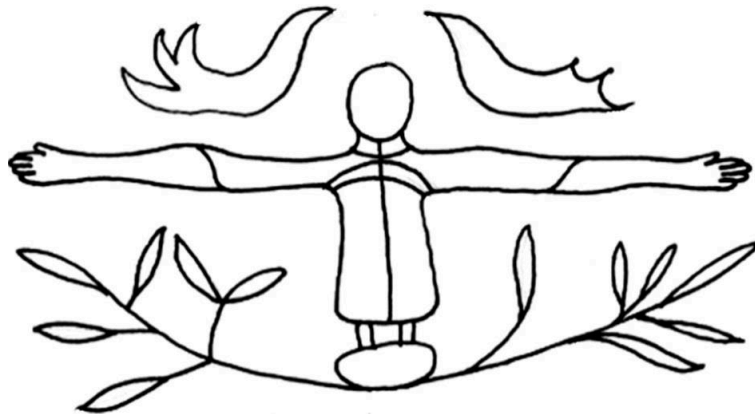


Diocese of Salisbury

The Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin

Gillingham, Dorset



'Open to God, Open to Gillingham'

Tuesday 25 March 2025

Agenda for the Annual Meetings
and Annual Reports for the year ending 31 December 2024

Registered Charity Number 1158272

The Annual Report for the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Accounts for St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham.

Data Protection Notice

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) came into force in May 2018. As with all organisations, whether large businesses or small charities like ourselves, we must conform. We can advise that the only data we hold in confidence on any person within the parish is: -

- contact details that we use solely for communications with yourselves
- planned giving details that you choose to provide and held in total confidence on encrypted, password protected systems shared only with HMRC.
- contact and other details for baptisms, marriages and funerals for contact purposes and as required in law for the registers.

We do NOT share this information with any other outside bodies.

The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham
‘Open to God, Open to Gillingham’

Agenda for the Annual Meetings to be held on
Tuesday, 25 March 2025, at 7:00pm in the Vicarage School Room

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Apologies

Annual Parish Meeting

1. Election of Churchwardens
2. Close of Meeting

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of last meeting – Thursday 4 April 2024
2. Matters Arising
3. Address - Revd Canon Tim Heaton
4. Elections
 - Parochial Church Council Members - 12 places, 8 to be elected
 - Deanery Synod - 3 places, 1 casual vacancy to be filled
5. Appointments
 - a. Independent Examiner
6. Reports
 - a. Electoral Roll Report
 - b. Presentation of the Annual Report
 - c. Presentation of the Financial Report
 - d. Fabric Report
 - e. Presentation of the Inventory
 - f. Deanery Synod Report
 - g. Safeguarding Report
 - h. Reports of Church Groups
7. Any Other Business

First PCC Meeting

1. Appointment of Officers
2. Date of next PCC meeting

Closing Prayer

The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham
‘Open to God, Open to Gillingham’

**Minutes for the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Parochial Church Meeting
held on Thursday, 4 April, 2023 at 7:30pm in St Mary’s Church**

Present: Revd Canon Tim Heaton (**Chair**), Susan Bailey, Steve Butler, Meriol Cottrell, Michael Giddings, Teresa Goatham, Diane Harvey, Robert Harvey, Alan Jeffs, Linda Jeffs, Jennifer Light, Miriam Light, Helen Long, Jeremy Long, Anne Marsh, Colin Marsh, Eileen Piper, Mary Sargent, Mike Sargent, Revd Philippa Sargent, Sarah Snook, David Wardle, Lois Wardle, Ian Watson, Karen Watson, Kate Wickson and Tom Wickson

1. Canon Tim opened the meeting with a welcome, a reading from the Gospel of St Luke and a prayer.
2. Apologies were received from Maureen Atkinson, Frieda Attwood, Margaret Grant, Gillian Harding and Revd Angus Mayhew. *NB: (After the meeting) Apologies were also received from Carol Hall and Revd Jeffrey Hall.*

Minutes for the Annual Parish Meeting

1. Election of Churchwardens

Helen Long (proposed by Val Stevens and seconded by Tom Wickson) and Tom Wickson (proposed by Richard Arnold and seconded by Helen Long) were elected as Churchwardens.

