

**PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF
St MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, GREAT BRICKHILL**

Annual Report and Accounts

For the year ended 31st December, 2022

**St. Mary the Virgin Church,
Lower Way
Great Brickhill
Milton Keynes
MK17 9AE**

Bankers:

**Barclays Bank PLC
Leighton Buzzard Branch
The Aylesbury Group
34 Market Square
Aylesbury
Bucks.
HP20 1TT**

Independent Examiner:

**Mr. D. Beatty
Roxburgh House
Pound Hill
Great Brickhill
Milton Keynes
MK17 9AS**

**Church Architect:
Adrian Ringrose Dip Arch BA Arch RIBA AABC
Stimpson Walton Bond
Chartered Architects
59 York Road
Northampton
NN1 5QL**

Report Of The Parochial Church Council (PCC) Year ended 31st December, 2022

MEMBERS OF THE PCC

The following persons served as members of the PCC from the date of the Annual Meeting, 19th May 2022:-

The Reverend John Waller (Chairman)
Jeremy Hopkinson (Licensed Lay Minister; PCC Vice-Chairman)
Julia Turner (Church Warden)
Phillipa Cook (Secretary) – re-elected
Clare Hankins-Lewis – re-elected
Joy Wilson – re-elected
Diana Williams – newly elected
[N.B. Margretta Smith resigned 19th March 2022]

Deanery Synod Representative:- Position vacant from 1/10/20

Neil Cook continued in the role of Treasurer, co-opted to the PCC, 30/6/22

N.B. The maximum number of lay representatives on the PCC is 6, as per the prescribed formula for Electoral Rolls up to 50.

OBJECTS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE PCC

The object of the PCC of St. Mary the Virgin Church, Great Brickhill, is to further the work of the Church of England in the parish of Great Brickhill. The Council is constituted under the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 and as amended by the 1969 Measure, and is required to co-operate with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in 2004 provision was made for the annual appointment of representatives on the PCC. All members of the church electoral roll are entitled to vote and stand for election. There is also provision for the co-option of members of the PCC, and the incumbent is ex-officio a member and the Chairman. The LLM, Warden and Deanery Synod Representatives are also ex-officio members of the PCC.

ELECTORAL ROLL AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Membership of the electoral roll is open to any lay person who is baptised, over sixteen years of age and has signed a declaration that he or she is a member of the Church of England and is either (a). resident in the parish, or (b). has habitually attended worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment.

At the start of the year there were 39 people on the Electoral Roll. There was a revision of the Electoral Roll prepared for the Annual Meeting in May, at which time there were 37 people on the Revised Roll. (There had been two additions, three deaths and one removed from the list - hence the number of Electors was 37). There was one death between July and the end of December and so the number at the end of the year was 36, three of whom are not resident within the parish.

The average attendance on a “normal” Sunday was 15, still showing a decrease from pre-pandemic years. Attendance at special services is significantly higher than the average figure for a “normal” Sunday service.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Rector took a month's leave in February following the death of his wife, Pauline in December. He had been due to have a three-month sabbatical during the pandemic but this was put on hold until further notice.

In the autumn the Rector went on a trip to Israel. He will be showing the photos he took during this walking trek over rough terrain amongst the Palestinian people at an appropriate time in 2023.

Jeremy Hopkinson continues as LLM. In January Sharon Sutton from Little Brickhill took on the role of Admin Assistant for the Benefice. In June we received the sad news of the death of the previous Rector, the Reverend Stephen Toze (incumbent here from 1994 to 2001).

During the year all restrictions brought in for Covid-19 were relaxed, the final one in October when Holy Communion was once again administered at the altar rail.

As the church keeps much cooler than ordinary buildings, it was kept open for a longer daily period than normal over the days of the heatwave in July, from 9.30am until 8.00pm. Drinks were available in the refreshment area providing a place of refuge during the hot weather, a place to cool down, relax or even to do some work.

Services:

In September the new service pattern had been in operation for twelve months. The pattern was reviewed within the four parishes and after the extensive period of consultation, it was agreed that the current service pattern would continue.

In order to make it fair for all four churches, the pattern is complex. The services are publicized widely to enable everyone to easily access the information through all the various channels of communication.

Special Services:

During 2022 we had one wedding, five baptisms and seven funerals.

Three Contemporary Services with modern worship songs were held on midweek evenings. There was an encouraging attendance at the first one on Ash Wednesday, 2nd March, held at 8.00pm with refreshments from 7.45pm. The numbers were less at the two subsequent services.

A number of special services were held. In addition to our annual services such as Harvest, Remembrance Sunday, Nine Lessons and Carols, all of which were well attended, the highlights were:

- On Sunday 31st July an outdoor service for the Benefice was held in the churchyard. Pets were welcome and, with 5 dogs among those present, the theme was 'God's Creation'. The second part of the service involved an activity around the cemetery.
- The Village Nativity on Sunday, 18th December. The Cricket Club kindly hosted this event again. The snow made it very scenic and it was another fantastic enactment of the Nativity with live animals, a wonderful opportunity to pass on the real meaning and message of Christmas.

