

THE BENEFICE of WITNEY



Year in Review **2022-23**

ST MARY THE VIRGIN
Witney

ST JOHN THE BAPTIST
Curbridge

ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST
Hailey

HOLY TRINITY
Witney

ST. KENELM'S
Minster Lovell

Called to be a community
of mercy and kindness

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1. Team Rector's Report



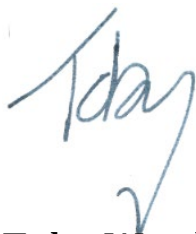
My brothers and sisters,

What a joy to share in this wonderful benefice and our common sacramental life. In the last year we have seen many changes in our Ministry Team which has continued to grow. It is good to be working much more closely together as we share so much.

One of my heroes, Oscar Romero once said, *'Living in Community is not a matter of choice but of calling. Christianity demands, by vocation, the forming of community.'* Our communities have to embody the values of the Gospel and be leaven to the world, extending God's Kingdom. We have seen this lived out in the work we have undertaken with the Asylum hotel opening in our midst and the way in that this has blessed us so much.

As we seek to live out the calling of community, we have to encourage one another to see God as an active agent in our lives, and tell again the stories that form and shape us to be those who know the light of the gospel. In our benefice we see so many examples of sacrifice, generosity, and teamwork. I want to thank all who make this such a wonderful place and who open our churches to newcomers and take the good news out into the places we serve as we seek to form community - not a matter of choice but of calling.

Grace and Peace



Toby Wright

Rector of Witney & Vicar of Minster Lovell

**Called to be a community
of mercy and kindness**



2. Benefice Strategy

Our vision continues to be that we are Called to be community of Mercy and Kindness. John Donne, when the dean of St Paul's, once spoke of God's mercy: 'We begin with that which is elder than our beginning, and shall outlive our end, the mercy of God... the names of first and last derogate from it, for first and last are but rags of time, and God's mercy hath no relation to time, no limitation in time, it is not first nor last, but eternal, everlasting.' Mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us, and how we are to encounter one another and the world. Nothing in our witness can be lacking in mercy. As John Chrysostom reminds us, 'Mercy is the Queen of all virtues'.

As we live out this calling, we have worked on a new structure of how the Ministry Team reflect on all that we are called to be and do. To help us with this desire we have come up with the following image:



This shows us that all we do is built upon the desire to grow deeper in God. To help us with this we have four key pillars of our

common life together: the Eucharist and Daily Office, which sustain all that we are. And Inclusivity and Hospitality which shape all that we do. Supported by these four pillars we have seven key areas of focus for our ministry. This is not meant to capture all that we do, but they are each areas which we all share in taking responsibility and are seen as important for us going forwards this year. Please pray for these areas of our life, and that our vision to be a community of mercy and kindness may flourish.

God of mercy and kindness

Deliver us from every temptation to act with anything less

Than kindness towards those we encounter,

Speaking the truth in love.

Teach us afresh the way of true mercy

That heaps burning coals through deeds of loving kindness;

For it is your kindness, your mercy,

In which we trust and hope. Amen.



Teaching & Spirituality

2022-23 has seen a shift from our previous *Exploring Spirituality Programme*. Although some areas have stayed the same such as online monthly Theological Reflection, we've also sought to offer those areas which you as a community have requested.

We have been able to revert to more in person activities now that all covid restrictions are hopefully a thing of the past.

have been offered both in person and online. The Daily Office is very well attended at St Mary's at 9am and 5.30pm.

Confirmation preparation and follow up groups are taking place; Baptism preparation is offered on a family basis having previously been as a group; First Communion is offered to our youngest members.

A new Bible Study group has started with great enthusiasm with our Asylum seeker friends.

Personal Discipleship Plans continue to be offered to people as a useful way to explore God's call on our lives. It is a simple process to reflect on where we are at with God, and what God might be inviting us to explore within our lives. It tends to be 2 sessions looking at material, but it can be on-going if that is supportive.

If you'd like to find out more, contact office@witneyparish.org.uk

Pilgrimage

June 2022 saw the inauguration of the Witney Deanery Pilgrimage Route, with the involvement of a good number of people, among them several from the Witney Benefice. The route of about 90 miles links all the Church of England churches in the Deanery. Over the eight days it took, pilgrims enjoyed very reasonable weather and fine hospitality, especially at churches which were the end point for the day's walking, in some of which it was possible for participants to sleep. Mostly, however, people joined for a day or part of a day. Bishop Gavin was present at the finish and the final service in St Mary's, Witney.

On St Kenelm's Day, 17th July, which turned out, as predicted, to be extravagantly hot, a 6.00am start was made from St Kenelm's,

Enstone, towards the pilgrimage's destination, St Kenelm's, Minster Lovell. It took about six hours to reach Minster Lovell and the refreshingly coolish church.

There are plans to create a route round all but one of the churches dedicated to St Kenelm in the country (and probably the world) – Dorset is a step too far and even without that outlying church, the distance would be around 200 miles.