Helen and Tom will be sworn in on 17th June by the Archdeacon in Sherborne Abbey.

2. The Meeting closed. It was followed immediately by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Minutes for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 21 February 2023

The minutes were circulated prior to the meeting. One correction was made - in 6. Any Other Business, Appointment of Sidespeople - Teresa Goatham was added. Kate Wickson then proposed the acceptance of the minutes, and Susan Bailey seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Chair then signed the minutes.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

From 6. Any Other Business, 1st Sunday in the Month Services - These stopped during the Covid outbreak and have not started again. The School is still planning the use of their Hall. Teresa Goatham asked if there was an update.

The update was that there is no update, and this may be something discussed with a future incumbent. In the meantime, Revd Angus does collective worship with both SMTV and Milton schools. Kate Wickson, as a governor, is keeping well informed and closely connected. She always feels welcome; and Open the Book is going very well. Canon Tim also reiterated that we have a good relationship with SMTV school.

3. Address by Canon Tim

I'd like to take this opportunity, first and foremost, to congratulate the parish on the way it has navigated this vacancy over the past six months and kept the ship on a steady and even keel. The maritime metaphor is, I hope, appropriate, because as you know the image of a sailing boat with a cross for its mast was a very early symbol of the Christian church, depicting it as a ship being tossed about on the rough seas of the world, subject to many perils and dangers. One of those hazards, of course, is that the captain might jump ship, leaving the crew leaderless and alone.

So, I congratulate each and every one of you, in all of the valuable roles that you play in the life of this church, both in our worship and in our outreach. Particularly I want to applaud the members of the PCC, who have had to get on with the day-to-day business and decision-making here at St Mary's, something that they have done most efficiently and effectively. Among them it would not be improper to single out the churchwardens, Helen and Tom, to whom we all owe a huge debt of gratitude.

In this Easter Week, as we continue to rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord, we look forward to his Ascension and the time when he will no longer be with his disciples on earth.

During these in-between days we know that Jesus continued to appear to his frightened and dispirited band of followers, fearful of what the future might hold for them. He convinced them of his victory over death, but more than that his words and actions were to shape them for what lay ahead, the time when he would be leaving them for good to make way for the coming of the Holy Spirit who would give them the power to continue God's mission that Jesus had begun.

Perhaps that is rather like where we are now: waiting, eagerly and prayerfully waiting, for the arrival of a new Rector to take us forward with a new energy and vision – though I'm always rather cautious of using that word, remembering the late West German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, who once said, "Anyone having visions should see a doctor."

Today, as you know, is the closing date for applications for the Rector's post. I have no advance information and I suspect that we – that is the members of the Appointment Panel – shall be hearing something from the Sherborne Area Office in the next couple of days. The shortlisting meeting is set for 9 April, with candidates visiting on 23 April and interviews on 24 April.

I trust that all our prayers will have been heard and patiently we must wait.

4. Elections

Parochial Church Council Members

Steve Butler (proposed by Richard Arnold and seconded by R. Stevens) and Anita Leigh (proposed by Helen Long and seconded by Jeremy Long) were both elected to the PCC to serve a three year term of office.

This brings the elected members of the PCC up to 9 out of a possible 12. It was noted by the Chair that casual vacancies can be filled during the year. It was also noted that the Chair of this meeting, Canon Tim, should have been added to those who have served on the PCC as an ex-officio member in 2023 on page 9 of this year's booklet.

Deanery Synod

1 place available, but there were no volunteers at this meeting.

The Chair noted that this casual vacancy can be filled anytime up to 2026, as the Deanery Synod elections are every 3 years (the last one being held in 2023). Sarah Snook spoke about what being a Representative entails, and Revd Philippa Sargent said that it should be

made known that being a Deanery Synod Rep means you are also an ex-officio member of the PCC.

