stewardship Scheme. Although we have exceeded this target in recent years, we fell short of it in 2023, the Parish Share for the year being £122,000.

This year's report, then, is one of falls almost across the board, and it seems plausible to attribute this to the one big rise of 2023: that in the cost of living. The Parish Share will doubtless increase in 2024, as will the other costs of Holy Trinity's ministry. It is to be hoped that, as the inflationary pressures that have affected all of us start to ease, Stewardship donations will rise next year so that we can once again keep pace with the church's obligations.

The church is always pleased to welcome new members to the Stewardship Scheme, especially those who are on Holy Trinity's electoral roll but do not currently participate. Any donation, large or small, is greatly valued, and giving through the Gift Aid scheme—which is open to all UK taxpayers – is a simple way of boosting Holy Trinity's revenue, as well as enlarging the charitable donations that the church itself makes on special occasions. Although tax cannot be reclaimed on their donations, many non-taxpayers also participate in the Stewardship Scheme and their membership is no less valued.

Please consider joining the scheme if you are not yet a member. If you would like details of how to join, please contact me through the parish office or direct on 01789 299785.
Chris Kennedy, Stewardship Officer