A far shorter pilgrimage was walked by members of the Ministry Team in March 2022 – a mere morning's stroll from St Mary's to Ducklington and back with Ducklington Lake a central feature, this as one in a regular series of Team Spiritual Refreshment sessions – short, but it seemed to do its job!

Next up is a Churches Together in Witney Pilgrimage round all the member churches which is scheduled for Holy Week 2023.

Older People

Anna Chaplaincy exists to:

- Offer spiritual support to older people who are living in care homes, and sheltered housing complexes, their relatives and staff who look after them.
- Promote the spiritual welfare of older people in the wider community, particularly those facing challenges living independently.

This year has been one of establishing and broadening the base and taking first steps to growing a team. As Anna Chaplain, Julia now has three *Anna Friends* helping the work. Our new bespoke 'Spiritual Care Course' is supporting them and runs for eight sessions until the summer (there is still time for 'interested others' to join from churches across the Benefice!)

There has also been growth in other areas. As well as supporting the clergy in leading some services in Care Homes, Julia is beginning to offer other more seasonal services on Care Floors and other areas where and when it is requested, as well as offering Home Communion to people in their homes.

In September Julia gave a talk to the Mother's Union and recently spoke to the Deddington Deanery on *'The spirituality of older people and how we can engage in our parishes'*

The Anna Chaplaincy is involved in:

- Visiting people who are still part of the Body of Christ in the benefice. Offering Home Communion when requested.
- Being a 'listening ear' with older people in our congregations across the parish.

Anna Chaplaincy plans for future:

- To continue to develop Anna Chaplaincy in Witney Parish
- To collaborate with other stakeholders and raise awareness of this ministry in Witney Town and beyond.

The Ministry Team continues to be involved on a daily basis, with ministry to older people, including through the hospital and nursing homes. There are also regular services which we share in with the Anna Chaplaincy Team.



Children & Youth

The work of the Benefice Schools Chaplain and Youth Lead continued to flourish in 2022, with the development of new initiatives, as well as the growth and resurgence of existing projects.

The end of Covid restrictions has allowed us to re-establish in person contact with the 9 primary schools in the Parish, providing regular input to collective worship throughout the year and some great work in Henry Box Secondary School

The re-opening of our buildings has given us the opportunity to host activities for all ranges of young people, from the Tiddlers group at Hailey, Messy Mass at Holy Trinity, Prayer Spaces and Witney Feast schools' activities in St Mary's. and the Young Disciples group which meets regularly in the Winchester Room.

A number of new initiatives continue to thrive, some of which include:

- **Christian Union at Henry Box:** We meet once a week and has grown from 3 pupils to 18 within 6 weeks.
- **Hot Chocolate:** An initiative to build and develop relationships with the local pupils that attend Henry Box and also working alongside building external partnerships with other youth leaders who also support this ministry
- **Witney Feast:** A great opportunity where hundreds of children descend into St Mary's to take part in a number of activities. This time we looked at being stewards of our planet as God intended.
- **Fun day at Minster Lovell:** This was a funday for the whole community. We saw nearly 70+ children and their families attend and take part in the festivities.
- **Asylum Seeker Friend (Children and Youth):** With the new community arriving, there were 60+ children and youth. Every child and young person were gifted a wrapped Christmas present.

- **Café Xtra:** Once a month, youth from all over Witney gather together at a local café to share time, testimonies of their faith and games.
- **Junior Church:** Junior church is central to ministry on a Sunday morning at St Mary's and is starting to grow once more.

These are just few of the children and youth activities happening in and around the Benefice!



Pastoral Care

Healing Ministry

On the first Tuesday afternoon of each month a group of between 5 - 8 people meeting to pray and knit or crochet Prayer Shawls. These are then blessed in church, wrapped with a Prayer card, then given to those we know are going through a difficult time. We hope that the prayers and love worked into the shawls bring

comfort to the recipients. This was validated very recently when unexpectedly someone who had been given a prayer shawl some years ago now, said she always keeps it by her and it was a rare evening when she didn't reach for it to wrap round herself to feel the comfort it gives.

We continue to have a healing Eucharist in Saint Mary's on a Sunday morning every quarter, and it is wonderful to see what a powerful time of prayer and support this is.

Asylum Friends

Since December 2022, the Oxford Witney hotel is home to over 200 asylum seekers and the parish has been at the forefront of welcoming our new friends into the local community. In conjunction with other churches, local relief agencies and relevant local authority departments, we have been able to help meet a wide variety of needs, from the provision of warm clothing, help with medical and schools registration to the establishment of English conversation classes. It has been a huge encouragement that many of these new friends (primarily Iranian) have sought to be baptized and to become actively involved in the prayer and worship offered in our churches.