5. Appointments

a. Independent Examiner for Accounts

John Barlett examined the accounts for 2023. It was proposed by Mike Sargent, seconded by Tom Wickson and agreed by all that John examine the accounts for 2024.

6. Reports

a. Electoral Roll Report

As of 31 December 2023 the number on the roll is 139. For more details, see this year's APCM booklet, page 9. A prayer was said for those who have passed on.

b. Presentation of the Annual Report

The Chair, Canon Tim, presented the report. The Annual Report for 2023 begins on page 9 of this year's APCM booklet, which was circulated prior to the meeting. The Annual Report was covered in more depth as this meeting progressed.

c. Presentation of the Financial Report

The Financial Report was circulated prior to the meeting, and was presented by the Treasurer, Mike Sargent. The accounts for 2023 have been adopted by the PCC. **For the full report, see the booklet entitled 'Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2023'**

- Additionally, Mike reported that although energy bills and cleaning costs have gone up, the VSR is overall running in profit. This is mainly due to: 1. the hire has been raised from £30 to £35/session and 2. picking up some of the Methodist hall bookings. One of such bookings is the Community Cinema, which had its first film in the VSR last month. How profits are distributed is to be determined.

- To date, the fundraising target for 2024, which has been raised to £8000, is on track.

- Whilst The Rectory is empty, Mike has been paying the energy bills - currently around £650. We will be reimbursed by the Diocese for this, and Mike will put in a claim soon.

- Mike also talked about the new Diocesan Share scheme, which will be coming into operation in 2025. Previously based on just numbers, this new scheme will be 60% paying for our own clergy & 40% numbers. From Mike's report: "it is envisaged that the system will be phased in over 4 years in order to keep the increases for those whose Share will rise to reasonable amounts. Those whose Share will decrease will be pegged at the 2024 share ask for a further 2 years and this will fund the phasing in of the increases' ie we will be kept at the same level for 2 years even if we only have 1 rector. Mike has made it clear to Diocese that we want transparency as to how the Share is made up.

The floor was then opened for questions.

Colin Marsh asked how the films for the Community Cinema are chosen. Gordon Amery has been running the cinema for 10 years. The films chosen cannot be shown in the cinema currently and Gordon, Helen Long thinks, also talks to the volunteers involved in the Cinema before deciding on a film. Tom Wickson suggested talking to Gordon if you have an idea.

The next films to be shown in the VSR are A Haunting In Venice on Thursday 18th April and One Life on Thursday 16th May.

Anne Marsh asked if the booklet next year could be done in bigger print. Teresa Goatham suggested it could be emailed to people, and Revd Philppa Sargent let everyone know that the whole booklet is on the Church Near You website.

Canon Tim thanked Mike for all his hard work.

d. Fabric Report

The full report by Helen Long and Tom Wickson being on pages 12/13 of this year's booklet, Tom opened the floor for questions.

In response to a question from Susan Bailey about whether a leak had been fixed, Tom replied that that leak has been fixed, but there are other places where rain might come in. There is a meeting next month with the architect where a plan can be devised for the roof.

Following this, there was discussion about the bells and clock chime complaints that have been received over the past year. For the clock chimes to be turned off at night, a mechanism would need to be installed (see booklet page 12 for details). As has been seen in the press, a church in Devon had a similar thing installed. Teresa Goatham commented that in the Devon case, the council paid for this and not the church. Tom agreed that this was a good point and that it has not yet been fully explored.

In the last few weeks, Tom has been working with the council to talk about a faculty with a view to repairing the wall opposite Spring Corner and paths. He has also been in touch with the Archdeacon to see how much faculty is needed.

