

St THE PARISH OF ABINGDON
HELEN'S CHURCH

Reports from
Groups and Organisations
(2023)

April 2024

1. CHURCH COUNCIL

1.1 District Church Council

1.2 Vicar/Team Rector's Report

My review of 2023 is more reflective than in the past since most of what I'm engaged with in ministry is detailed in the specific reports that fill this document and its parish equivalent.

The year involved two especially memorable occasions for me. The first was the (second) sabbatical leave through the first quarter of the year. It had been suggestion by the then archdeacon in my annual Ministerial Development Review in the autumn of 2021. It took me months to decide whether it was the right time and in the end, after consulting wise colleagues, I decided that it was. Time in France honoured two interests: first, my life-long commitment to ecumenism, especially with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. I thoroughly enjoyed time spent worshipping alongside members of those great communions. The retreat at Bec (Normandy) was an experience of warm hospitality and of inspiration. My first book, published when I was a very young priest, was titled 'Toward a Fuller Vision' and I realized in the course of the sabbatical how much, despite all the road-blocks and chills that have overcome the ecumenical springtime of the late 1960 and 70s, that sharing with those from whom we are separated - the roots from which our church has sprung - is still my compass 'north'.

It was a valuable retrospective exercise to share aspects of the sabbatical experience in the autumn Faith Forum sessions.

The French context of the sabbatical was just the right decision. The book on Matisse and his 'spiritual adventure' that has just appeared would have little of its quality and content had I not had the advantage of the months of research and writing. So I express my thanks to the St Helen's DCC yet again for its financial support (duly noted in 'Acknowledgements'). That whole project did, I admit, make me wonder whether I really did follow the right path in my life's vocation; would art history have been a better choice? Well, who knows; anyway, it's too late after so many years 'in the saddle'.

As to those many years: the marking of the 40th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood last Trinity Sunday was special. It was a moment to recollect that I had actually been immersed in the life of the church for almost fifty years, since my life as a serious 'churchman' (old fashion phrase, I know!) began at age 16. In one sense it seems like only yesterday; on the other hand, as I think back I feel like I've lived different lives through the course of those years in ministry and, goodness! how the church of my formative youth has changed! I realized how much rich insight I was given as a teenage Christian by the extraordinary clergy and religious who formed me; I realized too how much of my ministry has been a variation of those themes of early years.

The conventual context which was so spiritually formative during my high school years in Manhattan has continued its influence through subsequent years. The steely perseverance of the Reverend Mother who governed my school (S Hilda's & St Hugh's) was an inspiration through phases of ministry that almost buried me. What a debt I owe to her and her sisters (RIP most of them now). So, last summer was filled with vivid memories and a sharpened sense of what and who have made me who I am as your priestly servant here.

The return from the sabbatical – yes, refreshed – quickly led to successive months of hard work, and all that burdened by a persistent chest issue which made for months of interrupted nights and tired working days. Your patience with that was appreciated.

But the show must go on. And so the continuing work of picking up pieces strewn by the pandemic and its aftermath in our congregation's life were to the fore. I've spent a lot of time and energy trying to re-establish our liturgical patterns and the support roles related thereto. In the autumn we re-started many of the rota-ed pastoral programmes which we had developed over the years, and in much of that work it was necessary to support our Administrator (who had come on board during the Covid period) get to grips with the administrative implications of all that.

The autumn early winter period is always a busy time for the church. In 2023, however, other important business was added to the mix: first, the farewell to our H-f-D priest and his wife, Charles and Felicity,

and then the preparations for interviewing a successor; and second, working with fellow trustees of the (new) St Nicolas School and Education Trust to find a suitable firm to manage the trust's investments. That also involved working with the trustees' legal team and interfacing with the Charity Commissioners. In all of that the stakes were high.

The appointment of The Revd Dr Andrew K M Adam ('AKMA') was accomplished at the first-round of advertising and interviews (what a relief). He and his wife Margaret soon moved into Enock House, though we had to wait until the New Year for a formal licensing. We will have a thoughtful, learned, large-hearted priestly colleague and presence in AKMA and he will bring his own honed gifts and graces to our pastoral field.

The Revd *Dr* Jen Brown, now freed from Cuddesdon duties, can spend a bit more time with us, and it has been satisfying that she can join our weekly clergy chapter more frequently.

The First Communion of a small cohort of young people was gratifying and we gathered momentum through that process to take forward into 2024. That's encouraging. So too has been the increase in requests for baptism (children and young people) and for a church-based celebration of Holy Matrimony.

Christmas proved a fine festival; the Lessons & Carols service was the best I've ever heard in St Helen's thanks to our DoM, his Assistant Organist and the ever expanding choir. We really did put our best foot forward over that festive season.