At both the Nativity and the Carol Service the young children were encouraged to come forward to sing the first verse of some of the carols with the choir / music team, something that we wish to develop.

JUBILEE WEEKEND:

The Benefice choir sang the Jubilee anthem in the church, which was recorded and then played at the cricket field just ahead of the lighting of the beacon.

A photographic exhibition was held in the church over the four-day Jubilee weekend. There was a steady stream of visitors in the church on the Thursday afternoon and the Saturday morning to view the exhibits and a much larger gathering on Sunday afternoon. Alongside the display of the old photos taken around the village from as far back as the 1850s, there was a wonderful array of artefacts from Rectory Farm and also documents on display from the Great Brickhill Charity and the Great Brickhill WI Heritage Project in 1982, plus a letter of invitation and Order of Service for Westminster Abbey marking the 50th anniversary of the coronation.

A digitalized video of the Great Brickhill Silver Jubilee celebrations was a great success, with thanks to Pat and Barry Thorne for the original cine footage. A wonderful procession around the village with floats of all descriptions was followed by children's games on the cricket field, tug of war, barbecue and lighting of a beacon/bonfire.

Refreshments were provided over three days of the Jubilee weekend and the donations collected were given to the Ukrainian Fund, to add to the amount raised at the other village Jubilee celebrations.

THE QUEEN:

As soon as the news came through of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, during the period of Royal Mourning, until seven days after the funeral service, the church was kept open for a longer period of time, from 9.30am to 6.00pm – an opportunity for people to enter the church to pay their respects and have a quiet time for reflection and prayer.

On the eve of her funeral on 18th September, a Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of the Queen was held. Around 80 people attended the service to commemorate the life of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with a time of reflection, prayers and hymns.

THE BELLS:

David Middleton, the Tower Captain, arranged for special ringing of the bells for the Jubilee and at appropriate times during the period of mourning for the Queen.

The single tenor bell was rung unmuffled at mid-day on the day after the death of the Queen and before the funeral. All eight bells fully muffled were rung after the funeral at Westminster Abbey, as Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's coffin was paraded to Windsor for the Committal Service.

The fully muffled ringing is an historic event for the village, as the bells are rung fully muffled only for the death of a monarch, as an alternative to tolling the single Tenor bell unmuffled.

HIGH ASH SCHOOL:

High Ash is a Church of England school. Reverend John Waller is one of two Foundation Governors, appointed by the Oxford Diocese. Sandra Maher is the second Foundation Governor.

Regular Zoom meetings continued with Mrs Sara Boyce, the Head Teacher of High Ash. She left the school at the end of the year to take up a position as an Ofsted Inspector. Mrs Kate Goodger would be Acting Headteacher for the Spring term.

High Ash School Services:

The school is now too big to have all the pupils at a single service and so there is a service for Key Stage 1 & Foundation children and one for the older Key Stage 2 children. The following High Ash services were held:

- Easter Service. The children had made some Easter Gardens which were shared with Little Brickhill and Stoke Hammond churches. They had also made Easter cards which were distributed to residents in all three parishes.
- The Leavers' Service on 13th July when the Year 6 pupils (with Year 5 supporting) came to the church for an opportunity to reflect on their time at High Ash, as well as to look forward to their future at secondary school.
- In October pupils in Years 3, 4, 5 & 6 came for their Harvest celebration. Years One and Two visited the church as part of their themed week; the children enjoyed identifying symbols in the church.
- The snow and ice prevented the younger classes from coming to church for their Christingle service. The weather improved for the Carol Service for the older pupils.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES:

A 5-week Lent Course was led by the Rector, based on five of the Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120 – 134). A session was held in Stoke Hammond on Tuesday afternoons and also, a midweek evening session at venues across the Benefice.

A new monthly midweek evening Bible Group is held at The Rectory. The sessions led by the Rector started in June and focus on readings which will be coming up in the Sunday services.

"Link to Hope" Shoebox Appeal - again, shoeboxes were sent to Romania, Moldova, Ukraine or Bulgaria.

"Feed The Hungry" Knitting - knitted goods were sent to the "Feed the Hungry" charity.

Occasional Saturday Coffee Mornings, including one in May when donations were collected for Christian Aid. (There is no longer a Christian Aid House to House collection around the village, but people are encouraged to donate online).

The Monday Morning Coffee Club is held every Monday in the church during term time, between 9.30am and 11.30am. Anyone is welcome to call in for a coffee and chat.

The Food Box is available in the church porch for anyone to help themselves if they find themselves in need, either in an emergency or in the longer term. There has been a varied amount of call for items since the introduction of the Food Box in 2019. Towards the end of the year the demand increased. We are grateful to those who leave suitable items for inclusion in the Food Box.

Communications. A weekly e-mail is sent out to those on the database and the website is continually updated to provide all the up-to-date information regarding services and activities. Items are also circulated on the village WhatsApp Group. A Pew Sheet is produced for all services and a report is sent each month to the Parish Newsletter.

Parish Newsletter: A printed copy of a scaled down version of the Parish Newsletter, including just the news items, is being delivered each month to those known to be in the village who are not able to receive the Newsletter any other way.