Tom has also read in the Church Times that there was a change in the law recently that permits parish councils to make grants to churches. Alan Jeffs commented that the town council does have statutory authority to make a contribution towards the church clock if it's determined to be the parish community clock. As is the case with St Mary's, the council does pay the annual maintenance fee for the clock.

e. Presentation of the Inventory

Tom Wickson reported that there have been no additions or removals from the inventory or terrier this year. Subsequently, both the log book and the terrier were signed by Canon Tim, Tom Wickson and Helen Long.

f. Deanery Synod Report

The full report by Kate Wickson is on page 13 of this year's booklet. Nothing else was added at the meeting.

g. Safeguarding Report

The full report by Sarah Snook is on page 13 of this year's booklet. Sarah Snook joined as PSO (Parish Safeguarding Officer) alongside Carol Hall in the middle of last year to help pick up what was missing. Anybody who is on the PCC must have a DBS through the Church, and do the Basic Awareness course online. Once you have a certificate, show it or send it to

Sarah. A Domestic Abuse course must also be done, but Salisbury Safeguarding do not have it online yet. Sarah is regularly in touch with Salisbury Safeguarding. If anyone needs any help or advice, Sarah's number is on the safeguarding posters.

Susan Bailey expressed frustration that DBSes, safeguarding training and certificates obtained in other contexts are not transferable. Whilst Sarah understood this, the above rules are ones that we all must follow.

The PSO and Chair said the following roles need safeguarding training as follows:

- x Communion Helper/Server - Basic Awareness,
- x Messy Church Helper - Basic Awareness and Foundation,
- x Welcome Team - Basic Awareness.

If you have not already done so, please use the following link to do your safeguarding training: <https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org>

h. Reports of Church Groups

x Messy Church

The full report by Kate Wickson is on page 13/14 of this year's booklet. Kate currently has a rotating group of helpers.

x School Report

The full report by Kate Wickson is on page 14 of this year's booklet. There is a lot of change going on at the top of SAST (Sherborne Area Schools' Trust) at the minute. It was noted that other primary schools in the area have joined a different academy trust. The Chair said our benefice profile made it known how important our schools are to us, and Kate again said how well Open the Book is going. Kate thinks SAST has around 20 schools under them.

In response to Ian Watson's question about the connection between the Church of England and the school, Kate reported that SMTV School maintains a strong Christian ethos, and she imagines that the new incumbent would do as Revd Canon Peter Greenwood and Revd Eve Pegler did, which was regular collective worship.

x Christian Action

The full report by Teresa Goatham is on page 14 of this year's booklet. Christian Action currently has 2 members and more would be welcome. The Chair thanked Teresa.

x Bell Ringers

The full report by Alan Jeffs is on page 15 of this year's booklet. An appeal for more recruits will go out at some point, and there is no age limit. Teresa Goatham commented that we have 8 bells but are rarely able to ring them all on Sunday.

7. Any Other Business

x Thank Yous

Tom Wickson thanked all the clergy - Tim Heaton, Angus Mayhew, Nigel Done and the Archdeacon, Penny Sayer - and retired clergy - David Botterill, Jean Coates, Jeffrey Hall,

Anne Heywood, Bernard Joy, Philippa Sargent, Allen Walker. They all offer us outstanding spiritual guidance and friendship.

Tom also thanked Miriam Light (PCC Minutes Secretary), Alan Jeffs (Lay Vice-Chair of the PCC, Bell Ringer and Tower Coordinator), Mike Sargent (Treasurer), Dr Daniel Cummins (Organist), the choir, the bell ringers, and all the unsung heroes who keep the show on the road - in no special order: LPA, dusters, brass cleaners, church and VSR cleaner, Fair Linen launderer, the Sacristan, Sunday morning coffee rota, readers and intercessors and, of course, all who help with the worship and the outreach of the church – especially those who keep Friday Breakfast and Eden Café going.

Finally, Tom thanked Carole Blackmore, the Parish Administrator who makes the parish tick. As a thank you to Carole, Tom proposed a letter and bunch of flowers from us all, organised by the PCC secretary or her line manager, the Hon Treasurer. This was unanimously agreed to. *NB: Post meeting, it was agreed that Mike Sargent would do this.*

x Appointment of Welcomers

It was agreed to appoint the following welcomers: Meriol Cottrell, Richard and Margaret Cowell, Teresa Goatham, Christine and Katherine Joy, Jeremy Long, Bob and Val Stevens, David and Lois Wardle, Karen Watson, and John and Pam Trout (subject to both going on the electoral roll).

x Congregation and New Rector

Anne Marsh asked whether the congregation would get a say on the new Rector.