There is no doubt that the pandemic period forced resort to electronic everything in a way that was not so typical for me in the preceding years. Almost everything, it seems, is now by app, and the overall size of the e-mail wave has increased hugely. I now spend most of my ministry time in the office in front of the screen. It has turned pastoral ministry into something it never was before and, frankly, I don't like it. Were more administrative support available the burden might be lessened somewhat but our limited resources have so far restricted options. I mention it only to highlight that there is an impact on the ministry and priestly service I and my colleagues can give

owing to such constraints. Our congregation life is more *organic* than it is *operational* and yet operational concerns preoccupy, even bury us. So It's a problem I cannot solve but must manage as well as I can.

It would be impossible to carry on the ministry without the support of the honorary clergy and our Lay Ministers who in different ways according to their circumstances support the effort. Thanks to them all!

I am older than I look, so (as urged by the archdeacon in recommending a sabbatical) the past year has been a time to consider and decide next steps. St Helen's has had the best of what I have to offer as a priest and pastor; there are no new tricks up my sleeve for 2024 but rather opportunities to repair, rebuild and consolidate.

We must *all* set about that as best we can.

Thank you for your support.

Respectfully,

The Revd Dr Charles Miller, Vicar of St Helen's and Team Rector

1.3 Wardens' Report

It has been encouraging to see many new families and individuals regularly attending worship. We are pleased to report that Sunday congregational numbers are now approaching those pre-Covid. We hope this will enable some of the budget deficit to be addressed through an increase in Planned Giving and through the loose plate. Two very successful "Newcomers" lunches have been hosted in the last year, formally welcoming many of those new to the congregation whilst introducing them to congregation members able to support and encourage them on their journey of faith. The importance of these occasions cannot be over emphasised. The aim is to continue these outreach opportunities.

DISTRICT CHURCH COUNCIL

The DCC met regularly in 2023, managing the budget and business of the church. Recently the budget has been a discussion priority, looking at how the budget deficit can be addressed.

New members of the DCC are actively sought to serve, support, and represent the congregation in this important way. Please consider standing for election to this role. Have a word with one of the Wardens if you would like to put your name forward.

A DCC Away Day enabled attendees an opportunity to discuss how to grow the church, congregation, mission, and outreach.

FINANCE

The financial position of the church continues to be an area of concern. We must all be aware that without financial stability, our activities and our outreach will be adversely affected. Financial stability ensures we can pay our Parish Share obligation, heat the church, fund charitable giving and plan to grow the services we offer to both town and congregation.

Currently budget forecasts indicate we will once again be in deficit, despite rigorous and successful fund raising. It is important that the finance of the church again returns to a surplus: the church cannot continue to sell investments to meet its obligations. The outgoings of the church are closely monitored by our Treasurer Susan Read, to whom thanks must be given for her time, diligence, and expertise.

Nevertheless, the Stewardship campaign in the Autumn saw an increase in Pledged Giving. As always, our congregation members are very generous, for which we are very appreciative. However, it is imperative we increase our revenue in the coming year to ensure expenses can be met and outreach continued.

STEWARDING

The church continues to be open each day, appreciated by our many visitors and those who come to spent time in prayer. Between Easter and September, we aim to have Stewards on duty for part of the day. The volunteer rota is managed by Elizabeth Simpson, who ensures volunteers welcome, inform, and guide our visitors. Our stewards

enable visitors to enjoy and appreciate the history of our building, while appreciating its important role in the town of Abingdon.

As with all areas of church life additional volunteers are required to continue this important aspect of church life.

McMILLAN COFFEE MORNING

The church again hosted a successful coffee morning, the event being supported by volunteer cake- and coffee-makers, and of course all who attended and consumed large amounts of cake! The event was enjoyed by all and raised in excess of £650 for this wonderful cause.

FAITH FORUM

The Rev Dr. Jen Brown continues to lead and organise talks. These continue to be varied and well-supported by congregation members from all three churches, but mainly from St Helens.

As an experiment, February saw talks scheduled to follow the Sunday Eucharist. This enabled congregational members from our sister churches to attend. The result from this experimental change will be reviewed and a decision taken as to appropriate timing for the future.

CHRISTMAS MARKET

November again saw the Christmas Market, its aim being to raise funds for the church. The event was again well supported, and over £2,000 was raised. Thanks, must be given to Margaret Horton for her excellent organisation of this annual event.

MISSION AND OUTREACH

The West Porch again opened prior to Christmas and Easter, volunteers valiantly “battling” adverse winter weather. Despite these difficulties the Christmas services welcomed several people with whom meaningful conversations were held.

Late December saw volunteers from the three churches outside St. Nicolas handing out free chocolates and mince pies, while also handing out Christmas service details. Again, many good conversations took place.