CHURCH EVENTS:

The 2021 Year Book:

David Marlow again produced a Year Book with photographs of events throughout the year. A copy is on display at the entrance to the church. Copies of the 2021 Year Book

and earlier Year Books can be purchased via the Blurb website.

The Snowdrop Walks:

The Snowdrop Walks were severely affected by the weather on both days. After a long dry spell, rain arrived on the day of the first walk, Sunday 13th February, which resulted in far fewer people coming to see the snowdrops. The second Snowdrop Walk was cancelled due to Storm Eunice although the teas were still available. With thanks to Sir David and Lady Sally Duncombe for generously allowing the event to be held in their grounds, £869 was raised over the two weekends.

Plant Sale, Saturday 9th April:

Due to the continuing Covid restrictions, a Plant Sale was held at the church, a smaller version of the annual Plant Fayre that is held at the Parish Hall / cricket field. There were plants on sale from a few professional nurserymen and also a church plant stall. Refreshments were available. The amount raised was £475.

Open Gardens, Sunday 3rd July:

Teas were provided at the church for the afternoon of the Open Gardens organized by the Gardening Club on 3rd July, which raised £462.

Christmas:

The Advent Windows lit up the village again from 1st to 31st December.

The Christmas Coffee Morning was held in the church on Saturday 3rd December, from 10.00am - 1.00pm. There were a variety of stalls, tombola, lucky dip, and much more. It was a lovely occasion with a great atmosphere. £1,108 was raised.

Carol Singing took place around the village on two evenings. The collectors did a wonderful job and they reported back the comments they received saying how lovely the carol singing was. The two evenings raised £724.

WORK ON THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH:

A small amount of work has been carried out during the year. The biggest concern is when it rains, especially if it is windy as the rain comes into the church in several places and buckets have to be put out. The damp patches on the north wall close to the top of the big picture appear to be getting worse. (See "Roof Repairs" below).

DEANERY SYNOD:

The position of Deanery Synod Representative for Great Brickhill remains vacant. Jeremy Hopkinson continued in his role as Deanery Treasurer but was looking for a replacement. Richard Locke retired as Deanery Secretary and no replacement has been found. Gavin Merrylees is due to step down as Lay Chair next year, as is Revd Val Plumb as Area Dean.

The Deanery is fully staffed except for a House for Duty position, the first time for many years. Deanery Synod meetings were held on 15th March via Zoom, 28th June here in the church at Great Brickhill and 15th November via Zoom.

The Bishop of Oxford visited all 30 Deaneries in the Diocese – he spent the day in Mursley Deanery on 23rd June with meetings for clergy, parish representatives and an open meeting in the evening. He wanted to hear views from those he met, rather than offer advice as to how to tackle the problems which parishes are encountering.

POLICY DOCUMENTS:

The current Health Policy is on display in the church porch.

The annual review of the Safeguarding Policy took place at the November PCC meeting. No changes were made to the Policy, which is on display in the church porch and on the website. An annual safeguarding report was prepared for the November PCC meeting. For the year to 31st October the report is a nil report – no safeguarding incidents had been reported in the last twelve months.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was last updated in May 2021. The annual review took place in November. There were no GDPR issues to report and no further change required to the Data Privacy notice, which is on display in the church porch and available on the website in the Great Brickhill section.

CHURCH FINANCES FOR 2022:

The accounts, produced on a receipts and payments basis as in previous years, showed a deficit of £1,159. The Covid pandemic had much less effect this year, but the traditional Plant Fayre could not be held, a smaller event taking its place. The Snowdrop Walks, the second big fund-raising event of the year, were severely affected by the weather. In addition, a very large heating bill was received following a change in gas supplier.

In light of the projected deficit, only £8K was paid towards the allocation of the £21,025 Parish Share to the Diocese (£16K was paid in 2021).

Restricted Items: As well as general income the PCC has received donations which are restricted as to their use, the money having been given for specific purposes. Under the Charities Act accounting regulations, the restricted funds have to be identified separately in the main accounts. The PCC is able to confirm that it holds sufficient and appropriate assets to meet the conditions of expenditure of all restricted funds. Details of the balances of funds and the assets which are held to represent those funds are contained in the Statement of Assets and Liabilities.

Credit / Debit Card Devices: More use is being made of the two devices particularly at fund raising events.

UPDATE ON THE NEW FACILITIES AND ROOF REPAIRS:

Work on the rendering and the bonded gravel top covering of the path were done in June. There are a number of snagging issues with the New Facilities work. The builder has confirmed that he will not be completing the outstanding defects list. A third-party builder will be completing the works under the direction of the architect who will then calculate if the value of the works exceeds the amount retained in the contract.

The Roof. The faculty has been granted for the permanent repair of the roof. Planning permission to replace the temporary felt covering with terne coated stainless steel has also been approved by Bucks Council. The cost to do the work, including the professional fees and VAT will be £127k. The work will start as soon as the funding is in place. Multiple grant applications will be submitted. If the requisite amount is not available, the South aisle will be repaired first as the ceiling panels are in a worse state and likely to come down, followed by the north aisle. But this would not be the most cost-efficient way of carrying out the work.