**Formal Reports for 2024**

**a. Ravensden Church Annual Report of the PCC 2024**

**Who and what we are**
Ravensden Church is in the Diocese of St Albans and Sharnbrook Deanery and was part of the three Parish Benefice of Wilden with Ravensden and Colmworth. During 2019 the Benefice agreed to work in partnership with the Benefice of Bolnhurst and Keysoe. In 2024 an application was made to the Diocese for the benefice of Bolnhurst with Keysoe and the benefice of Wilden with Colmworth and Ravensden to be held in plurality by one incumbent. This was granted a Bishop’s Pastoral Order in January 2025. Rev’d Timothy Wilson was installed as Rector on 2nd March 2025.

The village of Ravensden is about 4 miles north of Bedford and consists of a series of rural hamlets each with a distinct personality. In addition, an urban estate had been built which falls within the ecclesiastical boundary of the village (not however within the Local Authority parish boundary). A development of houses is currently being built at the top of Cleat Hill. There has been extensive consultation across the North Bedford villages regarding the rail link from Oxford to Cambridge. The outcome of this consultation is due later in 2025.

All Saints Church is a grade one listed building which stands at the top of the hill in Church End. There has been significant work carried out on the internal walls of the church this year. This was funded by the hard work of the Friends of the church and the generosity of parishioners.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a corporate body established under Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is responsible for the financial affairs of the church together with the care and maintenance of the church building and its contents. The PCC co-operate with the Minister to promote the whole mission of the Church: pastoral: evangelical: social and ecumenical.

Unfortunately, the church remains without Churchwardens however members of the PCC and a team of volunteers have kept the church operating.

The church is well supported by the wide community and the Friends Group has held several successful fundraising events over the last year.

**Aims and Purposes**

The Church continues to maintain strong links with Ravensden Church of England Primary Academy.

Our primary objective is the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

**Worship**

The Church has continued to meet and worship 3 times per month with a Holy Communion service on the first Wednesday and third Sundays of the month and Morning Prayer on the first Sunday of the month. There were also services for Harvest, Remembrance Day, Lighting the Cross, a Carol Concert and Midnight Service on Christmas Eve.

**Mission Action Plan**

The PCC identified the themes of services, partnerships, outreach and music as part of the current Mission Action Plan. We have achieved some of the goals set in the Plan including a coffee morning held by the Friends of the Church, a Christmas concert held by Kimbolton School and a donation to the Archbishop’s Fund from the Harvest service.

**b) Rector’s Report**

**WCRKB APCM Rector’s Report for 2024, March 2025**

2024 was not an easy year as I reflect. The first 3 months were really busy for 3 reasons. I was planning cover for my 3 months Extended Study Leave; we decided to hold all 5 APCMs before Easter which took a lot of work and preparation (and for 3 of our Parishes it was impossible to get their Annual 2023 accounts independently and externally examined in time, so we had to hold extraordinary APCMs after I returned later in the autumn); and Easter being very early at the end of March meant Lent Groups and other things needed planning straight after Christmas! But Lent Groups were good – we held two sets at either ends of our Benefices - lunchtime in Keysoe and afternoons in Ravensden - and these were well attended. Holy week and Easter services in all 5 churches were very special, and despite not holding any regular family services, three Easter Egg Hunt/Activity Mornings/Afternoons were very well supported with a good opportunity to tell the full Easter story to many children and families.

As with previous years, in the winter months we held just one joint weekly Sunday 10am Communion service going around the churches, some of which were in ‘warm spaces’ rather than in the main church buildings. We did this in both January and February, but returning to 9:30am & 11am services in March. And then everything changed for Easter, and following advice from the Diocese, we held just one 10am Communion service each Sunday during my 3 months ESL from April – June. This gave everyone an opportunity to experience different services, times and venues and reflect on the way forward.

I really appreciated my time away – especially 2 weeks individually guided silent retreat in North Wales and a month in Ridley Hall Theological College in Cambridge. There I joined lectures and their community life; also reading, studying and writing – including writing a leaflet on the Rev Francis Dillingham, Rector of Wilden 1600-1625 who was one of the translators of the 1611 King James Authorised Version of the Bible. Dillingham was clearly a gifted man with a brilliant mind and yet very humble and passionate about the Christian Faith and the Good News of Jesus Christ. I also enjoyed some time away and meeting up with family and friends as well as jobs at home and celebrating 30 years of The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood, back in Hereford with my 4 colleagues of 1990 – the 3 women had had to wait until 1994 to be ordained Priest. It was also great to have our son and daughter in law with our grandson over from Australia and we had a very special weekend with all 4 of our children and spouses and 2 grandsons together for the first time – 12 slept in our house for 2 nights! But I did find it very difficult to ‘switch off’ and relax over my three months Study Leave, and returned quite inconclusive about what my and our 5 Parishes’ next step in ministry might be.

