



# Reports from Groups and Organisations (2024)

April 2025

# **1. CHURCH COUNCIL**

## **1.1 District Church Council**

## **1.2 Wardens' Report**

It's been an interesting year. Hardly had David and I been elected as wardens when Rector Charles declared he would like to retire in the autumn. Much of the first few months was spent, therefore, in meetings with Charles, and with others in the parish, working out a way forward. Then came the excitement of Charles' farewell parties - the lovely parish lunch at the Garden Hilton (thanks to Susan Scott for arranging this), Charles' last morning service at St Helen's when we presented him with a book of good wishes and memories and then the splendid final service in November with a church packed to the rafters with congregants old and new, former colleagues, friends and family of Charles and many more.

Then came stage two: could we manage without him? There were a few wobbly moments but we settled into a routine and David and I owe an enormous vote of thanks to those who have risen to the task; to Akma and Jen and Paul who have taken on new tasks and developed new roles, to our great team of honoraries who have been so generous both in their good wishes and in their actual support, sometimes taking services at very little notice, to Linda Hobbs who has been helping quietly in the background with many pastoral matters, to our Administrator Jackie and caretaker Robin who have had to adapt to 'the boss' not being so readily to hand.

By Christmas we were ready for Stage 3; the process of appointing a new Rector. Although strictly a '2025 event' I can report that at the time of writing the bulk of the Parish Profile has been prepared with the Job and Person spec still to be drawn up by the PCC standing committee using the report from the parish meeting in January as their guidelines. It is hoped to advertise in May and interview towards the end of June. Clergy with the required experience and skills for such a post are not in abundance so we must be prepared for the fact that we may not be able to appoint first time round...

The DCC has been most supportive throughout this period, and we are grateful to Geoff Meen for taking on the role of Chair. No matters have been allowed to slip during the vacancy and with the clear and helpful support of Pat Hudson we have managed to make a bit of progress in improving our attention to safeguarding. Norman Gee has done sterling work in installing new office computers and a small group had been looking into the office phone system. This will need renewing in the near future. The Events team have continued to work very hard in putting on a series of concerts last year and the barn dance in Feb, helping to raise money for the church but also to bring us together as a congregation. A big thank you to Gwen Bevington for her work as DCC secretary; she has done much to ensure the smooth running of meetings.

Much about the life of the church over 2024 you will find elsewhere in this report but there are a few things I would like to mention.

It was good to be able to continue the initiative of having a 'presentation' in the west porch of the church over Easter and Christmas. Sue Pemberton produced a lovely Easter garden which was on display and stewards handed out sheets giving details of Easter services, and mini eggs to passersby. At Christmas we had our usual nativity scene and again greeted those walking past with good wishes. If you haven't looked at it, I would urge you to come and visit the Easter garden this year. How about joining the loyal (but small) band of helpers in greeting those walking past? Many now expect to see us in the porch each year. With record numbers of people attending our Christmas services in 2024, I would like to think that we are beginning to 'spread the word'.

It has been good that we have been able to continue with some more newcomers' lunches, giving those comparatively new to the church the chance to meet and get to know others who have been around a while.

Thanks to Jen who arranged a further series of Faith Forum last year at the later time of 12.30, with a light lunch beforehand. The later time enables our friends at St Michael's to attend as their Sunday service clashed with the earlier time of 9.15am.

I personally was delighted to pass the management of the Christmas market to Jeanette Thomas and Pat Hudson last year. They did a

tremendous job and well over £3,000 was raised in total for church funds. It is also an occasion when we can welcome townsfolk into our building.

This report is but scratching the surface of church life. I have discovered that the role of a warden covers rats, robes, scattering of ashes, car parking, lost property, cooking, hoovering, pigeon chasing - and much, much more. However, without the support of so many volunteers amongst us and the work they do, it would be a lot harder to keep the show on the road, offering a beautiful building and a spiritual presence to the people of Abingdon

**Margaret Horton and David Pope, Church Wardens**

### **1.3 St Helen's Church Fabric Report**

One of the priorities for 2024 has been the investigation and repair of roof leaks, both for the Church and the Parish Centre. There had been a problem for some time with damp in a corner of the Parish Office near where the Office roof adjoins the wall of the Rectory. The damp had caused damage to plaster and paint in the corner. The contractor discovered that there was a fault in the construction of the lead step flashing on the roof. The lower layer of waterproofing (lead soakers) had been omitted when the Centre was built. The contractor lifted the tiles and the existing flashing, and fitted new soakers underneath. This appears to have fixed the leak however it will take some time for the wall to dry out completely before it is redecorated.

There was a second leak in the Centre, near the top of the dormer. The location made it difficult to reach, because of the corrugated PVC roofing in the area, blocking access from ground level. The contractor put a crawling board on top of the PVC and was able to inspect the lead flashing, finding a small crack in the lead. This has been filled with a sealant.