Toby, our Rector, is also involved in a number of initiatives highlighting and promoting the involvement across the Thames Valley, and also nationally through General Synod, supporting churches working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

Buildings & Place

Major enhancements to the Winchester Room in St Mary's, have enabled this Parish resource to be used more widely to offer a space for generous hospitality. The church has also benefitted to a number of other significant improvements which have contributed both to its beauty and useability. Most notably, the implementation of improved audio and video capabilities at St Mary's provide a substantially improved ability to stream services.

Fund raising for the Holy Trinity appeal has been notably successful, and this will allow progress to be made to the repairs to the roof in 2023.

Hailey Church was successful in obtaining a grant to allow it to offer a warm space for those in the local community suffering from the cost-of-living crisis.

Outreach



Once again it has been a busy year for the Windrush Outreach team. The ecumenical team, with people from Witney Benefice and three other churches in the town, is led by Rev. Jacky. Our aim is to reach out onto the new developments in West Witney.

This year has seen the very successful continuation of Messy Church held at the Windrush school with an average of 20 families attending each month.

We have a toddler group every Wednesday in partnership with Windrush School. It is a small friendly group with a regular core of parents and children now attending.

We have an allotment space on the Windrush and Rev Jacky and Heather her house mate who look after it, are getting to know all

the other allotment holders, enjoying socials with them as well as eating what we have managed to grow!

A new recent venture this year has been the start of a monthly social evening at a local pub. Those who have come along from the development are making friends there and tell us they are meeting up at other times.

At Easter last year we set up a find the chick trail on the lamp posts at both Colwell Green and Windrush Place with chocolate prizes for those who completed it. This was very popular!

For the Queen's Jubilee we organised a fun day for all, on the park on Windrush with games, a bouncy castle, stalls and an ice cream van! We invited locals to come along and run stalls alongside the things we organised so saw also saw cakes, face painting, samosas and other activities run by the community. This was a brilliant afternoon with over 400 people attending.

During August we ran fun afternoons on the park for children with lots of games once a week. We were joined by Tom a local community artist employed by the council for a year to work alongside us on Windrush.

September saw our annual Teddy Bears picnic – always popular with around 30 families attending.

In October we ran a 'Messy church light party'. This was held outside in the dark with light themed games, crafts and hot dogs. It proved popular not only with families but also with local teenagers who were keen to show us their scary costumes.

December saw our team helping at Windrush School Christmas fair as well as running a Christmas fun day in the park with Christingles, Christmas crafts and face painting, live stable animals and carol singing in the evening.

We would love to have others join the team so if you are interested in getting involved do speak to Rev Jacky.

Many thanks for the support from the PCC and to Kidlington Baptist Church who also contributed financially to the activities.

Voxtorp Link

After ten years in Voxtorp Benefice and having led its strong engagement with Witney Benefice, kyrkoherde Ulrika Zwaard moved to Värnamo Parish in February 2022. Heidi Sydmark was appointed komminister in Voxtorp and took charge of arrangements for a visit to Witney by a Voxtorp confirmation group in the Spring of 2023, a projected earlier visit having had to be cancelled because of Covid. Plans for this visit are now well advanced. The group will spend one night in Witney, staying at the Premier Inn before going on to Oxford and London - a brief visit to us but very worthwhile in establishing again face-to-face contact between the two Benefices. In October 2022 Olof Ringdahl was inducted as Voxtorp's new kyrkoherde, having moved from Gothenburg diocese, and is pleased that the link with Witney exists. It is hoped that mutually convenient dates can be found in the summer of 2023 for a visit to Voxtorp by a small number of the Witney Benefice Ministry Team

Festivals Ministry at St Mary's



The easing of Covid restrictions has enabled the re-establishment of our Festivals and events ministry across all churches, with many successful community events being hosted by our churches. These continue to be an important way of reaching out to the communities we are called to serve and to build up goodwill across the town.

Social & Eco Justice

Care of God's creation

St Mary's, Hailey and Holy Trinity have all obtained Bronze or Silver Eco awards under the UK A Rocha scheme. The parish has established a strong focus group to encourage continued focus on the care of the environment, and we now host Witney Eco Forum, a group that meets monthly at St Mary's, with speakers and discussions to inspire people to get involved in different aspects of environmental action. We've had speakers from the Witney Climate Emergency Centre, Extinction Rebellion, WODC, Oxford Friends of the Earth, and the Reading and Upper Thames Hydro organisations. Future meetings include a screening of the new film, The Oil Machine, and an update from a local group with a national reach, WASP (Windrush against Sewage Pollution). WEF is open to all in the Witney area, on the second Thursday of each month.

All five churches in the Benefice have installed bird boxes in the church yard and most have been able to leave a section of churchyard as a wild habitat for varied species.

Holy Trinity have been active in trying to improve the environment locally and on a wider basis. In February 2022, they held a Fairtrade morning highlighting, not only the trade inequities in our society, but also the impact our choices make on the world. Over the summer, an enthusiastic team took part in the Wychwood Forest Trust churchyard butterfly surveys, covering both Holy Trinity and St John's, Hailey churchyards on several different occasions.