It is important that mission and outreach continues, growing opportunities for our churches to be seen as available, open and relevant to all.

SAFEGUARDING

Our Safeguarding officer, Maria Gibson, has stepped down after serving for ten years in this important role, so we thank Maria for her time. The role will now be facilitated by three members of the congregation. Emmanuel Chukwuma stepped forward to fill our congregation's Safeguarding Officer role.

Safeguarding ensures clergy, lay ministers, wardens and all volunteers have current DBS clearance, with appropriate safeguarding training, and provides a human point of reference for those who need particular support.

RE-ORDERING

The long process of designing and approving a new church lighting scheme has continued, led by Chris Jefferies. The anticipated finalising of plans is imminent. Once this is done, permissions will be sought from the Diocese to enable work to commence. It is anticipated that the process of obtaining permissions will be protracted. Whilst awaiting permission, a team will "spear head" fund raising. If you are interested in being involved or have experience, please speak to Chris or the Rector.

PARISH CENTRE

The Centre facility continues to be available to hire, although unfortunately hire of the Centre has not recovered post-covid, resulting in reduced revenue. To make hire of the Centre more attractive, we have ensured competitive hire rates, so we hope under-utilisation of this facility will eventually disappear.

The Parish Centre and Parish Office continue to be efficiently managed by Jackie Cunningham, whom we must thank for her efficiency.

MOTHERS AND TODDLERS

The group continues to meet each Monday morning, offering a warm and stimulating welcome to all who attend. Many attendees are from

the town. This important outreach must be supported, and thanks must go to all volunteers.

CANDLE IN THE WINDOW

This monthly “Parish Magazine” continues to be edited by Rob Rutherford. Thanks go to Rob for ensuring it is always an inspiring and varied read. Each edition offers articles which challenge and inform. Each edition is available to download, (https://abingdonparish.org.uk/P_window.php) with hard copies available from the office.

CELEBRATION SERVICES

We have been privileged this past year to host celebration services for the Rector, The Rev Canon Charles Masheder and Professor John Barton. Respectively, they were celebrating 40th, 50th and 50th years of Ordination! Congratulations are offered to all. Each occasion was well-attended and marked with our customary hospitality.

Linda Hobbs & David Pope

1.4 St Helen’s Church Fabric Report

We have continued in 2023 with the implementation of recommendations from the Quinquennial Report of 2022. This included an investigation of the fire alarm system for the church. The system had been installed in 1991 to provide protection for the Painted Ceiling and the organ, but the smoke sensors had not been tested for some time. The system was found to be fully functional, despite its age, and is now included in the six-monthly fire maintenance schedule.

There has been a programme of improvement for the Parish Centre which had been in a poor decorative state. External doors and woodwork have been sanded back and varnished and the iron gate has been repainted. Our thanks go to the church caretaker Robin Day for taking on a significant amount of additional work in this area. The Centre had suffered in the past from rats in the gardens, both front and back. A pest control contract seems to have been effective, but we will need to monitor this closely. The gardens have been tidied up

to reduce the number of potential rat nesting sites, with wire netting added under fences to block easy access routes for rats.

The regular church roof maintenance has continued, primarily to keep the rainwater system clear, but also to fix minor problems such as repairs to pointing. One of the Nave eaves gutters was uneven, with considerable backfall. The gutter has been repositioned so that the downpipe now collects the water correctly.

There was a major problem with the church heating system in November, with a leak in the heat exchanger for one of the boilers. The system has two boilers working in a cascade configuration, but unfortunately it wasn't possible to isolate the failed boiler. The church had a few weeks without any heating until a new heat exchanger could be fitted.

There has been discussion with a professional archivist about the storage conditions for the church archives. The archive room is not heated, so there is concern about cold and damp. I have started recording values of relative humidity and temperature via a data-logging hygrometer. The results so far (after two months) show that humidity is slightly above the recommended range, but not sufficiently high to cause condensation or mould growth in the archive room. The logging will continue over a few more months so it covers the full range of weather conditions. If there is a problem with humidity, we will look at the options for conservation heating or dehumidification of the room.

Stephen Thomas, Fabric Officer

1.5 Music Report

1.6 Treasurer's Team Report 2023

1.7 Electoral Roll

There are currently 214 on St Helen's ER. (17 were added to and 17 were removed from the Roll during the Revision for 2023).

We are nearing the end of the ER Revision for 2024. I am not aware of any significant events that will influence the current revision, so the 2024 figures are likely to be similar to 2023.

The revised ER for St Helen's will be available for inspection and displayed in church between 27th March – 11th April 2024. It will then be sent to the Parish ER Officer who reports the updated Parish ER Revision for 2024 to the APCM in April.