For the Church, there had been a persistent roof leak near the organ. Despite repeated visual inspections, there was no obvious sign of cracks in the lead in that area or nearby. The leak was located by squirting water onto the roof from a hosepipe, working upwards until water started leaking into the Church. There had been a failure

underneath the edge of a lead repair patch, which made the crack very difficult to see.

The Tower notice board had been suffering from rotting of the wood in some areas, along with unsightly discolouration of the back board. Our thanks go to the Church Caretaker Robin Day for undertaking extensive woodwork repairs. The refurbished board is now mounted on spacers, slightly offset from the church wall, to reduce the risk of water getting trapped behind the board.

There has been progress with the monitoring of the Archives Room, as reported last year. There had been concern from a professional archivist about the risk of damp in the unheated room. The measurements now cover a full year and show that Relative Humidity is within or close to the recommended range in all weather conditions. There has been no risk of condensation or mould growth on the archives during this extended period.

There has been a problem for some time with the mechanism for opening and closing the high clerestory windows in the Nave. The window cords have frayed over the years and no longer run smoothly over the pulleys. It is possible for the cord to come off the pulley wheel and get stuck at the side of the wheel, so the window becomes jammed, open or closed. It would be possible to replace the cords, but it has been decided to leave the windows permanently closed. There have been problems with pigeons entering the Church by these windows, if they are left open for any length of time.

Other fabric work has included the replacement of a leaking water heater in the Church Served, also a continuation of the regular roof maintenance, clearing gutters and downpipes.

**Stephen Thomas**

## **1.4 Ecochurch**

Revd Dr Jen Brown has persuaded each church in the Parish to register with Ecochurch and to apply for certification for the environmental work that we do. Catherine Kimber and Rob Rutherford have agreed to be 'champions' for St Helen's Church. The reason you

haven't heard much from us is that we are working through the new criteria for a bronze award.

As soon as we can see gaps in what we do, or ways to improve what we do, we will report back and hope to persuade you that we can do better!

## **Rob Rutherford**

### **1.5 The Heat Pump Research Project**

Rob Rutherford, with the knowledge of the District Committee, has convened a small group to explore the possibility of heating without gas - to reduce our carbon footprint. Other members of the group include Stephen Thomas, Richard Charles, Catherine Kimber and a representative of the 'Christ's Hospital of Abingdon' charity.

We started with an idea – is it possible to use a heat pump not only to heat St Helen's Church but also, via a small district heating scheme, to heat the surrounding heritage buildings and potentially the Parish Centre and Rectory? To that end, we have involved the governing body of the charity Christ's Hospital of Abingdon. None of us know if this is technically feasible nor financially possible but it is sufficiently interesting to make it worth exploring. We are convinced that there are significant advantages in a joint project.

The initial idea is to use a water source heat pump (WSHP) – to take water from the Thames, cool it down and use the energy extracted to provide heat to the surrounding buildings. The advantage of this technology is that for the cost of 1 unit of electricity you can provide about 4 units of heat energy. It sounds like magic but it works!

We have visited two working heat pump installations. One was at the Dorchester Sailing Club where we were shown around by the club secretary and colleagues. The second was at Buscot Park where we were shown round by Lord Faringdon. These visits gave significant insight into the advantages and practicalities of the technology. Both use water source heat pumps but they use adjacent lakes. River-based WSHP have been used elsewhere – for example in Stroud –

and planned – for example in Exeter – but we need to find out about them to see how they solve practical difficulties – like river traffic. We also need to find out about regulatory hurdles. Another issue is the size of the necessary ‘plant’. This is not a short-term research project.

If you are interested and think you might have skills to contribute to a project of this kind, do talk to us.

**Rob Rutherford**

## **1.6 Music Report**

The choir had a full and varied year during 2024. Choir numbers have remained stable, and we generally have a well-balanced choir of about twenty at our Sung Eucharist and Choral Evensong. The choir's weekly routine involves a rehearsal on Friday evening, then a brief warm up before the service on Sunday morning. On the third Sunday of every month we also sing choral evensong; congregations have been very select at some of these, but the music has explored many of the riches of the Anglican choral tradition, and it would be good to spread the word about this service more widely. At our Sunday morning services an attempt was made to help more people join in with singing the musical settings of the Kyrie, Gloria and Sanctus by providing copies of the music (when possible) to the congregation. This had a mixed reception, and creates extra work for the sidespeople, so it would be useful to know whether members of the congregation find it helpful. One successful innovation in 2024 was the addition to our service list of a service of Music and Readings for Eastertide, which we are aiming to repeat later this month. On the fifth Sunday of those months that are favoured with such, the evening service at St. Helen's takes the form of a Sacred Concert of seasonal devotional music, often for the organ. It was particularly impressive to see about 70 Abingdonians turn out at 5.30 on Low Sunday at the end of December, to listen to 45 minutes of Messiaen's *La nativité du Seigneur* – not always a composer loved and appreciated by just any congregation.