The Benefice Environment Group met regularly to review environmental activity in the Benefice, to consider further initiatives and to receive information on environmental matters from outside sources. Its role has somewhat diminished now that individual churches are taking responsibility for environmental action and with the Witney Eco Forum coming into being, but the group continues to oversee what is going on in the Benefice environmentally and to act in respect of cross-parish activities

such as Great Big Green Week occasions. It reports on environmental matters to the PCC.

Creationtide was observed at SMV liturgically; a Franciscan friar, Br Sam, preached on the theme of humanity's, dislocation from creation. School sessions on creation themes were run and Councillor Andrew Prosser spoke at the beginning of Great Big Green Week to representatives of local environmental organisations who participated in an exhibition in SMV during the week.

The Parish recently changed its energy supplier in order to become greener in its energy use; this is part of our Benefice commitment to work towards Net Zero.

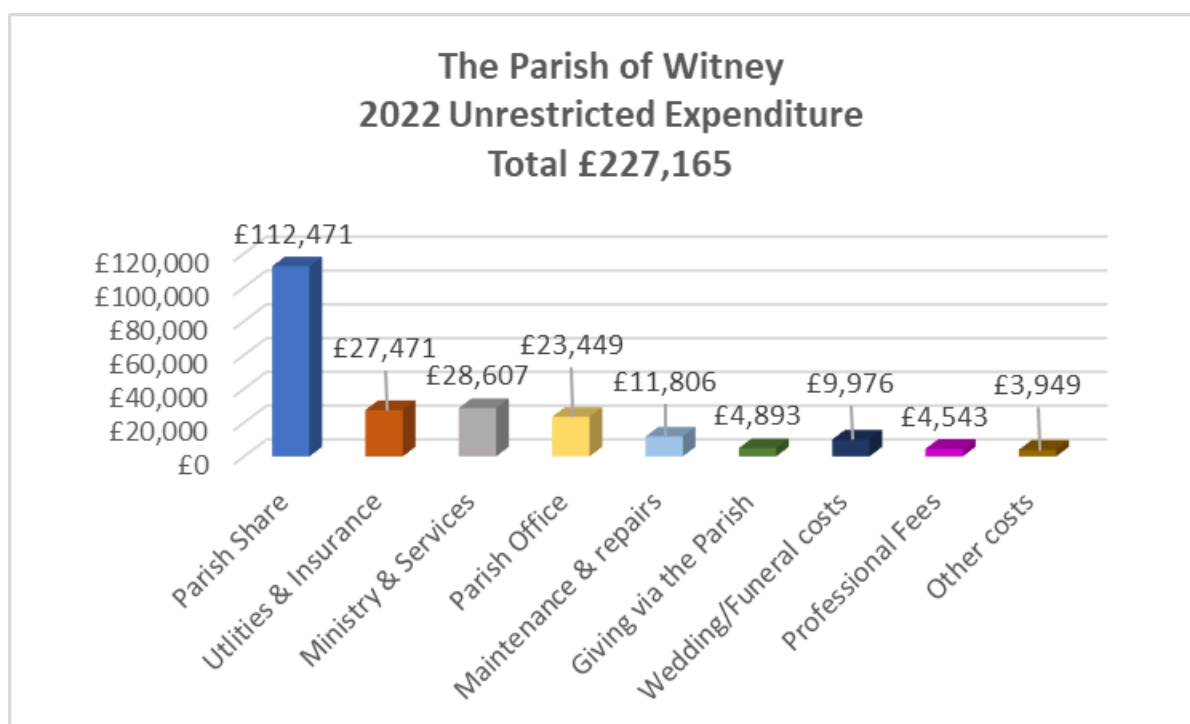
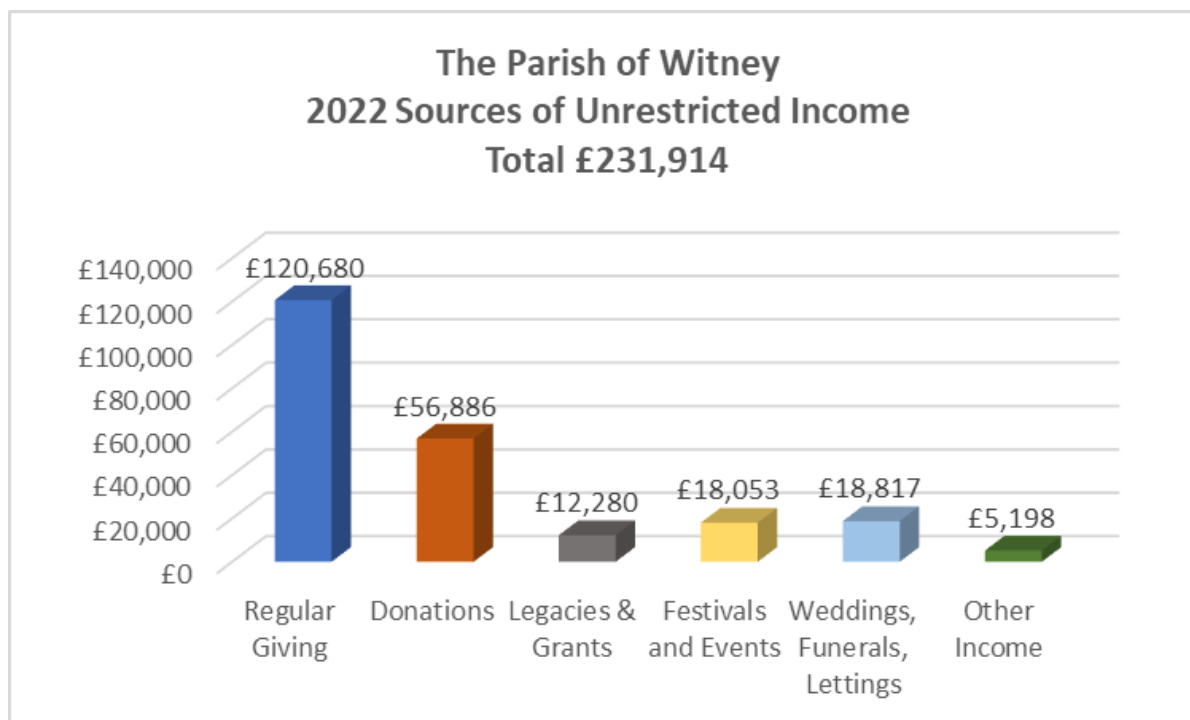
Social Justice