When I went away, I was very aware that dear Eunice Welbourn who turned 90 in February was terminally ill. I played for Wilden Easter Sunday Evensong, and took Eunice Communion at Home before flying to Northern Ireland the next morning. Towards the end of my Study Leave, I had the privilege of visiting Eunice in the Hospice a few times and taking her communion once again. She died just a few hours after my last visit, and has left a massive hole across our 5 parishes as organist, choir leader, long term PCC secretary and helping with administration and printing across all 5 Parishes - editing the Newsletter until the last month in which she died! But Eunice also trained up many to carry on what she has so faithfully done. So we miss her, and her funeral in early July was an amazing tribute to all she has done but also left for us. She even played for one last funeral whilst I was away of a former choir member, just a month before she died.

On my return from ESL I met in early July with our 5 Churches Group which has met every 2 months now for nearly 6 years with 2 reps from each church. There was a strong feeling of continuing our main Communion Service at 10am around all the churches (Wilden on 5th Sundays, but continuing with their twice monthly evensong). We would have additional 11:15am services of various types also moving around the churches. This began in August, and continued until Christmas; with 10am Communions every Sunday moving around the Churches, and just the 4th Sunday 11:15am Colmworth All Age Service continuing. This service has been a great encouragement and is the only regular monthly service with any children or young people present. We were also all very concerned in October when Geraldine collapsed following a heart episode, and is still awaiting treatment. Geraldine is having to be very careful with what she does, especially not standing too long or being in cold churches – which has limited her availability to lead services or preach. But as ever Geraldine has continued to work hard and be very supportive in so many ways especially the weekly Wilden Wednesday coffee mornings, social and fundraising events, and attending services when she can. As ever I really appreciate Geraldine’s support and partnership in the ministry in these 5 churches, and we all pray her treatment would happen and be effective as soon as possible.

Also at the 5 Churches Meeting in July, Archdeacon Dave joined us to discuss how the 5 churches might better work together, especially as the ‘Suspension of the Living’ was up for renewal in August. This ‘suspension’ couldn’t be renewed again without a new reason as the maximum time of 2 x 5 year terms since August 2014 had expired. Since I was appointed interim Priest for just 2 years in January 2019, and even when I was made Priest in Charge in February 2021, my post has been very temporary. At any time I could have been moved on, my post terminated, or a different new Rector appointed all despite my temporary presence in these Parish for nearly 6 years!

There was a unanimous strong desire that we work more legally together – hoping we could become 1 Benefice rather than 2 which makes things difficult for readings of Banns and other matters. But there was no desire to become 1 Parish or even a Joint Parish. However, becoming one joint Benefice is a long protracted legal matter involving many months of consultation that can be delayed and drag on for a very long time! And as our 5 Parishes are very small and still not sustainable in the medium term, some future flexibility is need. So it was proposed and agreed that the two Benefices would be held in Plurality under one incumbent (which is purely in the gift of the Bishop if no objections are lodged within a short time period); the suspension could be lifted, and I would be appointed the first Rector of the Benefices of Wilden with Colmworth and Ravensden, and Bolnhurst with Keysoe. This much shorter consultation went through and was agreed in January 2025, so I should have become Rector on 1st February 2025, but due to some clarification and new wording needed it all finally happened on 1st March, so I was collated and installed by Archdeacon Dave at Ravensden on Sunday 2nd March 2025, still as a 0.8 Post.

But over last summer as I’d returned from my Study Leave, I began to think more about my role and the future long-term mainly financial sustainability of our 5 Parishes. So also in that 5 Churches Meeting in September, I shared that I believed looking forward that unless we were able to grow as churches in the short to medium term, even with the pressures of our very small populations, I could see my post being reduced from 0.8 to 0.5 or 0.6, either in my time or almost certainly for my successors. We had seen the 6 Churches of the Stodden group adjoining us have a new priest just appointed at 0.5 despite many decades of full time Incumbents. I shared that whilst I loved these churches, the people are wonderful, the villages a delight to work in, and there are lots of opportunities especially with our 3 very small schools (who also are struggling to survive and all now working in partnership with other schools), there are just not enough of us in our church congregations and worshipping communities. Also it is sobering to note with me despite being nearly 63, I am usually the youngest person in attendance at nearly all our services and all 5 Churches.

