

Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Slindon & St Margaret's Eartham Annual Report for Calendar 2025

Highlights

- Attendance at services continues to grow – especially the Family Service and Family Communion
- Momentum maintained with families, building on school relationships, Messy Church and using music/singing (enhanced orchestra/children's choir) + involving sermons/talks
- Continued hosting of a wide range of events in our churches
- Lent and Advent House Groups
- 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 an excepted 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. We are also the "nearest" church for people just outside the parish boundaries (e.g. Fontwell).

Objectives:

The PCC has as its overarching goal that we should be welcoming churches that seek to share the love of Christ in our communities through worship, fellowship, learning, action and sharing. As such, we encourage ecumenical involvement both through close working with our Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ and with other church groups through Churches Together. 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 "chambers" 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 fourth year with Revd Peter Dyson as rector: his "house for duty" position has been extended to 2027 when it will be reviewed again. Ven Lionel Whatley continued to assist Peter with services and much else, as well as worshipping in our Benefice with members of his family. Lionel's wife, Sue, plays piano at Family Services.

Reader/Lay Minister: We do not currently have a lay reader: but Christine Tanner-Lindop is an Authorised Lay Minister and has steadily developed her participation in services and church life with growing confidence. Together with Chris, she has spearheaded the Front Room fellowship initiative.

Churchwardens: Mrs Debbie Stevens and Tony Richards continued in post.

Steward/Sacristan: Helen Ball leads and is assisted recently by Jane Geraets. 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.

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. Mr Mark Midgley shadowed throughout the year and will assume the role at the 2026 APCM when Clare steps down.

Honorary Secretary: Ms Carolyn Ball. Carolyn also represents Eartham on the PCC.

Safeguarding Officer: Mrs Glen Hampshire assisted by Mrs Fiona Else.

Ex-officio Members: Incumbent, Churchwardens, ALM

Co-opted Members: Annie Simson (Madehurst liaison)

Elected Members: Mrs Glen Hampshire, Ms Carolyn Ball, Mr David Slee, Mr Gareth Williams, Mrs Helen Ball, Mr Adam Stone, Ven Lionel Whatley, Mr Andrew Foakes, Mr Nick Horton, Mr Mark Midgley and Mrs Tina Wilkinson. Mrs Clare Bacchus has agreed to stand for PCC membership following the completion of her long service as Treasurer.

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 informal sub-committees. The St Mary's Building Committee manages the maintenance and development of the fabric of the church and churchyard. The St Mary's Events Committee plans and coordinates a programme of events, to promote use of the building and to raise money for our mission.

Children's Activities: Messy Church (led by Jane Sanders) is generally held monthly 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 further development of the children's choir and the revitalisation of the family orchestra that are now at the centre of the monthly Family Service and Family Communion Service. Up to 25 children + their parents now participate, even though the majority do not live within the parish.

Music/Organists/Bells: Gareth Williams leads the choir and music with Elaine Foakes leading the children's choir with Sue Whatley. 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 is Tower Captain and the bell-ringing team perform at most traditional services, as well as weddings on request. 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 Elaine Foakes is the parish representative on the Slindon Primary School Governing Body.

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 prior to the 2025 APCM. It is updated in between prior to each APCM. Currently St Mary's numbers 103 parishioners while St Margaret's numbers 17. Of these 86 are resident in the parish and 34 are non-resident (31 non-resident in Slindon and 3 non-resident in Eartham). We continue to qualify for two voting representatives at Deanery Synod.

Pattern of Services & Attendance: The pattern of services ran largely unchanged through the year, although Eartham changed to a 10.00am start time. Evensong continues to be held at Eartham during British Summer Time and Slindon during the winter – for safety reasons: the Eartham services are well attended by those who find the church's intimacy magical. There is a weekly prayer group meeting on Wednesday afternoons in the St Mary's Lady Chapel, usually led by David Thornley (retired minister). Once a month (on a Wednesday morning) there is a traditional 1662 said Communion service followed by coffee. All special services and festivals were well attended. The Remembrance Service is ecumenical and Advent Sunday was celebrated together with St Richard's (Catholic church). 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 pewsheet via email with materials for home worship – Bible notes, prayers, a Psalm and suitably-themed poems. Advent and Lent discussion groups were held at the Rectory.

A Monday afternoon fellowship session over tea and cakes was started by Christine Tanner-Lindop and, after successful trial, moved to weekly – timed to coincide with school turn-out and the Forge café closing.

Weddings, Baptisms and Funerals/Memorials: There were 2 weddings and 10 baptisms in the parish in 2025. There were 7 funeral/memorial services/interment of ashes. Slindon especially mourned the passing of both David and Dineen Olby who had been prominent members of both the church and the village communities over many decades prior to downsizing to Chichester.

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.

The Summer Fair was held on June 7th / 8th with Andrew Foakes leading the organising team once again. Because of severe weather warnings, a decision was made to run a reduced programme inside the village hall on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Attendance was good in the circumstances, although the money raised was inevitably reduced. Harvest Supper was held once more in the Coronation Hall and was oversubscribed. It was organised with great efficiency by the Event team + helpers.

