

Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Slindon & St Margaret's Eartham Annual Report 2023

Highlights

- Attendance at “traditional” services consistently at levels similar to those of 20+ years ago, despite significant changes in local population as people pass, downsize and/or move away
- High level of community engagement by rector has broadened appeal and participation
- Momentum increased through the year with family involvement, building on school relationships and Messy Church and using music/singing (children’s choir)
- Church events well supported with more people helping with their organisation
- Continued involvement of Ven Lionel and Sue – a great support both for Peter and the church family

Background:

The PCC of St Mary’s with St Margaret’s is a charity which has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent in promoting the mission of the church in the ecclesiastical parish of Slindon and Eartham. It does so according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England and following the requirements of canon law. The parish is part of the United Benefice of Slindon with Eartham and Madehurst.

Benefice:

There are three churches, a C of E Primary School and two independent schools/colleges within the Benefice.

Parish:

The two churches in the combined parish retain their historic status; but there is a single PCC with representatives from both church communities. The combined population of the two villages is less than 600 people. However, the CofE Primary School in Slindon village draws most of its pupils from outside the parish and we encourage them and their parents/guardians to engage with the church – pastoral care is not defined by geographic boundaries, after all.

Objectives:

The PCC has a Mission Action Plan which is reviewed and updated as necessary. The overarching goal is that we should be welcoming churches that seek to share the love of Christ in our communities through worship, learning, action and sharing. While our primary motivation is the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by enabling as many people as possible to worship in our churches, we also recognise the importance of the church buildings as historic village landmarks at the centre of our communities. We seek to welcome and inform all who visit the churches and encourage their use for non-liturgical events, partly to raise funds, but more importantly in the hope that non-churchgoers will gain spiritual refreshment and encouragement. St Mary’s is on the Old Way pilgrimage route and welcomes occasional overnight “champers” as they make their way to Canterbury. We also seek to involve the wider communities in the maintenance of the fabric of the listed buildings and their churchyards.

PCC Membership:

Members are either ex-officio, elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting or co-opted in accordance with Church Representation Rules.

Incumbent:

This was the second year with Revd Peter Dyson as rector. Bishop Ruth appointed Ven Lionel Whatley as an additional sequestrator during the prior vacancy and the close relationship that subsequently developed has led to Lionel, with Revd Peter’s blessing, continuing to assist us as well as worshipping in our Benefice. In addition, Lionel’s wife, Sue, is playing piano at Family Services and their daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter have joined our worship and assist with graphic design for posters etc.

Reader/Lay Minister: We do not currently have a lay reader: but Christine Tanner was commissioned as an Authorised Lay Minister in the Spring of 2023 and has steadily developed her participation in services and church life with growing confidence.

Churchwardens: Mrs Debbie Stevens was elected as Churchwarden at the APCM joining Tony Richards who continued in post.

Steward/Sacristan: Mrs Margaret Gibbons, who relinquished her role as Sacristan due to ill-health late in 2022, sadly passed away in early 2024 and is sadly missed by all. No one could rival her extraordinary experience and dedication: but Miranda Clarke and Helen Ball have taken over her duties on a rota basis. Apart from preparing the Communion table for services, the role includes managing the various altar frontals and accessories and the supply of wine, wafers and candles. An inventory was undertaken by Miranda and Moira at the turn of the year with some new items purchased along with improved storage.

Deanery Synod Representatives: Mr Tony Richards and Mrs Debbie Stevens. Mr Richards continues to serve on the Deanery Standing Committee.

Honorary Treasurer: Mrs Clare Bacchus. **Honorary Secretary:** Ms Carolyn Ball.

Safeguarding Officer: Mrs Glen Hampshire.

Ex-officio Members: As above. **Co-opted Members:** Annie Simson, Andrew Foakes (pending election)

Elected Members: Mrs Jane Haywood (Eartham rep), Mr Paul Wilkinson, Mr David Slee, Mr Gareth Williams, Mrs Helen Ball, Mr Adam Stone, Ven Lionel Whatley, Ms Jan Diamond and Ms Christine Tanner. Paul and Jan are standing down at the 2024 APCM. Andrew Foakes and Nick Horton are standing for election at the APCM and Miranda Clarke will attend PCC meetings on an ex officio basis (sacristan role).

Committees: The PCC Standing Committee, which is required by law, has the power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council. It consists of The Incumbent, Churchwardens, Treasurer and Secretary. The PCC has two sub-committees. The St Mary's Building Committee manages the maintenance and development of the fabric of the church and churchyard in accordance with PCC direction. The St Mary's Events Committee plans and coordinates a programme of events, primarily in the church, to promote use of the building and to raise money for our mission.