The choir works particularly hard at certain times of year to prepare for the more musically elaborate festivals in the calendar. As well as

Christmas, Holy Week and Easter, those included the Rector's farewell service at the start of November, the musical ingredients of which had been planned and requested by Charles well in advance. It was very good to welcome a few singers from St. Nic's and St. Michael's into the choir on that occasion, to underline the parish-wide element of the event. Members of our choir also visited the other churches in the parish to sing at the corporate communion for Trinity Sunday, as well as St. Nicolas' patronal evensong in December.

Members of the choir have contributed musically and administratively to the Music at St. Helen's (MASH) concerts, which have enriched the church both culturally and financially throughout the year. In February the Hurst ensemble brought the music of Schumann and Ravel to St. Helen's, then in April we were treated to an organ recital by Simon Lawford. The St. Giles Consort, a visiting choir from Chalfont St. Giles, gave us a programme of English Choral music, which got us nicely warmed up for Himms 'n' Pimms (or should that be Hymns 'n' Pymns? Heaven have mercy on overseas visitors trying to cope with English spelling) the following week. In October the Helenstowe Consort, a small group of singers based at St. Helen's church, presented Sounding the Sacred Space, a programme that matched the different parts of our church building with music composed in the era they were built. I would like to thank the members of the Events Team for the considerable amount of work they have undertaken in promoting and organising these concerts.

One of the jobs of a choir director is to judge how far to push singers in the direction of difficult and challenging music. I would like to thank the members of our choir for their dedication, and their willingness to be pushed a long way! (And for their forbearance when the director occasionally pushes a bit too far). I would also like to thank Norman Gee for occasionally deputising in rehearsals, as well as playing for some evening services and liaising with the organ tuners, Elizabeth Dawson, for spending a lot of time looking after our music library and our robes, and particularly Andrew Shouler for his consistently excellent organ playing and sensitive accompanying. The choir is always happy to welcome new members, both adults and children; if you enjoy singing and would like to find out what is involved in being in the choir, please come and discuss it with me.

**Peter Foster**

## **1.7 Treasurer's Team Report 2024 – To be circulated at the meeting**

## **1.8 Electoral Roll**

Reporting for the year to March 24, there were 229 on St Helen's Electoral Roll. (21 were added to and 6 were removed from the Roll during the Revision for 2024).

After 5 years of revisions, 2025 is time again for a completely new Electoral Roll. Consequently, there are likely to be some variations between 2024 & 2025 figures in next year's report.

Matters are progressing and the new Electoral Roll for St Helen's will be available for inspection between 13<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> April 2025. It will then be merged with the new Rolls for St Nicolas and St Michaels, to become the new Parish Electoral Roll for 2025 in time for numbers to be reported at the APCM in May.

**Kate Burland**

## **1.9 The Events Team**

The Events group has continued to develop throughout 2024. Our events have raised money for St Helens and for charities and opened the church to the community. The Hurst Ensemble Chamber Concert in February was followed by an organ recital by Simon Lawford in April. In July we held two events with the first showcasing the St Giles Consort. We tried something different for the second one and held a "Hymns and Pimms" evening with lots of favourite hymn singing and strawberry tarts. Our final event for the year was in October when "Singing the Sacred Space" with the Helenstowe Consort sharing music and songs from the different centuries of our amazing building. The programme for that event was written by Peter Foster and is an incredible and informative souvenir of that evening. Our music director Peter Foster has been an invaluable supporter of our work this year and we can only give him our

warmest thanks and appreciation for his time, effort and enthusiasm. Our events in 2024 raised almost £4000 for St Helens and £1100 for charities nominated by our performers.

In the past year we have worked to develop systems which enable us to put on events in an organised and streamlined way. It is now possible to book tickets via a QR code on all posters and flyers. The Bookstore in Abingdon will also now sell tickets for us. Publicity has greatly improved. We have agreed a template for all posters and flyers which have our logo and a picture of St Helens painted by Margaret Horton. The deep blue background is easily recognised wherever posters are displayed. A further template has been produced to aid programme production as we begin to address gaining sponsorship. Risk assessments, health and safety rules and safeguarding procedures have all been implemented.

Everything we have done and are trying to do as we move into 2025 is because of the hard work and dedication of a small group of people. Hazel Glennie has now stepped down from the group and we thank her for her positive contributions. We welcome Pat Hudson who has volunteered to join us recently and we are very grateful that the number of people who have agreed to support events when they are able has increased considerably in 2024. Without them we would not be able to continue. We are open to welcome more new members either to the committee or to help at events.