On March 12th, Andrew Foster gave a talk on *Slindon, the Archbishops of Canterbury, and Chichester, 686-1542* which was accompanied by an exhibition of display panels and a leaflet. The exhibition continued through to May and represented the village's contribution to the general 950th celebrations for Chichester diocese and cathedral. The materials were subsequently taken up by Lambeth Palace.

On the 27th-29th June, St Mary's hosted an art exhibition. Our resident guitar quartet gave a concert on September 27th, once again raising money for our associated orphanage and school in Kenya. The church hosted a Christian pantomime – *It's a Boy* – on 13th December which filled the church with much joy.

The *Open the Book* initiative at the Primary School continued on an occasional basis, and both the school and Slindon College held key services in the church. Lionel held his annual plant sale in order to raise money for the projects in Kenya which have now become an associated charity for our church.

The St Mary's website was managed during the year by Tony Richards which includes the monthly letter from the Rector as well as other news items and forthcoming services + a donation button. 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). The calendar function was amended during the year to avoid external charges but without losing functionality. Christine Tanner-Lindop 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 additionally 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. Andrew Foakes kindly assisted with the management of the advertising. The distribution network of volunteers was reviewed and updated.

The contactless (card) donation device in St Mary's has been very successful - a new one was installed after the original one developed unresolvable problems and it has since been working well. 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 and that she now has Fiona Else to help her manage training and admin. Both parishes are working towards Level 3 on the new dashboard-based scheme.

The PCC delivered on its pledge to pay our full ministry costs (in conjunction with Madehurst). We have pledged to do likewise in 2026. That is a remarkable achievement for a small rural benefice and ultimately reflects the success of Revd Peter's ministry and the efforts of all our volunteers. However, we are eating into our reserves and are planning a Stewardship campaign during 2026 to encourage more regular giving and greater involvement from the wider community in maintaining our historic building and our pastoral mission.

The Church Fabric and Churchyard:

The required Quinquennial Inspection by the church architect was undertaken which always identifies a number of issues to be addressed over varying timescales, some by our own resources and others requiring contractors. Thanks to the "minor repairs" carried out in 2024/5, the only major work identified was the longstanding issue with the South porch: this was subsequently found to be more extensive than apparent:

rectification has spread into 2026 and effectively wiped out the building fund reserve. We will require fund-raising going forward. Usual annual/bi-annual checks (fire extinguishers, lightening conductor, etc) were passed without incident.

Prior to the depletion of the building fund, we had instituted a project to address the church lighting – for safety, efficiency and enhancement – as reported at the last APCM. In addition, the onset of the cold snap demonstrated that our heating system is struggling to keep the congregation warm and an investigation into enhanced heating was added to the project. Mrs Debbie Stevens put a huge amount of work into identifying and costing alternatives for the PCC to consider, including consultation with the DAC. However, we are unable to proceed until we have raised sufficient funds through a combination of donations and grants over the coming 1-2 years.

St Mary's is cleaned every 2 months (end of March, May, July, September, November and January) by contractors. The churchyard is kept in extremely good order by a team of volunteers supplemented by working parties as necessary. It is a place of beauty and tranquillity (except during the Easter Day egg hunt!)

St Margaret's

Fleur, Carolyn and Jane oversee St Margaret's church. Mrs Jane Haywood prepares the duty rota for services. Mrs Fleur O'Kelly looks after the upkeep and maintenance of the church in liaison with architect Richard Meynell and Great Ballard School. Ms Carolyn Ball keeps the church beautifully clean and represents Eartham on the PCC. Lucie Payton changes the altar frontals; Richard Payton turns the heating on in the winter months; Sarah Green is in charge of the flower-arranging rota; and Rev Peter is ringing the bells before services. A member of staff at Great Ballard opens the electric gates for parking. David Hobson oversees churchyard mowing & maintenance. He has negotiated with Great Ballard and they will mow the church area on a regular basis in the growing season for an annual fee of £500 replacing Skye Litchfield. For the newer graveyard across the road, David Hobson is helped by Simon Ulrich and nephew for which we are very grateful. David has installed a new water butt beside the church. A great help to flower arrangers!

Couzens continue to help with minor repairs: the intensity of rainfall in recent times is a challenge for all ancient churches.

The Church Events Group organised a well-attended poetry & wine evening in November. Our crib service in December was followed by a generous tea at Home Farm, courtesy of Richard and Lucie Payton. The annual Pet Service was as joyful as ever - treats for the pets and a collection in aid of RSPCA Mount Noddy Animal Centre.

The third Sunday of the month Evensong at 6.00pm during the summertime is swelled by Slindon worshippers and their wonderful choir. Wine is served after the service.

Endpiece

However imperfect, we should always remain thankful for the Church of England's commitment to maintain a church in virtually every parish in the land, regardless of financial viability. While other denominations have reduced and consolidated their presence, especially in rural areas, we remain providing a home for worship and reflection + pastoral care for all, whether regular churchgoers or not. Our villages often seem like oases of calm in an increasingly troubled world and our church families are a key element in creating community cohesion. Locally our churches are bucking the national trend by engaging with a significant percentage of the local population – even if not every week! 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