The Chair replied that whilst ultimately 9 people would decide (the 6 parish reps, Canon Tim, the Archdeacon and the Bishop of Sherborne), there are plans to invite the congregation to the VSR on Tuesday 23rd April at 4pm to meet the candidates. The details for this day have not been published yet, as currently we do not know if there are any candidates. More information will follow when possible.

The meeting was closed at 9pm by saying the Grace. It was followed immediately by the First PCC Meeting.

Minutes of the First PCC Meeting

This meeting was chaired by Lay Vice-Chair of the PCC Alan Jeffs.

1. Appointment of Officers

It was proposed, seconded and then agreed by all that the people listed below retain their positions:-

x (Minutes) Secretary: Miriam Light - proposed by Kate Wickson, seconded by Helen Long

x Treasurer: Mike Sargent - proposed by Tom Wickson, seconded by Helen Long

x Lay Vice-Chair: Alan Jeffs - proposed by Steve Butler, seconded by Susan Bailey

The PCC was also happy with the Standing Committee, which currently consists of Helen Long, Tom Wickson, Mike Sargent, Alan Jeffs and Kate Wickson.

2. Date of next PCC meeting - To be decided at a later date.

The meeting was closed at 9:05pm.

Statement of Accounts year ending 31 December 2024

Please see separate booklet

Reports and Information for the 2025 Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Electoral Roll Report for APCM to be held on 25 March 2025

The number on the Roll as at 31 December 2024 totalled 136.

Names added during 2024

John Trout, Pamela Trout and Lavinia Skevington

Names removed during 2024

June DeSouches (RIP), Linley Venters (RIP) Margaret Grant (RIP), Michael Smith (RIP), John and Shirley Davies (moved)

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2024

Administrative Information

Saint Mary the Virgin Church is situated in Queen Street, Gillingham, Dorset. It is part of the Benefice of Gillingham, Milton on Stour and Silton in the Diocese of Salisbury within the Church of England. The correspondence address is The Parish Office, Queen Street, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4DX.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC, Church Representation Rules 2020) is a charity registered with the Charity Commission.

PCC members that have served since 4 April 2024 until the date this report was approved are: -

Incumbent (Chairman): Vacant

Benefice Curate half time: Revd Angus Mayhew (ex-officio) (until January 2025)

Rural Dean/Associate Priest: Revd Canon Tim Heaton (ex-officio)

Churchwardens: Mrs Helen Long (elected APCM 2024)

Mr Tom Wickson (elected APCM 2024)

Deanery Synod Reps: Mrs Sarah Snook (to APCM 2026)

Mrs Kate Wickson (to APCM 2026)

Lay Vice Chair: Mr Alan Jeffs (to APCM 2025)

Treasurer: Mr Michael Sargent (to APCM 2025)

Secretary: (Minutes) Miss Miriam Light (co-opted member July 2023)

Elected Members: Mrs Susan Bailey (to APCM 2026)

Mr Steve Butler (to APCM 2027)

Mr Richard Cowell (resigned 30th June 2024)

Mr Michael Giddings (to APCM 2025)
Dr Teresa Goatham (to APCM 2026)
Mrs Anita Leigh (to APCM 2027)
Miss Jennifer Light (to APCM 2025)

Parish Administrator & Electoral Roll Officer: Mrs Carole Blackmore
Gillingham Churches Together Representatives: Vacant
Parish Safeguarding Officer: Mrs Sarah Snook

Aims and Purposes

Every Church of England Church has the same aim: "To promote the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical".

Structure, Governance and Management

Members of the PCC are either elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, (APCM) in accordance with Church Representation Rules, or act ex officio. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

Objectives and Activities

St. Mary's PCC as trustees have the responsibility of co-operating and working with the incumbent in the ecclesiastical parish of Gillingham, sharing in the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin and the Vicarage School Room in Queen Street, Gillingham.