**Kath Cook**

## **1.10 Charitable Giving**

In 2024, the Charitable Giving Group (CGG) consisted of three members of the congregation, Mary Anderson, Lesley Legge and Tom Hardy, with input from Churchwardens Linda Hobbs and Margaret Horton. Our original plan for 2024 had been to support two international charities, The Dorothy Springer Trust and the International Refugee Trust, as well as two local charities Trintiy Learning and Abingdon Carousel. Our support would be to provide £300 quarterly to each of the charities, requiring an annual budget of £4800.

There was some discussion at the DCC over this level of charitable giving, given that St Helen's overall budget was very tight, and the CGG was asked to look at ways of reducing these payments. Then in April 2024 we were informed of the closure of The International Refugee Trust by its directors; the reasons for this closure were not made clear. Consideration was given to replacing The International Refugee Trust with another international charity with which we had connections, but no suitable replacement was agreed in 2024. The DCC also pointed out to us that St Helen's gives to charities other than those nominated by the CGG, through its £1700 grant to CiA and through the Macmillan Coffee Morning, donations to the food bank and money raised through concerts. This extra giving totalled over £3,000 in 2024. The church also hosts 2 large events, the Remembrance Day service which raised over £1,000 for the Poppy Fund and Christingle which raised c£800 for the Children's Society. In summary, St Helen's gave the following support to CGG nominates charities during 2024.

• The Dorothy Springer Trust	£1200
• The International Refugee Trust	£300
• Trinity Learning	£1200
• Abingdon Carousel	£1200
Total	£3900

**Tom Hardy**

## **2 EDUCATION AND FORMATION**

### **2.1 Baptism Preparation – See Parish Report**

### **2.2 Junior Church**

### **2.3 Quest**

Quest members leave church after the Gospel and meet in the upstairs room in the church centre for discussion and activities. Numbers have been small – sometimes only one – not a good situation for anyone! Our leaders (Martin Kimber, Norman Dawson, Elizabeth Irving, Margaret Horton) have remained very loyal and a big thank you must

go to them, and also to our helpers (Barbara King, Elizabeth Dawson, Georgina Jarvis and Rob Rutherford) who attend so regularly. Staffing might change slightly in April. We continue to use the resources produced by the ecumenical group "Roots" as the basis of our ideas but will frequently adapt the materials to our own thoughts and strengths. Thank you to Margaret Horton for 'coordinating' the group. Rob Rutherford has taken on that role to allow Margaret to concentrate on being churchwarden. Margaret still makes time to lead Quest on one Sunday a month and takes responsibility for Senior Quest.

Please let us know if you would like to help in some way.

Senior Quest has continued to meet just once a month, on the last Sunday. They disappear into the vestry and discuss a topical issue or an idea from the day's lectionary readings. It is often a scratch on the surface of a vast topic but the aim is to open up questions - not to find answers! Examples of topics include the parliamentary vote on assisted dying, whether Christians could be termed 'extremists' and miracles. Our young people are so thoughtful.

**Rob Rutherford**

## **2.4 St Helen's Baby and Toddler Group**

The Baby and Toddler group continues to meet on Monday mornings during school terms. Numbers have continued to increase gradually. By the end of the year, we often had 20 children present with a parent, grandparent or carer. We are in contact with over thirty families, although it is rare for everyone on the register to be there at the same time. We have not yet had to limit new families from coming, but are relieved when the weather is warm enough for more than the most hardy 3 and 4 year olds to use the outside space. The age of the children varies from babies to those in their final year before full-time school.

We continue to use both inside and outside space, which is valued by the children. When it is warm enough we still use a groundsheet over the (very rough!) grass so that children and parents can sit to play with simple toys, and we put out water play, sand or similar as well as ride-on toys. When it is colder it is mainly the older children who choose to go outside, to cycle up and down, and each week there will be one or two

children making that choice. We offer a simple craft or “exploring” activity each week, usually planned by Sue Pemberton. Jenny Shouler continues to lead singing and action songs (including some in French and Spanish) for fifteen minutes at the end of each session, which is greatly enjoyed by the children.

We continue to have a link with St Helen and St Katharine School. Although no sixth formers were able to volunteer with the Toddler group in the academic year 2023-4, we are delighted that two more girls joined us this September as their planned community service. They help to set out toys, and the children enjoy playing with them, particularly on the playdough or craft tables. Parents, particularly those with more than one child, are delighted to have someone to play with one of their children and give them a short respite.

At the moment there are five volunteers who help to set out equipment and put it away: Sue Pemberton, Elizabeth Dawson, Sue Cox, Jenny Shouler and Rosalind Rutherford. We also want to record our thanks to Robin Day who works so hard to keep the area around the Parish Centre clean and tidy and as safe as possible.

**Rosalind Rutherford**

### **3 THE WIDER CHURCH**

#### **3.1 Food Bank**

Abingdon Food Bank continues to be an important lifeline for many families in need within our community. In the last year a new Manager has been appointed, he is initiating additional staff training to ensure Foodbank users have access to assistance with Benefit advice. The food bank is under Trussel Trust management.