This year is a normal revision of the ER. 2025 will see a complete revision, as occurs every six years.

Kate Burland

1.8 The Events Team

The Events Group is a small team of volunteers who are working hard to establish/support a range of events at St Helen's Church. These are mainly in addition to the regular annual activities already taking place in St Helen's. The aim is to increase fundraising for the church and for local charities as well as providing opportunities for fellowship and opening the church to the wider community.

Beginning with the "Big Help Out" in May, where we opened the church to the local community to show-case the work of our voluntary groups, we were able to hold a lovely concert in June, thanks to our music director Peter Foster and fellow musicians. In September, we supported Abingdon Heritage weekend, in November worked with Margaret Horton to plan our Christmas Market and in December, assisted Steve Thomas in supporting the large programme of annual Christmas bookings by external hirers. All of these events have been successful.

Here are the net funds raised from new events:

Event	Church funds	Local Charities
Big Help Out	£ 287.90	-
Coronation Service	-	£ 272.30 Abingdon Food Bank
Heritage Weekend (refreshments)	£ 242.75	-

Music at St Helen's (17 June 2023)	£ 511.17	£ 511.17	Abingdon Food Bank
Music at St Helen's (3 February 2024)	£ 652.94	£ 652.94	The Abingdon Bridge
Totals	£1,694.76	£1,436.41	Grand Total
£3,131.17			

It has been important to gradually increase our knowledge and understanding of managing events throughout the year. We have learned enough to develop a new series of concerts under the banner of 'Music at St Helen's', with at least four concerts and other events in planning for 2024/25.

Very attractive posters are appearing around the town and booking on line is available. An increasing number of willing volunteers to help with events is another very positive sign as we move forward into 2024 and of course we encourage more of you to join us.

The group was chaired by Fiona Tonks from April to November 2023 and by Kath Cook from December 2023 to March 2024. Please do approach Kath if you would like to get involved as a volunteer, either by joining the Events group who meet regularly throughout the year to plan activities, or by helping at events – or both!

Kath Cook

2 EDUCATION AND FORMATION

2.1 Baptism Preparation (see Parish report)

2.2 Junior Church

This has been a difficult year for Junior Church. In the summer Melanie Brown stood down as a leader after many years of sterling leadership. She is greatly missed, particularly for her musical contributions. Huge thanks are due to Melanie, and also husband Chris as supporter and helper. This leaves only Alison Oliver and Sue Pemberton as leaders. We now have very few families with Junior Church age children attending Church so often there are no takers.

This is very frustrating and dispiriting for leaders who have spent time and resources preparing a session.

Due to the lack of leaders, we do not usually hold Junior Church of first Sundays although we may vary this to fit with festivals etc. We welcome the new style of simpler first Sunday services with increased participation by young people. Although Junior Church are too young to play an active role in the service in its current form, it is a more welcoming and accessible service for families. On other Sundays we offer Junior Church to any child in Church aged 3-8, usually using Roots material which follows the lectionary readings.

In view of the shortage of children and leaders we took a break over the summer holidays. Ruth Pyke and Rosalind Rutherford collaborated with us to produce a series of packs based on the Parable of Jesus. These were available in the children's area in church and were used by some families. We also provided materials for Christmas and Candlemas services when there was no Junior Church.

Sue Pemberton and Alison Oliver

2.3 Quest

Quest continues to leave church after the Gospel and meet in the upstairs room in the church centre for discussion and activities. Our numbers have been small but steady and it has been good to welcome Emilia to our group. 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. We continue to use the resources produced by the ecumenical group called "Roots" as the basis of our ideas but will frequently adapt the materials to our own thoughts and strengths.

Senior Quest has continued to meet just once a month, on the last Sunday. We disappear into the vestry and have a discussion about either a topical issue or on 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! Recent subjects have included “What is the Christian response to violent crime and punishment?”, a look at the background history to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and what we understand about ‘angels’. Our young people are so thoughtful and by the end of a session I have often learned much from them. Thanks are due to Jacob Smart for his loyal support and valuable input as well.

Margaret Horton

2.4 St Helen’s Baby and Toddler Group

The Baby and Toddler group continued to meet throughout 2023 on Monday mornings during school terms. Usually there are between 12 and 15 children with a parent, grandparent or carer. Most come regularly, although it is rare for everyone on the register to be there at the same time. We have not had to limit new families from coming. 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 for fifteen minutes at the end of each session, which is greatly enjoyed by the children.

Two sixth formers from St Helen and St Katharine School came in the academic year 2022-3 as their planned community service and the older children often enjoy playing with them on the playdough or craft tables. They organised the craft activity some weeks. Since September we have not been able to offer a placement to any girls as those who were interested were not free on a Monday morning. We hope that next September, we can welcome more girls from the school again.