£8,969 was distributed to those in need across Witney from the Hardship Fund, enabled by continued generous donations from our congregations. In addition, a new restricted fund was established to provide donations to the Asylum Seekers who are now resident in the Oxford Witney hotel. A total of £9,784 was distributed from this fund, from donations received from our own congregations, other churches in Witney as well as a grant from the local council. The Parish also continues to support the Besom project, Food bank and overseas aid charities.

As part of our charitable giving, our congregations have supported the following:

- The Pilgrim Society
- The Children's Society (three congregations)
- Save the Children
- Witney Hardship Fund
- Witney Food Bank (two congregations)
- 30 hampers of Christmas Food for local families
- Ukraine via Red Cross
- Christian Aid

3. FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2022



- The income for the year ended 31st December 2022 totalled £487,102, with total expenditure of £439,086, resulting in a substantial surplus of £48,016. These figures include Restricted and Unrestricted Funds

- However, unrestricted income totalled 231,914, while costs amounted to £227,165, resulting in an operating surplus of £4,749.
- This result reflects the continued generosity of our congregations, in response to an appeal for one off donations to enable the Parish to meet its operating budget. This is the third year that such an appeal has had to be launched.
- 2022 income benefitted from the reopening of our churches post pandemic. As a result we were able restart our festival and events ministry. Income from weddings and (sadly) funerals increased substantially.
- Our operating costs increased by 3.3% also largely as a result of the re-opening of our churches for services and the return of in person ministry across the Parish.

Jeremy Lasman, Witney PCC Treasurer

4. Witney Churchwardens' Report

With the lifting of all Covid restrictions, all our churches were able to re-open fully in 2022. In addition, we have also seen the continued growth of our on-line ministry, significantly enhanced with the upgraded audio-visual capabilities in St Mary's. As such, we remain hugely grateful for energy and commitment shown by our Ministry Team, PCC/DCCs, Church Wardens, Deputy Wardens and the whole raft of volunteers who enable the work of the Parish to flourish and grow in our desire to be a community of mercy and kindness.

We must pay particular thanks to Robin Carr, for his faithful and diligent work as Hailey church warden, but who is now stepping down from this role. Keith Ridgeway is also standing down as deputy warden of Holy Trinity, and our thanks go to him for his input during the past year.

Kate Banks & Jeremy Lasman, Witney Churchwardens

5. Witney PCC Report

Since the last APCM in May 2022 the PCC has held four meetings.

The PCC monitors the financial position of the parish and agrees the budget each year. It also receives updates from all the churches, and the activities taking place in the parish.

In the last 12 months:

- The PCC has participated in a review of collaborative working within the Witney Team, conducted by Rev Canon David Tyler, Associate Archdeacon of Dorchester.
- The PCC has received Safeguarding reports from our Safeguarding Officers and is using C of E Parish Dashboard to monitor safeguarding practices. The Safeguarding Policy has been reviewed and updated for 2023.
- Faculty applications were submitted for improved lighting at St Mary's, and repairs to the stained glass at Hailey. A contractor has been appointed to repair the roof at Holy Trinity in the near future.
- The Fire Safety Policy, Baptism Policy, Personnel Committee Terms of Reference, Policy for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion, Conflict of Interest Policy, Storage, Retention & Destruction Policy and Whistleblowing Policy have all been revised. All PCC policies are available to view on the website.
- New General & Fire risk assessment templates have been devised for use in all churches.