Abingdon has two food banks, the Christchurch hub opens Tuesday and Friday mornings, South Abingdon Foodbank at Preston Road food opens Wednesday afternoon.

There is an ever increasing demand for support with an increasing need from refugee families, these families and individuals have no

recourse to public funds, therefore until employment is found there is a need for short term food support. The Christ Church hub also offers a regular language café aimed to integrate families and improve language skills.

The Parish of Abingdon continues to actively support the work of the Food banks. Regular donations of tinned foods as well as monetary donations help to support this important work and ministry.

We would like to offer thanks to all who have contributed in any way to the work of Food Banks locally and nationally. Without the work of Paid employees, volunteers and those who donate, clients would be facing even more difficult situations.

**Linda Hobbs**

### **3.2 CiA Church Twinning**

Church Twinning is a sub-committee of the Church in Abingdon. This is a local ecumenical partnership, formed in 1988 and bound together in a formal contract. Thirteen churches of all denominations are members of the fellowship. Church Twinning is itself affiliated to The Abingdon and District Town Twinning Society, which was formed in the 1960s with the support of the Town Council, to foster friendships and engender reciprocal visits between families, schools, clubs and societies of Abingdon's twin towns.

In April 2024 we hosted a group of five from Schongau, who enjoyed events hosted at Trinity, All Saints, St Michael and Abingdon Baptist Church, and a day in Oxford. A special highlight was a visit to St Helen's bell tower, with thanks to Susan Read.

From 20 to 24<sup>th</sup> June we hosted a group of nine from Sint Niklaas. This visit focussed on the Passion Play performance on the Saturday. The visitors and their hosts enjoyed a visit to Oxford, a guided walk around Abingdon, and talks and hospitality at Abingdon Baptist Church, St Edmund's, Christchurch and Peachcroft Christian Centre.

Our funds are used to provide hospitality for our visitors when they come to Abingdon and we are grateful for the generous support of our congregations for our Christmas cards, Barn Dance and Quiz night.

We are always looking to encourage new people to take part in this important work of fostering European Christian friendships. A valuable offshoot of this is the friendships we form with members of other congregations in Abingdon. If this is something that appeals to you, please get in touch with your Church representatives, as below.

**Anne Dodd and Elizabeth Simpson**

### **3.3 Agnostics Anonymous**

Agnostics Anonymous, the recently formed open discussion group on the Christian faith, met six times this year. For the first three meetings, Keith Ward, John Barton and John Kerr formed the speaker's panel. Regrettably Keith Ward left the panel at Christmas but Jen Brown (the Reverend Dr Jennifer Brown) kindly took his place for the last three sessions. The meetings continued to be well attended. In April a survey was taken and there were 27 replies. All were very favourable. Comments included: first class; thought-provoking; stimulating; well-chosen, varied and open topics. People also said that it was good to have a variety of perspectives. The meetings were welcomed particularly by those with doubts and questions. All wanted the series to continue.

Details of the meetings are as follows:

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024 *Miracles : 6 Impossible Things before Breakfast*: led by John Kerr, with Keith Ward and John Barton

25th June 2024: *How We Got the New Testament*: led by John Barton, with Keith Ward and John Kerr

19<sup>th</sup> November 2024: *Evil and the God of Love*: led by John Kerr with John Barton and Keith Ward

28<sup>th</sup> January 2025: *Is Christian Language too Male*: led by John Barton, with John Kerr and Jennifer Brown

25<sup>th</sup> February 2025: *Does Being Religious Make You a Better Person:*  
led by Jen Brown, with John Barton and John Kerr

25<sup>th</sup> March 2025: *Prayer for Agnostics*, led by John Kerr: with John  
Barton and Jen Brown

**Jill Gant**

## **4 CHURCH GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS**

### **4.1 Uniformed Organisations**

#### **4.2 Hand Bell Ringers**

Report of Handbell Group Activities in 2024

In 2024 our team had eleven members, enough for all the events at which we were asked to perform.

We held ten weekly practices starting on 13<sup>th</sup> October. We again met in the Parish Centre each Sunday evening.

We provided background music at three church Christmas fairs this year (St Michael's, St Helen's and Dorchester Abbey). We entertained at three clubs, two church carol services and one care home. I also gave a talk on handbells to the Trefoil Guild.

I'd like to thank all the handbell ringers again this year for their helpfulness and for the fun we have had.

**Susan Read**

#### **4.3 Tower Bell Ringers**

The bells are rung every Sunday morning at St Helen's and St Nicolas', while Tuesday evening practices alternate at the two towers. On Friday afternoons we welcome boys from Abingdon School for their practice. This is followed by a lively session for our own youngsters, who are making excellent progress. Some are able to qualify for the Oxford Diocesan team in the annual National Youth Contest.