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 see an increase in referrals for families and individuals. Two food banks continue to operate in Abingdon, Preston Road Community Centre serves South Abingdon, North Abingdon being served by Christ Church.

As Inflation affects many families in Abingdon more referrals are anticipated. Clients continue to require referral, ensuring only families or individuals currently in need receive assistance, each client being interviewed by volunteers trained to assist and advise on benefit entitlement.

Refugee families continue to receive support, to aid integration, a Friday “Language Café” offers facilities for children, whilst their parents learn.

This year saw the retirement of Hillary Beale after many years as volunteer manager, with a new manager now appointed.

Christmas saw the preparation of approximately 300 Christmas parcels, these being distributed to clients in need.

As always additional donations are required, some supermarkets in Abingdon as well as Millets Farm, now donate surplus food, these donations being freely available to clients. Regular monetary donations enable specific food items to be purchased as required.

The Community Fridge and Community Larder continue operating, supporting those who are vulnerable in the community.

St. Helens congregation continue to donate generously, food being collected and delivered. It's important that support for food bank continues, by contributing, we support those in our community who are vulnerable.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this cause in the last year.

Linda Hobbs

3.2 CiA Church Twinning

The Church Twinning Group made two visits in the year 2023.

At the end of March a group of members from five Abingdon churches were invited to Sint Niklaas to join the film showing of their Passion Play which should have taken place in 2022 but due to covid rules had to be filmed without an audience. A detailed account of this visit, with many other activities included was reported in the May 2023 issue of Candle in the Window.

The second visit is similarly reported in considerable detail. See, Candle in the Window, November 2023. A group of eight made the journey to Argentan in September. The theme of this visit was Peace and Reconciliation.

I urge you to read these reports. I hope they will encourage more of St Helen's congregation to take part in these very rewarding exchanges, through which many lasting friendships are made.

Church Twinning is a sub committee of the Church in Abingdon (CiA). This is a local ecumenical partnership, formed in 1988 and bound together in a formal covenant. Thirteen churches of all denominations are members of the fellowship.

St Helen's Reps; Anne Dodd and Elizabeth Simpson

3.3 Agnostics Anonymous

Last year the DCC agreed that, as part of its community outreach initiative, St Helen's would hold some open discussions on topics of

Christian belief, presented in a popular but scholarly manner. Three distinguished theologians from the congregation, Keith Ward, John Barton and John Kerr – all of whom had lectured at Oxford University – kindly agreed to lead the meetings which have been taking place in the Parish Centre from 6 pm to 7.30 pm.

So far three such meetings have been held and two more are currently planned. One of the speakers starts with an introduction to the subject. This is followed by open discussion where questions and all points of view are welcomed. All three speakers field questions and join the discussion. The meetings are open to everyone in the community and are free. The first took place on Thursday 26th October when Keith Ward spoke on “Was Jesus the Son of God?”; The second was on Tuesday 28th November when John Kerr spoke on “The Genesis Distortion: Seven Creation Accounts Plus One.” On 6th February John Barton addressed the question “Do You Have to Believe Everything in the Bible to be a Christian?”.

Extensive publicity was arranged both in Christian communications and to the community in traditional and social media. Attendance was surprisingly high: between 60 -70 people each time, several people were not Christian and there were some young people who came in off the street. Comment has been very favourable; it seems that there are a lot of people who value and enjoy discussion about these issues.

The remaining two subjects are: “Is There a God? (On 5th March); and “Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast” (on 23rd April).

Before the last meeting we shall be discussing the way ahead. Ideas would be welcome.

I want to express my considerable gratitude to the three speakers for sharing their extensive theological knowledge so eloquently and accessibly. Also to Margaret Horton who took the lion’s share of the publicity – a very demanding job, to add to her other many responsibilities and activities!

Jill Gant

4 CHURCH GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

4.1 Uniformed Organisations

10th Abingdon, (St Helens) Scout Group

The last year has been good for the Scout Group - The Beaver colony and Cub pack are almost full (12 Beavers and 18 Cubs) and we have a small team of dedicated leaders. We have had an excellent year of Scouting with our young people participating in a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities including camping, crafts, cooking, sports and learning new life skills.

The highlight of the last year was our Group camp at Dry Sandford in June where the Beavers and Cubs took part in a wide range of fun activities. We had over 20 youngsters and adults camping for the weekend. The weather was mixed but we still enjoyed the fun and friendship. The great thing about camp is that the parents discover that their children can survive a weekend without a TV, a smartphone and a shower, and that young people love spending a weekend running about in the open air.