Kate Lockwood, Witney PCC Secretary

6. Minster Lovell PCC Report

The PCC meets every two months. Matters discussed – other than the Treasurer's report and the Chairman's report – include :

- Ongoing development of the Crawley Aisle – installing kitchen and cloakroom facilities
- The future of St Kenelm's Hall in the upper village
- Community outreach via the Village Hall services
- Future services at St Kenelm's Church – including dates and format of 'special' services e.g. St Kenelm's Day
- Church fundraising through events
- Maintenance of churchyard

Judith Warwick, Minster Lovell PCC Secretary

7. Fabric Reports

St Mary's Fabric Report

2022 saw the implementation of several major projects to upgrade the facilities in St Mary's. These have progressed under the auspices of the Inspiring Change project and have been largely facilitated by a substantial legacy from the late Dennis Woodhams, as well as a generous donation from a member of our congregation.

We have been able to complete the refurbishment of the Winchester Room, with upgraded facilities to enhance our ability to provide hospitality as well as the capability to offer mixed in person and on-line meetings. These improvements to the room have already been used to the full, not least to welcome and support our new asylum seeker friends.

The church has also benefitted from a substantial upgrade to our audio systems which, alongside with the installation of three powerful video cameras has allowed us to offer significantly improved streaming of services and events via YouTube. Our Sunday services are now regularly accessed by over 50

households online, and the feedback has been resoundingly positive; 'I feel like I'm actually in church'.

We are also extremely grateful for other donations which have allowed us to install two icons in the nacelles either side of the Aumbry in the St George's chapel. These are of St Luke and St Frideswide; their beauty has enabled us to begin to re-imagine this chapel as a place of quiet contemplation and healing.

We have also progressed the project to install a new nave altar and dais in the church, with the wood for the altar being sourced from the cedar of Lebanon in the churchyard which had to be felled in 2019.

All these major improvements have been reviewed and agreed by the St Mary's DCC and PCC and prioritised in line with the wishes of the donors and the stipulation of Dennis Woodhams' legacy.

Improvements to the lighting in the church have been made with spotlights installed to highlight the Nave altar, lectern as well as the new icons. The lighting in the South Aisle and outside the Winchester Room are now controlled by motion sensors, to provide automatic illumination for those entering and leaving the church when it is dark. All the lighting in the church has been converted to LED fittings to improve energy usage and longevity.

The North porch has been redecorated, and the noticeboards upgraded. The noticeboards at the rear of the church have also been improved to show relevant information in a much more informative and attractive style.

The heating system required an urgent repair last year, but fortunately this was the only significant unscheduled maintenance that had to be progressed.

We continue to be hugely grateful for the work of the many volunteers who regularly turn up for church cleaning and ad hoc maintenance, as well as those who enhance the beauty of the church with flower displays and seasonal altar cloths and banners.

Jeremy Lasman, Churchwarden

Holy Trinity Fabric Report

The quinquennial inspection was carried out in April/May. The main priorities are repairs to the guttering and a new north roof, for which we are fundraising. The work has had to be delayed for spring/summer bat surveys.

The five-yearly electrical systems inspection took place in September and the necessary repairs have been completed.

We are waiting for a faculty for two small conifers and a laburnum to be felled, and also confirmation from the council that they will prune branches of the trees nearest to the church. We have had problems with squirrels getting into the building and not being able to get out.

The bell is out of action because of damage to the connection. It will not be repaired until the scaffolding for the roof is up and an extended platform can be added.

All the usual servicing and organ tuning has been carried out.

Dair Henderson, Deputy Warden

Hailey Fabric Report

In the summer 2022 the stone cross fell off the gable end of the chancel. It has been inspected by a contractor.

A member of the congregation tripped and fell on a proud piece of the concrete slab making up part of the church path. This has been made safe and repair work will begin shortly.

Routine gutter clearing revealed the gutter on the north aisle is only very precariously held on. This is because of the timber roof ends are rotten and the screws have rusted. We are awaiting a list of works, to be passed to the DAC to ratification.

The Environmental footprint report produced by the Environmental department of the Diocese recommended the repair of the stained-glass windows, and they calculated the potential energy saving as a result. The same department had

offered a small grant. The works will begin later in the spring when the weather is expected to be warmer.

We have tidied up and cleaned the boiler room; it has been reinstated as a “Tool shed” for the hand tools being used in the churchyard.

The Rector’s Garden has been a source of great joy. The long grass was allowed to get a bit longer so that by June when the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, came to make their 20-year inspection of biodiversity, it was a sea of wild flower blossom. Maiden’s bed straw, Imperforate Hypericum, Oxeye daisy, fritillary, cut leaf Crane’s bill to name but a few of the 428 species of plants and animals found in this space.

However, a small group of individuals who tended their loved ones in the churchyard felt very passionately that the “State” of the churchyard was disrespectful to those buried there. The deputy churchwarden managed several complaints concerning the churchyard. It is worth remembering there was as many compliments as possible about how beautiful it looked.