As part of the Oxon Ringing School (along with Dorchester-on-Thames, Witney and Kirtlington), adults are taught basic bell handling on Saturday mornings. This is possible with the generous help of volunteer experienced teachers from a wide area of Oxfordshire. In 2024 we organised two Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) day courses to train new teachers of bell ringing. Quite a few new teachers attend the Ringing School to be mentored and gain experience in order to achieve accreditation.

Last year we rang for the occasional wedding and tolled for a number of funerals.

Visitors are very welcome to come up the tower to see the bells and ringing. We are happy to teach girls and boys (from age 10) who may be interested in learning to handle a bell and join in.

**Brian Read**

#### **4.4 Holy Dusters**

The total complement of Holy Dusters is still eleven, as it was two years ago when last reported. Each of them continues to diligently clean, dust and polish the furniture and fittings in their section of the church every week. Some extend the scope of their work to sweep between the pews. This work assists the caretaker, who works restricted hours and is therefore unable to clean the church comprehensively every week. There have been some retirements from the team, notably Valerie and Colin Casemore, who organised and provided four decades of service, which was publicly acknowledged and thanked after a recent morning service. The following new members of the team have generously offered to give their time to the task: Irene Scane, Julie Mellows, Jane Elliot and Robert Medcraft.

**Chris Jefferis**

## **4.5 St Helen's Archivist Report**

St Helen's extensive historical archive, in some cases providing information dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is looked after by a team consisting of Claire Bolton, Dominie Burton, Alexandra Green, Silvia Joinson and Geoff Meen. The team is particularly grateful to Steve Thomas who regularly monitors temperature and humidity conditions in the archives room; maintaining these within a prescribed range is crucial to the long-term preservation of the records. Given their age, the archives are in a good state of repair.

Although preserving the state of the archives is the primary concern of the group, it also responds to the requests received from genealogists, around the country and indeed around the world, seeking information about family members. The demands are not onerous and are frequently very interesting. However, the team is conscious that the archives are under-used. Information is available to carry out research of major significance and the team would welcome interest from anyone wanting to utilise the records in this way.

**Geoff Meen**

## **4.6 Ministry of Welcome**

## **4.7 Friends of St Helen's**

The Friends of St Helen year began in April 2024 when we participated in the launch of our Rector Charles Miller's book, '[The Spiritual Adventure of Henri Matisse](#)'. This was arranged in collaboration with the publisher, Unicorn, and our local Abingdon Rotary. The evening was a great success, with an inspiring talk and friends in attendance from as far afield as London and Cambridge.

Then in May we hosted a deeply significant talk on 'Christians and Muslims in a fractured world' by Dr Richard McCallum, Director of the [Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies](#), Oxford. The talk engendered many questions and a very lively discussion.

Our Autumn talk in October, entitled 'Trouble in Paradise' and delivered by Alex Titcombe, struck a different note. Alex spent many

years in the hotel industry in the Caribbean and he gave us a fascinating glimpse of the economic and social issues behind the 'holiday brochure' view of that beautiful part of the world.

We are extremely grateful for our speakers' contributions to the FoSH programme and are always happy to hear from new prospective speakers.

At our 2024 AGM in July 2024 we said a fond farewell to our Rector and FoSH Chair, Revd Dr Charles Miller. As usual, we give thanks to Linda Hobbs for providing a delicious cream tea.

Thanks are also due to our expanded committee. Sue Mathew is manager of the shop, looking after stock orders and displays, though since January 2025, DCC has taken on overall financial responsibility. Kate Burland as membership secretary and treasurer bears much of the burden of our accountability – thank you. Linda Hobbs and David Pope provide much needed support, and we hope soon to welcome Anne Dodd to the committee.

FoSH receives annual income of approximately £10,000 from interest, dividends, membership subscriptions and (until January 2025) from the shop. We and our linked charity, the Trust for the Development of St Helen's, continue to support the church in diverse ways and look forward to partnering with the DCC in fundraising for the new lighting scheme.

**Mary Anderson**

#### **4.8 Mothers' Union Abingdon Branch**

It was announced in early March, that Mothers' Union has a new royal patron, HRH Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh.

Abingdon branch continues to meet on the first Tuesday of each month in the parish centre. Our current membership is 20 and April, we will be admitting 3 new members. Sadly, we lost Dorothy Donald in January. We have welcomed a wide variety of speakers, enjoyed discussion, fellowship and hospitality throughout the last 12 months. Highlights have been a speaker from Ronald MacDonald House at the John

Radcliffe Hospital (JR), which was followed by a group visit to the house where families of premature babies and sick children can stay in en-suite accommodation. We have heard about the work of the “Abingdon Bridge” which provides support and counselling for young people in our town and another talk about the latest needs of the “Abingdon Foodbank”. Two other memorable meetings were the work of the “Thames Valley Air Ambulance” and the amazing creative skills of the “Guild of Church Needleworkers”. We continue to raise money for Mothers’ Union charities locally, nationally and world- wide, and provide knitted items, baby products, basic groceries and Easter and Christmas gifts for “Baby Basics” in Milton Keynes, the JR Hospital and “Children Heard and Seen.” A generous contribution was given to the MU “Away From It All” (AFIA) holiday scheme. We have held 2 services during the year, firstly a eucharist and secondly, a special service to remember all those caught up in domestic abuse. Members have also represented our branch at various diocesan events.