Our team of leaders is small and we are always looking for adults who are prepared to help on a regular or occasional basis. In addition, we are still looking to start up a Scout troop to allow the Cubs to stay at St Helens until they reach 14. If any members of the Church know of anyone who can help with Beavers, Cubs or Scouts than please contact the Group Scout Leader (gsl@tenthabingdon.org.uk), who will be happy to provide more information.

Finally, the leaders, helpers, committee and children would like to say 'thank you' to the Church and the congregation for their continued support and for the use the Church Centre.

Tom Kyffin

4.2 Hand Bell Ringers

4.3 Tower Bell Ringers

4.4 Holy Dusters

4.5 St Helen's Archivist Report

St Helen's is fortunate in possessing a major archive of documents that date back, in some cases, to the 16th century. But this means that we have a duty of care for the collection which is of national significance. The archives are now looked after by a small team consisting of Claire Bolton, Dominie Burton, Silvia Joinson and Geoff Meen. The team's priorities are conservation of the documents, responding to requests for information from the general public and (in the future) exploring the possibilities for digitization. The archives were inspected by a specialist in the autumn who made valuable recommendations for improved storage and monitoring of conditions. Humidity and temperature are now regularly monitored in the archives room and volumes which are on open shelves will be 'boxed'. The group displayed a selection of our records during Heritage Weekend which attracted considerable public interest and we continue to receive a steady flow of requests for information on early baptisms, marriages and burials.

Geoff Meen

4.6 Sidespeople

St Helen's is blessed with dedicated volunteers at the front-of-house for the Sunday services and some of the larger special occasions. It is a great pleasure to work with such friendly and enthusiastic people who help practical and social aspects of worship in our church. With typically only two or three sidespeople now running ordinary Sunday 10:30am services, we are 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.

As coordinator I (Martin) maintain and email out a booklet of guidance and useful information for anybody helping out, with details of fire safety rules, contact details and the regular rotas. This year we welcomed Robert Medcraft and Anne Dodd to the team. I always display sign-up sheets for special services in Holy Week and Advent. To some extent, the decrease in typical congregation size makes the ordinary services manageable to run; but it will be 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

4.7 Ministry of Welcome

4.8 Friends of St Helen's

The Friends of St Helen has hosted several talks and meetings this year. We began in March 2023 with an inspirational illustrated talk by Gillian Sills, who is lead Volunteer Guide at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. We learnt much about the Bodleian itself and also about the joy of guiding visitors round a beautiful historic building.

In October 2023 Georgina Hicks gave a wonderful presentation about Abingdon Carousel, which offers much-needed family support in South Abingdon. (Partly as a result of this talk, St Helen's is starting to give financial support to Carousel.)

We have recently tried to link our events under the theme 'International Abingdon'.

In November 2023 Emmanuel Chukwuma and Mary Anderson gave a talk entitled 'Nigeria: Giant of the Faith', with an overview of faith traditions in this multifarious country. This was followed by Sue Mathew's interesting talk about 'Argentina: from Riches to Poverty'. In future, FoSH is hoping to develop the programme with the support of voices from church and community alike.

Our 2023 AGM in July 2023 attracted a good attendance, and as usual, this was followed by a delicious cream tea.

We are grateful to Ann Murdoch for fulfilling the role of treasurer during the year. We have also welcomed two new committee members: Sue Mathew has stepped up to the challenge of running the FoSH shop, and Kate Burland is bringing her administrative and financial skills to help keep track of FSH membership, and more. Thank you, both.

FoSH receives income from three sources: approximately £10,000 from investments, and the remainder from trade (i.e. the shop) and subscriptions.

During the past year, FoSH has continued to support various church expenses, including insurance and heating. Ongoing work funded by FoSH includes the maintenance of the building, including the repair and renewal of existing features.

Mary Anderson, *FoSH Secretary*

4.9 Mothers Union Abingdon Branch

Our Mothers' Union have met throughout the last year on the first Tuesday of each month. We currently have 23 members who come from various Abingdon churches and we have had the pleasure of welcoming 3 new members to our branch. We have enjoyed a varied programme of speakers, including a talk from the Church Missionary Society and one from the archivist at Christ's Hospital. In the summer we visited Dorchester Abbey for a guided tour with tea, and in early December we held a moving service for victims of domestic violence in St. Nicolas' church. We continue to fund raise for various Mothers' Union charities and sent money to Kinshasa Diocese (with whom we are linked) to assist with training and education. Nearer to home we have supported "Children Heard and Seen" with gifts of cakes for their summer residential and knitted jackets for "Baby Basics" who are based in Milton Keynes. We support the JR hospital with toiletries and Ronald McDonald House with basic food items. We also made Christmas cards for Bullingdon prison and have helped to provide vacuum cleaners, (through our diocesan Project Fund) for refugees moving into social housing in Abingdon. A highlight of the year was winning the best MU notice board display in the diocese. The reward was a beautiful hand painted plate with the words of Mary Sumner's personal prayer around the edge.