The 2023 season will see a new person cut the grass in keeping with the Caring for God’s Acre, management of grasses. This is a space that is for all and not the few.

Robin Carr Deputy Warden

Friends of Hailey Church Report

The Friends of Hailey Church is a charity dedicated to supporting the non-fabric needs of St John’s Church in Hailey. Close contact is kept with the Hailey DCC committee to ensure that, where possible, the Friends can grant sums of money to cover expenditure, in both normal running costs and some additional one-off activities borne by the DCC. The Friends raised their own funds in 2022 by running the Hailey Annual Rounders match, hosting the Wood Green School Swing Band for a concert and by generous donations from members. We shall continue our support of Hailey DCC in 2023.

John Haskell

Curbridge Fabric Report

St John's church building is in quite sound condition. There have been a few minor leaks from the roof, but these are now in abeyance. The statutory requirements for electrical safety are in place. There is no water supply to concern us. Gutters are clear and some repainting has been done by the congregation. The stonework is sound, but the bell is no longer working. The church path is subsiding in places but its total replacement would be a mighty challenge financially. Some repairs have been put in place. The churchyard is delightful; part is being allowed to go semi-wild and the whole is full of flowers. Only nine grave spaces remain for burials, but there is ample room for interred ashes.

Ian Galletley, Deputy Warden

Minster Lovell Fabric Report

- Ongoing discussion regarding development of kitchen /cloakroom in the Crawley Aisle
- Heavy rainstorm produced flooding and removal of carpets in the nave. General feeling is that Victorian floor tiles are attractive enough to leave replacement of carpets to discussion when building work is complete on the Crawley Aisle development
- New Noticeboard erected outside the church
- Some repairs on porch roof and general clearing of gutters and drainpipes



Judith Warwick, Minster Lovell PCC Secretary

8. Church Reports

St Mary's Church Report

2022 saw the resumption of the full range of services, festivals and events in St Mary's in support of the various communities for whom our beautiful ancient house of prayer is a centre. The routine of Daily Offices, Wednesday Eucharists and Sunday services has been re-established, and it has been extremely encouraging to be able to welcome a steady stream of newcomers into our fellowship, many of whom have now become firmly established as part of our worshipping community.

St Mary's was able to host the first Parish meal following lockdown on Maundy Thursday, followed by the powerful liturgy including the washing of feet, the sombre and reflective Good Friday services and the Easter vigil, culminating in a joyous Easter Sunday celebration. Similarly, the church was once again busy throughout Advent, hosting civic and schools carol services, and our own Christmas Eve carol service, which saw the church full to capacity for a wonderful celebration of the story of the birth of Christ, enriched by excellent music and choral pieces, led by Francis and the choir.

Our festival ministry restarted in earnest, with the church hosting extremely well attended Beer and Food and Drink festivals in the Spring. Due to the sad death of Her Majesty the Queen, the Oktoberfest had to be cancelled, and we limited activities during the Witney Feast to daytime sessions for local schools, focused on care for the environment.

The monthly Witney Eco Forum continued to flourish, attracting a wide range of speakers and growing numbers of enthusiastic and engaged attendees from Witney and beyond. Facilitated by members of the Benefice Environment Group, the church was awarded a silver A Rocha Eco award.

The installation of enhanced audio-visual capabilities allowed us to improve our offering to those using St Mary's for Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals and other ad hoc concerts and events. This has also enabled us to improve the streaming of services via

YouTube, which has helped those who, for whatever reason cannot attend church services in person.

The refurbishment of the Winchester Room has proved a huge success in support of our ability to offer gracious hospitality. Its upgraded facilities have been put to great use, particularly in November and December, as part of the welcome that we were able to offer to 200 plus asylum seekers who have been moved into the Oxford Witney hotel.

While the arrival of our asylum seeker friends has stretched our resources somewhat, their presence and increasing involvement in the life of St Mary's has enriched so many aspects of our church life, spiritually, emotionally and practically.

This summary highlights just a few of the many activities that have taken place in the past year, which together give a sense of increasing momentum in all aspects of the life of St Mary's. None of this would be possible without the incredible commitment of a large group of enthusiastic volunteers; to all our flower arrangers, servers, welcomers, coffee makers, cleaners, brass polishers, banner makers, embroiders, chair movers, floor fixers, singers, musicians, tech managers, rota organisers, readers, preachers, intercessors and everyone else who graciously gives of their time and energy (apologies for the Oscar acceptance style script) a huge thank you!

Kate Banks & Jeremy Lasman, Churchwardens

Holy Trinity Church Report

It has been a busy year including our Quinquennial Inspection in April/May and 5 yearly electrical systems testing in September.