Achievements and Performance

Church Attendance

St Mary's Church was open for public worship throughout 2024 always in accordance with the guidance given by the Church of England. The average attendance for the 8am monthly service was 6. The weekly 10am Sunday attendance averaged 64 with larger congregations at festivals such as Easter and Christmas and other special occasions. The midweek communion service regularly numbers 10.

We participated fully in the civic ceremonies held in our town. We celebrated the major festivals including Advent Carol Service, Burning of Ashes on Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Eve, School Leavers Service, Remembrance Sunday, Christingle, Crib Service, Christmas Eve Service and Christmas Day.

Statistics of Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and Confirmations

Baptisms	5
Confirmations	6
Weddings	1
Funerals at St Mary's	20
Funerals at Crematorium	8
Burial of ashes	5

Regular Services

1st Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion
Sunday weekly	10.00am	Holy Communion
Wednesday mornings	10.30am	Holy Communion
Thursday evenings fortnightly	7.15pm	Meditation
Friday mornings	9.30am	Prayer Group
Saturday mornings fortnightly	10.30am	Meditation
4th Sunday	3.30pm	Messy Church

Services were held for all significant festivals.

St Mary's Church is open daily between 10am and 4pm for quiet prayer and reflection. On the 5th Sunday of the month, the three churches of the Benefice come together to share Holy Communion. The service takes place at either 10am (when in St Mary's, Gillingham) or 10:30am (when in St Simon & Jude, Milton on Stour or St Nicholas, Silton).

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2024

During the year 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024 the PCC met on six occasions with the Standing Committee meeting occasionally on a casual basis. The PCC continued using the 'Build' committee which looks after finance, housekeeping and buildings. The Grow Committee, which operates as Messy Church, also continued to meet.

The Annual Parish and Annual Parochial Church Meetings were held on 4 April 2024.

The Rector position was advertised during the year but there were no applicants.

Eden Café, open twice weekly in the Vicarage School Room, enabled fellowship and service to the local community whilst at the same time contributing significantly to our fundraising. Recycling continued alongside, though there were some changes in what we were able to collect. The VSR picked up various bookings, including Gillingham Community Cinema. Films shown this year include Wonka, A Haunting in Venice and Hamlet. The VSR also had a new boiler installed in August.

The meditation group continues to thrive. Messy Church met 8 times in 2024, ending the year with a wonderful Christingle service in which the children's crafts were integrated into the service. The church's work with local schools continues through the work of governors, collective worship, and Open the Book. Friday Breakfast came to end in July.

Our annual stewardship appeal was launched as usual on Passion Sunday and again resulted with individual increases to planned giving. However, with deaths and moves out of the area we have seen a decrease in planned giving and overall income.

The PCC continues to manage the maintenance of the church. The Quinquennial Inspection was carried out in May.

In May 2024, the PCC adopted in full the House of Bishops Safeguarding Policy (Promoting a Safer Church, 2017). This can be found in full on our A Church Near You website.

The Key Holder List is regularly updated.

Risk Assessments are routine and various policy documents are available.

FINANCE REPORT SUMMARY

Please see separate booklet.

RESERVES POLICY

It is current PCC policy to maintain a balance of unrestricted funds that equates to three months outgoings in order to cover emergency situations that may arise from time to time. With finances such as they are and to ensure that these reserves can be maintained into the future the PCC approved the treasurer's suggestion to cancel the Direct Debit for the Diocesan Share by the end of 2023 so that the PCC pays only what our finances allow. The PCC further agreed with the treasurer's proposal, in February 2024, that we could improve our Share contribution should we end up with a balance sheet surplus towards the end of 2024.

FABRIC REPORT

The most important event for the fabric of St Mary's this year was the Quinquennial Inspection, carried out by our architect, Tomas Griffin, in May.

This has resulted in two major initiatives for repair and restoration.