Elizabeth Dawson (Branch Leader)

4.10 Readers and Intercessors

The readings for all the main services normally follow the pattern in the Common Worship Lectionary, with a few exceptions for special services. After discussion with the Rector, I prepare the rota for readers and intercessors on a quarterly basis. I then email this to all the readers and intercessors, as well as to the clergy team and the church office. Copies of the rota are also displayed in church. We currently have 17 intercessors and 40 readers, a significant increase from last year, when there were 15 intercessors and 34 readers. Following the Rector's initiative to involve young people more fully in 1st Sunday services, additional young people are reading and, for the first time, leading the intercessions using prepared texts. There are opportunities to read at evening services, including Choral Evensong on 3rd Sundays and Healing and Wholeness services on 4th Sundays. It is hoped to re-instate Taizé services on 2nd Sunday evenings in the future.

We are very fortunate in having so many willing and able people involved in this ministry, and are grateful to them for the way they enrich our worship.

Susan Gee

4.11 Stewarding

4.12 Servers

The serving team currently consists of seven adult members who serve regularly or from time to time. Since the pandemic the long-standing team of three for the Sunday Sung Eucharist and festivals has been unsustainable owing to a decrease in numbers of servers regularly available. An ideal team total would be twelve.

However, it was very gratifying that a young member, Oliver Gibson, joined the team in the autumn!

Rob Bough has been acting as coordinator of the servers rota through the year and that has been hugely helpful as has his default availability Sunday by Sunday.

Late in the year it was decided to start a junior servers team for those under 18 years of age, and there has been a very good take up. 2024 will see that junior cohort become integrated into St Helen's worship cycle and will be an important way for youngsters to become familiar with the dynamics of liturgical worship and grown in active expression of their developing discipleship.

Charles Miller

4.13 Pastoral Care

The Pastoral Team under the leadership of the Rev. Canon Charles Masheder continued to meet regularly until his departure as House for Duty Priest; in the absence of a post holder the team continued its work led by Linda Hobbs; AKMA as the new House for Duty Priest will now lead the team.

The team aims to support those unable to attend church in person, whilst offering pastoral support to the congregation. Home Communion is offered to those who are "house bound", with regular monthly services at Cygnet Court.

As with all areas of church life the Pastoral Team needs members to assist in this important area of church life and outreach.

Linda Hobbs

4.14 Outreach Activities Through the West Porch (2023)

4.15 St Helen's Strategic Planning Group (Lighting)

The Project team compiled and thoroughly reviewed a list of "scenes, which were submitted to the architects, who then worked together with the electrical engineers, to produce a revised lighting plan, which was formally presented to the Project team for review. After minor adjustments it was hoped the plan could advance to RIBA stage 3, with the architects assisting with preparing and submitting a Faculty application to the DAC, and the electrical engineers providing input to produce a costing.

The architects took note of our comments, and feedback from the Rector, and completed a first revision to the lighting layout. Working on very creative suggestions by the Rector, the architects and electrical assessed how best to achieve a flexible control system. They recommended a lighting control system, called Casambi, operated by Bluetooth from an iPad or phone. How this would operate at St Helens, for all purposes, including processions, would be to be able to dim or brighten different lighting types, or zones in different places. For example, if there was a procession from outside the west door, the church could be generally dimly lit and as the processing group entered the rear section of the central aisle, this could be gradually illuminated. This could be followed to the most forward section of the central aisle, while gently increasing the illumination in the rest of the church.

The architects say the basic mechanism is simple. Each light, or each group of light fittings is dimmable and controllable, linked back to the central controller. The controller is operated by blue-tooth from a hand held device. So, by raising and lowering different zones you can do countless different things to suit the occasion. They are sure that pre-programmed settings would be the simplest to achieve.

The project team has been looking at the cost of the Casambi range, bearing in mind the cost of the luminaires can be very expensive. It is suggested lighting control is retained from panels on the wall with physical switches rather than just touch panels. The Casambi range could accommodate this and it may be necessary to use tablet/phone control for more complicated scenes and transitions.

With regard to processions, it would be difficult and expensive to include sensors to track movement and automatically raise and dim the lighting. The architects have recommended pre-programmed scenes, which would be selected at the appropriate time from the control device so that the lighting can follow a procession, as the Rector was suggesting.

The Project team was concerned about the cost of these various set ups and said we need to balance flexibility against cost. It is

suggested we could minimise costs by grouping sets of luminaires together, and was why we chose to work on scenes.