Children's Activities: Messy Church (led by Tina Wilkinson) is generally held in the Primary School and continues to develop. Together with occasional "Open the Book" performances and regular assemblies, it has seeded a greater engagement with family services at St Mary's. The involvement of Elaine Foakes and Sue Whatley alongside Gareth Williams has enabled the development of a children's choir and the revitalisation of the family orchestra that are now at the centre of the monthly Family Service. Some 25 children + their parents now participate, even though the majority do not live within the parish – something we could only have dreamed of two years ago. The children's area in St Mary's was refreshed with new materials and furniture.

Music/Organists/Bells: Gareth Williams leads the choir and music. Ray Adams is our mainstay organist and his commitment is a great blessing: he also plays at Eartham and is in demand for weddings and funeral services. Nigel Creasy plays at Madehurst and occasionally in Slindon. Sue Whatley plays piano at our Family Services. Adam Stone has taken over as Tower Captain and the bell-ringing team perform at most traditional services, as well as weddings on request. David Hobson rings the bells in Eartham. The St Mary's sound system enables a wide range of recorded music to be played at special services, weddings and especially funerals/memorial services.

Foundation School Governor: The incumbent is usually the Foundation Governor at Slindon C of E Primary School. Mrs Emer Cloke stood down as the parish representative on the Slindon Primary School Governing Body in 2023 when her family moved away. Mrs Elaine Foakes has taken her place.

Note: *All roles are undertaken by unpaid volunteers.*

Electoral Roll: The church electoral roll has to be fully revised every 6 years which was carried out during March/April 2019. It is updated in between prior to each APCM. Currently St Mary's numbers 78 parishioners while St Margaret's numbers 14. We continue to qualify for two voting representatives at Deanery Synod meetings.

Pattern of Services & Attendance: The revised pattern of services ran largely unchanged through the year, although Madehurst kindly agreed to start their services 15 minutes earlier to facilitate the rector's journey between churches. This has generally worked well – with one exception. As attendance at the Slindon Family Service grew during the year, with many new people unfamiliar with church practices, the lack of longstanding members to welcome and guide them (because they attend the later Evensong Service)

is less than ideal. A proposal will be put to the APCM to swap the Family Service and Family Communion services around from August 2024 to prevent this clash. All special services and festivals were well attended. Forthcoming services are available to view on the church website with the most imminent on the Home Page – along with a “Donation” button.

Tony Richards continued the weekly pewsheets via email with materials for home worship – Bible notes, prayers, a Psalm and suitably-themed poems.

Lent discussion groups were held both at the Rectory and at Richmond Cottage in the run up to Easter.

Weddings, Baptisms and Funerals/Memorials: There were 3 weddings (+ one blessing/dedication) and 5 baptisms in the parish in 2023. There were 7 funeral/memorial services/interment of ashes. Slindon especially mourned the passing of Pam Lutman, John Waymark and Faith Harris.

Charities: Refer to Treasurer’s report

Thank You: Refer to the Rector’s Report

Review of the Year:

The PCC met 5 times (preceded by Standing Committee meetings to finalise the agendas), including one immediately before the Annual Meeting to approve the accounts.

Support for Ukrainian refugees continued through the year, although those in Slindon all moved to alternative accommodation. A family continues to live with the Hobsons in Eartham.

The successful Summer Fair in the Forge Field and Village Hall was brought forward to June 10th, one of the hottest days of the year. Nonetheless, it was well-attended and raised £2,952.46 for St Mary’s.

Harvest Supper was held once again in the Coronation Hall and was oversubscribed. It was organised by Corinna and the Colman family.

The church hosted a talk by Mark Seaman on the Special Operations Executive in WWII in March, a performance of *HMS Pinafore* by Opera Anywhere in June and an Art Exhibition in July – showing the diversity of activities for which our historic church is put to use.

The *Open the Book* initiative at the Primary School returned on an occasional basis in 2023. Slindon College continued its regular Friday services in the church. Laura, the Primary School Head, addressed the church congregation on Education Sunday. Lionel gave a presentation on the St. Nicholas Orphanage in Kenya during a service in July, followed by a plant sale, in order to raise money for the projects that he has been supporting there over many years. We also welcomed Bishop Ruth who led our worship in November.