1. A bundle of smaller works, adding up to a reasonably large list, principally on the roof and associated rainwater goods. The PCC agreed to ask Mr Griffin to draw up a schedule of these to send to contractors so they could quote to carry out the repairs. At the time of writing the process of drawing up estimates of costs is being carried out by four building firms selected by the architect.

Once a price has been established and a contractor has been selected, we shall be able to move ahead with applying for a List B faculty to carry out the work and also to apply for grants to help fund it. It may well be possible to get this work carried out later in 2025.

2. The chancel roof. Mr Griffin points out that the lead roof of the chancel is in the latter stage of its life. There are cracks and splits which, though not letting in water quite yet, soon will be. This will be an expensive job – it is very hard to estimate exactly how costly, but with a complex scaffolding required, probably a six-figure sum. There are options as to how much of the total roof covering should be replaced. It is possible that the ridge and south slope only could be done with some patching on the north side giving it another twenty years of life.

A significant advantage we have is that the Church Commissioners (who control the C of E's major financial investments) have, for historical reasons, a 60% liability for costs of repairing the chancel (note: only the chancel, not any other part of the building). Your churchwarden met with Mr Ian Simpson of the Commissioners' office at the church on 17th September, 2024. He agreed the responsibility and said that he would be able to work with us on getting this job carried out.

However, we do not feel able to take forward these two initiatives simultaneously, so while we focus on part 1 of these works (above) this project is on hold. It may well be possible to take this forward in 2026.

List B faculty approval was eventually achieved to replace the floodlights in the nave and aisles of St Mary's with LED lights. This was carried out early December 2024.

The Churchyard Wall: Also following comments in successive Quinquennials, the churchyard wall is being surveyed on behalf of Gillingham Town Council who have responsibility for the up-keep of the churchyard. The area on the southwest corner (near Rutters solicitors) causes most concern and the Council has appointed our architect to supervise such works as may be necessary and by the time you read this a site meeting with a firm of structural engineers should have taken place (23rd January 2015).

Tom Wickson and Helen Long, Churchwardens

DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

During the past year we had 3 meetings. January, May and September.

The January session looked at Rev Canon Tim Heaton's 5 Year Plan for the Blackmore Vale Deanery. We looked at what we are all already doing in our Parishes to meet the demands of this ambitious document and how to fill the gaps. The Meeting was held in our VSR.

The May meeting was at St Mary's Motcombe, looking at their churchyard and its maintenance and use as part of the Living Churchyard project. They very luckily have a dedicated team working on keeping this lovely rural space as an accessible churchyard, but also a haven for wildlife and a resource for the primary school next door.

Our September meeting in Ibberton had to be postponed as the Rev Hilary Bond, who was due to lead a discussion on eco church was unwell. I could not attend the altered date

Thank you to Tim for arranging a year of interesting meetings and for this opportunity to meet our friends across the Deanery and share our common problems.

Kate Wickson, Deanery Synod Representative

SAFEGUARDING REPORT

This year's Safeguarding work as PSO has in the main been trying to ensure all those who are involved in roles within the Church have the appropriate training and checks. This has been a huge task and I feel a real 'nag'. But, we need to safeguard ourselves as well as others.

I am pleased to announce we will be offering a face to face training session for Basic Safeguarding on either Friday 28 March or Friday 4 April from 2pm-4pm in the Vicarage School Rooms. We will run the ONE date initially that has the most booked on so please let me know your preference by 12 March and I will confirm the date soon after. I would please ask you to attend if you have not yet completed this or completed it online. We can then offer the Foundation Training and Domestic Abuse for those whose role needs it. DBS checks, where needed, will not be started until Basic Training is completed.

I have dealt with a few Safeguarding issues over the year which have all been resolved and/or logged with the Safeguarding Team for future reference.

Thank you for your vigilance and please contact me with any concerns on 01747 826844 or Salisbury Safeguarding on 01722 438651.

It remains the calling of us all to take responsibility and accountability for Safeguarding within our local communities.

