

FRIENDS OF POLSTEAD CHURCH

2025 CHAIR'S REVIEW

Dear Members and Supporters of the Friends of St Mary's, Polstead,

The Committee remains immensely grateful to all members and supporters of the Friends for their continued generosity and encouragement.

Honorary President, Vice-Presidents and Officers

The following held office during the period covered by this report:

- Honorary President: Toby Owles
- Honorary Vice-Presidents: Victoria Engleheart; Sir Simon Jenkins; Professor Lionel Tarassenko
- Executive Committee: Lucinda Bartlett (Chair), Martin Mitchell (Treasurer), Caroline Mansfield, Sue Freeman, Jackie Mitchell (Representative of the PCC), Revd Stephane Javelle (Ex officio)
- Independent Examiner: Margaret Ryan

Chair's Review

I am pleased to present my fourth annual review as Chair of the Friends of St Mary's, Polstead.

Current Works

The final component of the quinquennial programme is to restore the movement of the church clock hands. The parapet works have now been signed off, and we are preparing a faculty application for the necessary extension to the drive shaft. Thankfully, the clock mechanism itself remains in excellent condition.

Future Works

The next major project for the Friends is the conservation of the Royal Arms Board which hangs beside the North Door of the church. It has formed part of St Mary's historic interior for many generations. Dating from around 1731, during the early Georgian period, it is a notable survival of the eighteenth century.

Over time its surface has become obscured by dirt, discoloured varnish and the effects of age. Careful cleaning and conservation are now required both to preserve it for the future and to recover much of its original character. Following long and concerted efforts, a faculty has now been granted, and we hope to commission the restoration during the summer under the expert care of accredited conservator Polly Saltmarsh.

Churchyard

The care of St Mary's churchyard remains one of the express purposes of the Friends of Polstead Church.

Like many Church of England churchyards, St Mary's fulfils several roles. It must remain accessible for those visiting graves and attending services, while also supporting biodiversity and protecting the many species of flora and fauna that thrive there. For this reason, some areas are intentionally left longer during the summer months, particularly where wildflowers are encouraged to flourish. Paths and frequently visited memorials continue to be regularly mown, ensuring ease of access and a cared-for appearance.

Following advice from Suffolk Wildlife Trust, we have adopted a programme of management designed to balance these responsibilities. Their report noted that churchyards can be among the last remaining fragments of species-rich grassland in Suffolk, with wider benefits for pollinators, birds, reptiles and biodiversity.

The report recorded notable wildflowers already present in the churchyard, including burnet saxifrage, lesser calamint, ribwort plantain, yarrow, creeping cinquefoil, common sorrel, pellitory-of-the-wall, common ragwort and ox-eye daisy. Earlier botanical work identified some 73 plant species in total, suggesting that the churchyard has considerable ecological interest.

We are particularly pleased that our regular gardeners, Graham and Toby Warboys, have made excellent progress in carrying forward the management plan. The generous donation received last year specifically for churchyard maintenance has enabled the PCC to establish a more regular and planned programme of mowing, seasonal cutting, path maintenance and general care.

Our Churchyard Working Party on 1 October 2025 was a great success. Supported by volunteers from the Dedham Vale National Landscape, the morning focused on collecting and removing trimmings from designated wildflower areas after seasonal cutting. This reduces soil fertility, discourages coarse grasses, prevents thatch and creates better conditions for wildflowers in future years.

The 2026 Working Party, again supported by the Dedham Vale National Landscape, is scheduled for Wednesday, 7 October.

Further Action

The Friends has achieved much since its founding, but renewed membership growth is now an important priority. We have good opportunities to expand support through clearer communication, events and community outreach.

Charitable Status

Our charitable status allows us to reclaim Gift Aid on qualifying donations, significantly strengthening our fundraising efforts. To help reduce administrative costs, we encourage members to complete Gift Aid declarations where eligible and to consider setting up standing orders for annual subscriptions or donations.

Thanks

I would like to extend my thanks, and that of all the Friends, to Martin Mitchell who, while remaining a Trustee, is stepping down as Treasurer—a role he has carried out with diligence and good humour.

Annual General Meeting

I am pleased to announce that the Annual General Meeting will be held at Polstead Mill on Friday, 22 May 2026 at 6.30pm, followed by drinks, refreshments and, weather permitting, an opportunity to enjoy the garden. All members and supporters are warmly invited.

Lucinda Bartlett, Chair

24 April 2026

THE FRIENDS OF ST MARY'S PARISH CHURCH POLSTEAD

1st Nov 2024 to 31st October 2025

	1st Nov 2024 to 31st October 2025			1st Nov 2023 to 31st October 2024		
	Restricted	Unrestricted	TOTAL	Restricted	Unrestricted	TOTAL
	Churchyard Fund	General Fund		Churchyard Fund	General Fund	
	£	£	£	£	£	
Income						
Donations	100,000	5,260	105,260	0	4,579	4,579
Fund Raising		1,670	1,670		715	715
IR Gift Aid		896	896		1,300	1,300
Other income		100	100			-
Total	<u>100,000</u>	<u>7,926</u>	<u>107,926</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6,594</u>	<u>6,594</u>
Expenditure						
Church Restoration		7,500	7,500		716	716
Other		141	141		150	150
Total	<u>0</u>	<u>7,641</u>	<u>7,641</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>866</u>	<u>866</u>
Surplus/Deficit		285	285	0	5,728	5,728
Assets						
(Cash Balances)						
At start of year Nov 2024	0	37,319	37,319	n/a	35,381	35,381
At end of year Oct 2025	<u>100,000</u>	<u>37,604</u>	<u>137,604</u>	<u>n/a</u>	<u>37,309</u>	<u>37,309</u>
gain/reduction	<u>100,000</u>	<u>285</u>	<u>100,285</u>	<u>n/a</u>	<u>5,728</u>	<u>5,728</u>
Major Project reserve			22,722			22,663

**Independent examiner's report to the trustees of The Friends of St Mary's Parish Church
Polstead**

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of The Friends of St Mary's Parish Church Polstead for the year ended 31 October 2025.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of The Friends of St Mary's Parish Church Polstead, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:

Margaret Ryan

Name: Margaret Ellen Ryan FCA

Address: Old Brewery House, 20 Church Lane, Nayland CO6 4JH

Date: 25 February 2026