The St Mary’s website was managed during the year by Tony Richards and now includes the monthly letter from the Rector as well as other news items and forthcoming services. Many thanks once again go to Simon Howell for his technical support and hosting of the site (as well as that for the village as a whole, including the SlindonLife Round Robin email service). Christine Tanner, our Lay Minister, has continued to maintain and develop the church Facebook page which now has over 200 followers. Nonetheless, villagers still value the traditional monthly Parish Magazine in print form: subscriptions remain stable and it is financed by advertising revenue (many artisans and local businesses find it to be a very cost-efficient promotional vehicle). Niki Adamson continued as its highly professional editor – a great relief since this is a precious skill.

The contactless (card) donation device in St Mary’s has been very successful with only occasional drops in service due to weak mobile signals. There is a link on the St Mary’s website to the same donation service.

Safeguarding is a major focus in the Diocese and there is a continuous programme of renewal and training to be managed. We are extremely fortunate that Glen Hampshire has continued as our Safeguarding Officer to guide the PCC through this process. Both parishes remain accredited with SQP Level 1.

The PCC delivered on its pledge to pay £23,394 towards our ministry costs in 2023. Together with Madehurst’s contribution, this represented the full ministry cost for a benefice with a House for Duty Minister. We have pledged to do likewise in 2024 and that will be a notable achievement. However, we recognise that we are unlikely to be able to bridge the gap between our regular giving from worshippers and the combination of diocesan ministry costs and the church/rectory running costs, including insurance, indefinitely – a challenge for most rural parishes. Our Deanery as a whole also delivered on its pledge: but that only constituted some 79% of the contribution requested by the Diocese: that figure will drop to 77% if

2024 pledges are met overall. Only one parish is pledging more than 100% of its ministry costs in 2024: so cross-subsidies will not resolve the issue for the Diocese.

The Church Fabric and Churchyard

Generally, the fabric of St Mary's is in good order following the extensive work carried out over the last decade or so. Yet again, there was further staining to the south wall decoration due to the persistent problem with the guttering and down-pipe. Further work was done on the gutters etc and this will be instituted on a biannual basis to minimise ongoing issues. However, the original design of the church with the gutters built into the top of the walls is inherently prone to damp ingress when we have periods of exceptional rainfall, as experienced in 2023/4. Pending the next full Quinquennial, we are applying to the Archdeacon for permission to undertake a number of minor repairs to the lead work and pointing in 2024. The lock was replaced on the main South door and access was re-established to the organ bellows-chamber with new keys provided. All other basic maintenance was carried out in accordance with the Building Committee's schedule.

The churchyard became a little unruly following "no-mow May" due to absence and health issues in the team. A working party helped to restore order and a more effective mower was purchased in early 2024. Jonathan Rodwell kindly surveyed all the trees for us and two dead trees/shrubs were removed. The bench nearest the gate became unsafe and unrepairable. Colin Loveless agreed to purchase a new one in honour of his late wife: this was duly installed and is very popular with visitors.

St Margaret's

Mrs Jane Haywood oversees St Margaret's church including the preparation and distribution of duty rotas. Lucie Payton changes the altar frontals; Richard Payton turns the heating on in the winter months; David Hobson rings the church bells before each service; Sarah Green is in charge of the flower arranging rota and Carolyn Ball cleans the church. A member of staff at Great Ballard opens the electric gates for parking for the services. Litchfield and Fox gardening contractors have taken over mowing and strimming the graveyards. A churchyard working party was held in the Autumn and members of the village worked hard all morning to strim and tidy the two graveyards ready for the winter.

The new church roof is now successfully completed and a few problems with guttering have been resolved. Moving forward, two new projects are in the pipeline. The first is to install a handrail for the steps coming up from the road to the churchyard. This is felt to be an important safety issue and quotes for this are being sought by Richard Meynell, the church architect. The heating in St Margaret's is not efficient so the second project is to replace the high, wall mounted heaters.

In order to aid with fundraising for Eartham church and to encourage community use, a Church Events Group has been established to organise events in St, Margaret's for 2024. The first successful event, in January 2024, was an interesting talk by David Hobson about the history behind the wall plaques in the church. This event was successful and well attended. Following on from this, further events in 2024 will be a Pet Service, Harvest Flower Festival and Poetry Evening.

As we are a small (but growing) congregation at St Margaret's, we are very thankful for the support we receive from the churchgoers of St. Mary's. The Evensong Service held in the summer at St. Margaret's is always well attended and it is lovely to enjoy the wonderful singing from St Mary's church choir.

Endpiece

While we can never forget – and indeed continually pray for - the many injustices and inequalities afflicting our world, locally this feels like a year of significant progress for our churches. We stand in stark contrast to the picture of decline regularly painted in our secularised media. We cannot be complacent: but we are managing to draw in new people and to grow our mission. That is the result of enthusiasm, commitment and dedication by so many and we should be proud and thankful for it.

The Churchwardens