Sarah Snook, (PSO) Parish Safeguarding Officer

MESSY CHURCH REPORT

This year we held 5 meetings in the first half of the year and 3 in September and December. Compared to previous years our numbers were much lower.

We have considered why this might be but I think it is a mixture of a loyal group outgrowing our offer and also several families, who were very regular attenders, moving away.

For the future we are linking our sessions to major church festivals and hoping that will attract people.

We have had some lovely sessions over the year. Easter Messy, where the children made our Easter Garden that we then brought into church, Harvest Messy with a wonderful script for worship provided by Anne Heywood. And finally a really excellent Christingle service, where we integrated crafts that the children made into the service. We finished with refreshments in church. This all worked very well but took some organising and planning. Running monthly sessions is a big commitment, with a planning meeting and session each month.

My thanks to our wonderful team of helpers, and to Anne Heywood and Allen Walker who have led the worship element. Anne is always wonderfully inventive and provides material when she cannot be there in person.

We hope to carry on the tradition of Messy Church in our worship offering for families, albeit in a modified programme.

Kate Wickson

ST MARY THE VIRGIN (SMTV) SCHOOL REPORT

My connection with SMTV is as a Foundation Governor and organiser of the Open The Book team.

As a Governor I have attended Governors meetings, 4 per year, and visited the school to talk to students and staff about areas of the curriculum.

In July we visited for a review of RE teaching throughout the school. We began the morning with an Open the Book session. This is always presented as part of the school's worship programme and where we can we link the readings to topics covered by the younger children in RE and the Church Year.

We met and talked to the children and their teachers and saw examples of their work. My fellow governor and I were very impressed with how well the children talk about key aspects of Christianity and their awareness of other faiths. They were very aware of the need to understand different perspectives in our modern world.

Open The Book continues to work very well. We are using new materials this year, which we are getting used to. But as always our experienced team copes very well and sensibly adapts where needed. We have a bigger team this year which makes it all easier to manage and the school always appreciates very much the contribution these sessions make to their worship life.

Kate Wickson

GILLINGHAM TOWER REPORT

Like many other towers, we could do with some more ringers! However, weekly Sunday services are rung for, together with special occasions; although not always on the full eight.

Most method ringing is doubles on the front six bells, and plain hunt on 7. We do ring some minor methods, especially with the help of friends from other towers, and have recently rung a couple of courses of Kent TB minor. 'Rounds' and call changes are regularly rung.

During the year two quarter peals of 1,260 changes were rung by local ringers, including two 'firsts', and a 'first inside'.

There are eight regular ringers in the band, and also at present we have one keen learner.

At our weekly practice night, we often welcome friends from other towers to join us.

If anyone is interested in learning to ring, please contact me on awjeffs@btinternet.com.

Bell Ringing is good fun, and a service to the church.

Alan Jeffs, Ringing co-ordinator

FRIDAY BREAKFAST REPORT

The final session was in July 2024 just before schools closed for the summer. A number of the young people attending were moving from primary school to Gillingham Secondary so were less likely to continue attending much longer, and Angus, Jeremy and Helen all felt the sessions had run their course.

Helen Long

PARISH OFFICE REPORT

Mrs Carole Blackmore looks after the whole benefice dealing with all day to day enquiries, arranging weddings, funerals, baptisms, taking VSR bookings, liaising with all elected parish officers, organising and printing the weekly newsletters, the collating and printing of Impact until publication ceased, and keeping the administration in good order. There is also a pastoral element to her role in the office in listening to and dealing with parishioners queries and supporting the clergy.

THE VICARAGE SCHOOL ROOM (VSR) REPORT

Our church hall is a community hub. Gillingham Repair Café, country dancing, pilates, the local community cinema, and our community café, Eden café, and Board Games Afternoon run from this building. Occasional events include art and craft events, Lent Lunches, various fundraising pop-ups, and it is also popular for hire for private functions when there is a free slot. A family of Syrian refugees run Syrian Cuisine, their takeaway and restaurant, from these premises on Friday evenings. It is the place where St Mary's congregation gather for coffee after Sunday morning Eucharist.