On 4th June we celebrated the Jubilee with a picnic on Wood Green joined by friends from the local community

Later in June the Charities and Outreach committee organised a quiz, treasure hunt and tea in aid of Guideposts and donations from the barbecue in July went to Ukraine. Five walkers from Holy Trinity took part in the Ride and Stride in September. After

an absence of 3 years, the Quiz and Pancake evening was able to go ahead with the money raised going to ShelterBox.



Fundraising events for the Roof Appeal have continued all year with sales of plants, produce, chocolate, prints, jewellery and knitted goods for sale at various times. The Barn Dance at St. Mary's was a good social event in October, followed by the Top Ten hymns which were enjoyed the following afternoon. The Auction of Promises in January was an entertaining and very successful evening.

In November the coffee morning in aid of the Parish Share was well attended.

There have been 5 Messy Mass services during the year including a Christmas one followed by a short Christingle service.

Christmas cards were delivered to all houses in the neighbourhood. 111 Christmas boxes were filled and we provided 30 bags of Christmas food and essentials to Witney Community Primary School. The church was filled for the service of Nine Lessons and Carols and the choir also sang carols in the area at 3 different locations.

We have joined the Inclusive Church initiative.

Thank you to all those who help in many ways to keep the church in order and running smoothly.

We remember 3 members of our congregation who died this year: Shirley Craig, Anne Ryland-Jones and Jim Alty. May they rest in peace.

Dair Henderson Deputy Warden

Hailey Church Report

The Great Big Green Week was celebrated once again. It was still well attended and once again the Witney Bee exhibition along with the bee keeping equipment was a draw to the younger visitors.

The church was awarded a bronze Eco Church award and is close to achieving the level to warrant a silver award.

The Hedgehog club, a community group that do activities in the Breach Wood asked if they could run two sessions in the churchyard. Both were very well attended. A moth trap set overnight collected multiple moths including an Elephant Hawk moth the size of a child's hand.

Ness started a mother and toddlers' group in the church called "Tiddlers" There are a varying number of young mothers, mothers to be, parents and grandparents and carers , who come and benefit from the space, the time, and the comradeship.

Our churchyard group continues to attract a group of 10-12 individuals, mainly non church goers, and the bulb planting continued with Bluebells, more fritillary, and



more naturalising daffodils. Refreshments are held in the church building, and this has been an opportunity for those coming to see what a special place the church is, as well as the church yard. During the heatwave last year, the inside of the church was also used as a place of shelter for parents and young, avoiding the intense heat.

The church applied for, and received, several nest boxes from Wyvern Waste management, The Owl box will probably be put on

the old chapel churchyard as that is where the Tawny owls usually roost.

Lights of Remembrance was once again a special evening, and again characterised by attendance of non-regular church goers.

The nativity scene was put back in the front of the churchyard and was once again populated by all sorts of animals as well as the more traditional nativity scene characters.

The church has opened as a “Warm Space” where individuals can be in a warm space, have a warm drink and be safe.

A new pew prayer card is in development and shortly to arrive.

A legacy leaflet for those considering bequeathing funds to St. John’s is in a final stage of editing and is hopefully to be published and available this year.

A new Facebook page was started to show what was happening and what had occurred in the church and now has a good following.

Lastly it has been encouraging to see some more new people in church.

Robin Carr Deputy Churchwarden

Curbridge Church Report

St John’s has a small and faithful congregation which continues a traditional form of worship (communion or occasional morning prayer) on Sunday mornings. The church is also quite regularly but rarely used for funerals, baptisms and marriages.



Ian Galletley, Deputy Warden

Minster Lovell Church Report

In the last 12 months Minster Lovell has held the following events:

- Summer concert of renaissance music
- 'Fun Day' community event for village at St Kenelm's Hall
- Flower Festival for the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II
- Christmas Coffee Morning with raffle and tombola
- Carols with Burford School Brass Ensemble

Judith Warwick, PCC Secretary, Minster Lovell



9. Deanery Synod Report

Meetings were held on 15th February on Zoom and 25th May in person.

There was a visit from Bishop Steven including Deanery Synod members on 29th March in St Mary's Witney.

Oxford and Vaxjo Diocese in Sweden link: There was a talk by Eric Sidenall from the Vaxjo Diocese on the Links with Sweden in choirs, confirmation groups, schools and churches.

Witney Deanery Pilgrimage: There was a Witney Deanery pilgrimage from 12th -19th June around all the churches in the Deanery organised by The Rev'd Dr Hugh White with help from Sue Campbell.

Finance: The Deanery share has been paid.

Helen Meyrick, Deanery Synod member

10. Safeguarding

Over the last year the parish has continued to develop and review its safeguarding policies and practices for both in person and online events as some activities are still held this way.

Training has been held in person and online for those who need it. The Diocese encourages anyone who wants to, to undertake basic level training, this - along with foundation and domestic abuse level - is compulsory for PCC/DCC members, children's workers, pastoral visitors, and other roles.

We use the Parish Dashboard system to record much of this work.

Concerns have continued to be reported and dealt with as needed

The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.

Alison Spicer, Parish Safeguarding Officer