All that we do is rooted in prayer, reinforcing our commitment to stable relationships and family life.

**Elizabeth Dawson**

## **4.9 Readers and Intercessors**

The number of readers and intercessors has remained stable over the past year. There are at present 39 readers, compared to 40 last year, and 19 intercessors, compared to 17 last year. The rota is prepared on a quarterly basis and usually most people will read or lead the intercessions once in this period. We have maintained the pattern of involving young people in first Sunday services, both in reading and in leading the prayers using prepared texts. As well as reading at the morning services, there are opportunities to read at Choral Evensong on third Sundays and at the Healing and Wholeness services on fourth Sunday evenings. There are extra services around the major festivals, including the Advent and Christmas Carol Services, the services in Holy Week and the Easter Service of Music and Readings. We are blessed in having so many able and committed people who support this ministry and are grateful for the way they enhance our worship throughout the year.

## **Susan Gee**

### **4.10 Stewarding**

The 2024 season for physical stewarding of the church began at Easter (very early this year) and continued until the end of September. We aimed to have two people stewarding from around 10am to 12.30pm. Ideally, it would be wonderful if we had enough stewards to allow alternate weeks of duty. However, we were able to cover every day of the week.

The church is now open to visitors and for prayer from 9.15 with the morning service, until 3pm from Monday to Thursday, when the building is locked by the Parish Administrator. On Fridays the Junior Bellringers meet, followed by the Choir Rehearsal. Through the winter the church is locked before dusk. In summer at around 5pm. On Saturdays and Sundays, if no meetings or Services, members of the stewarding team volunteer to lock the church.

The feedback we receive from the church being open every day is of thankful appreciation, from the many visitors to Abingdon who come to explore the church and Abingdon's history, to the many people, residents and others, who come to spend time in quiet reflection and prayer.

We are always looking for more volunteers to join the stewarding group. If you are able to give a little time to sitting in the church to welcome visitors please get in touch with myself or leave a message in the church office.

## **Elizabeth Simpson**

### **4.11 Servers**

This year has seen the addition of junior servers to the team for first Sunday services which has been particularly welcome. Otherwise, we remain at a level where it is only really possible to field one server on a regular Sunday, though we have managed larger teams of 3 or even 4

servers on major feast days. The team is actively recruiting with a view to being able to roster 3 servers each Sunday on a regular basis. Thanks to all the current volunteers and to those who have responded to the ongoing recruitment drive.

#### **4.12 Sidespeople**

We have small teams of sidespeople helping out at Sunday 10:30am and some of the other services, particularly focused on organisational matters: distributing service sheets and hymn books, unlocking doors for fire exits, sorting out lights, collection plates and readings, answering queries and so on. The sidespeople act as effective deputies to the church wardens: a historic role, but one that we have gradually evolved and will continue to do so under future incumbents. Several of us have been in office for six or seven archbishops, if we include both provinces. From St Helen's we were very sad to lose Dorothy Donald, who played her part as recently as January: I miss all of our group who have gone before us, quietly friendly and unassuming people who made the world a better place. Thanks to you all.

As coordinator I (Martin) maintain and email out a booklet of guidance and useful information for the whole group, with details of fire safety rules, contact details and the regular rotas. I display sign-up sheets for special services in Holy Week and Advent. It is becoming more challenging to provide sufficient sidespeople for our larger, seasonal services unless further new volunteers can be found. Do contact Martin even if you can only help occasionally...

**Martin Kimber**

#### **4.13 Pastoral Care**

The Pastoral Care group consists of a small group of congregational members who offer support and practice assistance to those members of our congregation who have additional needs.

This is an important aspect of our life as a caring Christian community, we must never forget or disregard members of our Church family when affected by illness disability or simply restricted mobility.

Assistance can be as simple as an occasional phone call, shopping, lifts to church and of course the offering of Home Communion when unable to attend Church in person. Support can be just for a few weeks, or longer term.

All Pastoral Care team members have DBS and have completed Safeguarding training.

The team meet on a regular basis to review support given. The team is led by the Rev. AKMA Adams and Linda Hobbs who together co-ordinate meetings and Home Communions.

**Linda Hobbs**

#### **4.14 Outreach Activities Through the West Porch (2024)**

I am pleased to report that we continued this initiative in 2024. It was initially inspired by the needs of lockdowns when it was impossible to have the church open but it was felt to be a worthwhile action to help bring a closer relationship between town and church.