The architect had suggested attending another presentation meeting with the “client Team”, and a Zoom meeting was set up to be more cost-effective. Following a Zoom meeting with the architects in September, Jeremy Bell requested another site visit to tie up the detail. This was fixed for a date in October, accompanied by a request to review fee positions, as the project had taken “far more work to reach this point, and more than the one meeting they had planned for.” Moreover, “the level of detail and attention that the client team has had an input into has raised the level of sophistication and complexity of the lighting proposal above the norm and it will be a lighting scheme of the highest performance as a result.” A modest uplift in fees was therefore agreed, to take us from the proposal as it stands with the current comments, through to the DAC application.

The architect recommended that Lux level calculations be done for the DAC application, as this would preclude any awkward questions about the brightness levels, e.g., whether assessed as good, bad, high, or low. He said the electrical engineer would submit a quote for calculating Lux levels.

The architect, Jeremy Bell, wished to work closely with a lighting expert, Stuart Markham, who had been working for no fee and gave occasional advice. His primary occupation had been working in the supply and sales part of the lighting industry, and was now working on the installation of major lighting schemes such as Aldi. He is an expert in the supply and details of luminaire fittings, suppliers, manufacturers, and the exact details of their fittings. His involvement would refine the quality of the specifications and configuration, as distinct from the wiring and installation details Paul Campbell is engaged to do. It was agreed that Stuart would continue to work with the team for a modest fee.

The final edition of the lighting plan, updated from the architects’ site visit in October, was shared with the members of the DCC in January, by walking round the church to explain how the new light fittings would be set up. A visit in the evening was chosen, as it was felt members could better understand the lighting requirements when lighting levels were dim or dark. Eleven members of the DCC

attended the tour and all were in agreement with the lighting plan, which was presented, and were happy to proceed to the next stage of costing and DAC faculty.

Subsequent to the DCC tour, the architects asked for clarification of various dimensions for the organ, which Norman Gee kindly provided. There was a query about one of the dimensions for the organ, which led to confusion about the actual position of the organ since it was moved. But the architect, Jeremy Bell, has said the precise position of the organ will have no effect on the lighting plan, nor DAC permissions or wiring etc. He therefore suggests we leave the drawing as it is and move on. Jeremy has also asked Stuart Markham to assist with the cost of light fittings, which could incur a modest increase in fees.

The subject of fund raising has been discussed, and following on from a Diocesan workshop on fundraising, the importance of Prayer Support and attracting a lead donation has been noted, as well as the usual avenues of fund raising through church activities, charitable grants and sponsorship.

Chris Jefferis

4.16 House for Duty

Enock House was purchased in 2015 to be used as accommodation for the “House for Duty” Associate Priest. Until October 2023 the property was the home of Rev. Canon Charles Masheder and Felicity his wife, until they vacated the house to “retire” to the Cotswolds.

The property is now occupied by Rev. AKMA, the new House for Duty Associate Priest, and his wife Margaret.

The property was well cared for by Charles and Felicity, they carried out many improvements at no cost to the Parish, for which we are very grateful. The result of their care meant that on vacating the property, very little work was required.

This last year has seen very little work being required to the property, except for the water tanks in the roof needing to be replaced, (as

detailed in the 2023 report) This work took longer to complete than expected, but we now have confidence that there should be no further expense due to water tanks.

The only remedial work required to enable AKMA and Margaret to take up residence, was the painting of a ceiling damaged by water ingress when previously the roof required extensive remedial work. The re-painting of the ceiling was carried out at no charge to the church or Parish.

As always, any expenses required to maintain the property will be kept to a minimum, it must be understood that all expenses cannot be predicted or budgeted for, all properties need maintenance, if regular maintenance is not carried out the value of the property will be adversely affected.

The property continues to be managed by Linda Hobbs

Linda Hobbs

4.17 Hospitality

4.18 Flower Group

First a thank-you to the group for all there arrangements though out this past year. Along with the extra arrangements for special event like the coronation of King Charles 3rd.

We do miss Felicity Masheder, who had a natural gift for flower arrangements.

Flowers do have a part of the churches worship.

Thank you to the congregation for your support of the Poinsettia's at Christmas and the Easter Lilies and flowers in Memory of family and Friends who has died.

Along with support of suppling extra greenery for festivals. This is always most welcomed at Harvest and Christmas.

This last year we have been looking at various greener approaches in material we use for our arrangements and this is on-going.

We are just starting to exploring sponsor an arrangement for a special occasion. For this to work we need to increase our pedestal team.

Lilian has compiled a lovely photographic file of some of the flowers arrangements we have done 5 year +

We welcomed 3 new members who are at the start of their flower arranging journey. As a group we would welcome anyone to join us. Either as a festival only or all year-round arranger, pedestals are not to be feared. We can give one to one training.

Liz Norman