At Easter a lovely Easter Garden was on display in the porch for much of Holy Week before being brought into the church itself. Volunteers staffed it, offering mini eggs and short information sheets about Easter and the services to passersby. At Christmas we set up the nativity scene below a dark sky of twinkling lights and again had small gifts to distribute as well as a cheery 'Happy Christmas' to give to those passing by. It felt so much more positive and personal to speak to people as we gave them a list of service times rather than to leave the lists to be picked up or delivered through letterboxes.

If you haven't yet seen what we do, I urge you to take a look in Holy Week this year. The more volunteers we have to staff the Easter Garden, the more we can share the sorrow and joy of Easter with others - so if you can spare an hour, do sign up on the list in church.

**Margaret Horton**

## **4.15 St Helen's Strategic Planning Group (Lighting)**

During the past year, the project team has helped the architect produce the final lighting plan, which has been forwarded to the DAC for informal discussion. This was reviewed by the DAC and their lighting advisor, who asked for a lighting design intent report for the project. This request was passed back to the architect, who worked on it over the Christmas holiday period, before the document was forwarded to the DAC, to be seen by their lighting advisor.

We are now looking at a two stage process towards faculty. Firstly, an initial consultation with the DAC, together with their lighting advisor to form an opinion of the final lighting design plan, then a formal online application.

A small fund-raising group has been convened to start the process of fund-raising, which it is hoped will be launched formally in May. A Design and Production (D&P) group has been formed to discuss publicity in its various forms, including the possibility of "adopting a light bulb". The D&P group will determine the community benefits that the lighting project offers, as this is a requirement for the DAC, and will also examine and quantify the energy saving and environmental benefits of the project, as this would make the project more attractive to potential donors.

The Bishop of Dorchester has kindly accepted the offer to become patron for the project.

**Chris Jefferis**

## **4.16 House for Duty**

Musson Close is a 4 bedroomed Town house situated close by the river Thames, within easy walking distance of Abingdon town centre, St Helens Church and the other 2 churches, St Nicholas and St Michaels and all Angels.

The Parish purchased the property in 2015. The property is currently used as a main residence by the Associate Priest, Rev AKMA Adams and his wife Margaret.

AKMA and Margaret have been resident since November 2023, a short while before commencing his position as House for Duty Priest. At termination of the License, the property will be returned to the use of the Church.

Currently it is anticipated that the property will continue to be used as residence for the House for Duty position, however if the position were vacant, consideration could be made to the house being rented on the open market, which would generate a considerable return each month.

Under the terms of the License, (agreed by the Diocese) the Associate Priest has no liability to pay rent, water rates, Council Tax or Insurance. All costs associated with the upkeep and of the property being met by Church funds. All costs incurred by the Associate Priest in fulfilling his post, are also met by Church funds.

Since Akma and Margaret took up residence there has been minimal requirement for repairs to the property. Since the writing of the last report the annual Gas Certificate, (required by law for all properties under license or tenancy) has been carried out, having passed all safety requirements there was no requirement for additional repair costs.

Late summer 2024, a need arose to replace the faulty shower, this work was out by a private plumber at a cost of £360. The property continues to be managed by Linda Hobbs.

**Linda Hobbs**

## **4.17 Hospitality**

Hospitality has always been an important part of the life of St Helen's, from post service refreshments to newcomer's lunches. There is a team of 15 volunteers who help as when they can. The team has not been asked to support the Faith Forum breakfasts which are provided by a very small number of volunteers, and for which extra help is badly needed. Both the Hospitality and Sunday coffee teams would benefit from a few more helpers.

There was one newcomer's lunch during the year and mulled wine was offered after the Advent Carol Service, and the group organised the Epiphany tea.

**Susan Scott**

#### **4.18 Flower Group**

This year we were able to fulfil our commitments with festivals and normal time with a small group of people.

I would like to thank all the team for their commitment, and the church members who supports the flowers of Remembrance for Christmas and Easter.

Gillian Watson and Jenny Morris arranged a wonderful altar pedestal for Charles last service, supported by the other members with the south aisle, lady chapel and porch.

Gillian and Jenny did extra cover for Christmas and confirmation which was very much appreciated.

The porch flowers offers a welcome to the church, Lady chapel for quite reflection, the Altar to enhance worship.

It is important for us as a team to increase the number of member of arrangers for 2025/26. Do not need to be a qualified flower arranger, just able to put flowers into a vase and learn the techniques from the group members.

I am standing down as the administrator of the flower group at the end of 2025, it would be good to hand over a full team.

Please talk to myself Liz Norman, or any member of the flower team.

We would like thank Steve Thomas and Robin Day and others for their help for moving the various pedestals and boxes around, putting arrangements and poinsettias in place we cannot reach.

**Liz Norman**

[abingdonparish.org.uk/StH](http://abingdonparish.org.uk/StH)