We also had an ‘Away Day’ with 8 of us from all 5 churches in November as a totally free gift at a new conference centre in Northamptonshire. During this day we considered just 2 big questions: ‘What could it look like to be One Church in 5 or more locations?’; and ‘What would be our priorities for a 0.5/0.6 Incumbent?’. What came out of this was that largely we still work as 5 independent but interdependent Parishes. We do share a number of aspects – myself and Geraldine’s ministry for a start! And a shared paid Part Time administrator. We share Deanery Synod representation and Safeguarding (although I pay tribute to Jane Snaith and Alison Baggott who really do need an extra member of the team especially since Caroline Griffin (now Silby) from Keysoe married in October and moved to Kimbolton). We also had a ‘try before you buy’ card giving machine in the Autumn and have purchased one early in 2025 that is already being used in 3 of our churches to make it easier for people to give, pay and donate in our increasingly cashless society. But very few people move around to worship at each others’ churches and the vast majority only worship in their own Parishes. This is noted across the Diocese in most rural churches, but there are examples after many decades of working together that people have felt more ‘one church in a variety of places’, but here I do not see this development taking place at least in the medium term. I also note an almost 100% commitment from our PCC members to attend our PCC meetings, but we do struggle to get 2 reps from each church to our 5 Churches Meetings and even to joint PCC meetings we’ve had with the Archdeacon. But on the other question, I was greatly encouraged by our shared priorities for an incumbent even if this went down to a 0.5 post. Overwhelmingly (without any prompting from me) people wanted me and my successors to continue building links with our schools, families, children and young people. This really lifted my heart as I so enjoy and see the short term (and by faith the long term) benefits of this. However, this does not immediately bring growth to our usual worshipping communities, but we are building faith that maybe others will reap in the future in other places as these children and young people quickly grow up.

Also in the Autumn I did begin to explore other roles and ministries beyond our Parishes – as I had worked 0.2 for the Diocese when I first came here on their ‘Growing Younger’ mission project, which finished during COVID and nothing followed on from this involving me. But nothing came of these explorations and I did realise how hard it would be for me to reduce what I was already struggling to fit into 0.8 down to 0.5 or 0.6! However, during the Autumn I also took over co-facilitating the Deanery CYPF (Children, Young People and Families) project for which we have had national funding of £20,000 for 2024 and 2025. This mainly pays for using ‘The Resources Cupboard’ - an agency working alongside us and starting some new initiatives which I hope we shall see during 2025. I was also elected onto the Diocese of St Albans’ Board of Education. I have realised over nearly 35 years of Parish Ministry that I am at heart an ordinary Parish Priest. But I really value other things beyond and outside my Parochial Duties to support and stimulate me and give me a wider perspective of what God is doing across his world. So I do find I am perhaps ‘giving’ 0.2 time to wider matters of the church.

But all this still does not face our challenges here of very small congregations and we’re all growing older. I realise how hard many work to keep things going especially with the pressures of raising more funds and managing our 5 mediaeval listed Parish Churches (especially with new heating challenges!) and with 2 still on the Heritage ‘at risk’ register. But it is so encouraging to have Ravensden finally sorted with its internal walls repaired and redecorated in 2024 (even though they also face further 5 figure sums following their QQ report last year, mainly for repairs to ancient stonework – as in all 5 of our Parish Churches).

Sadly, financially we ended the year in a worse situation than in 2023 covering the Parish Share. 4 Parishes paid in full in 2023 and we were just £4,700 short of the total. But only 3 paid in full in 2024, leaving us £8,621 short of the total despite Diocesan Grants to 2 of our Parishes, the larger of which is not available again in 2025. Whilst we are grateful for God’s provision mainly through our generosity to one another for that shared support we all give, unless our collective annual Parish Share can be paid in full by all 5 churches, we have a very uncertain future ahead of us.

We have another 5 Churches awayday booked for May 2025 after our first joint APCM, and so far we have 10-12 attending. The main thing we’re looking at that day is our Mission and Outreach. We long to have more people joining the life of our churches, as well as more people to help us reach out more effectively to serve our communities.

I realise my report this year has been quite personal as I have detailed the challenges I believe we all face. I hope by God’s grace to have another 5-7 years or more active full time ministry ahead of me. We cannot just continue as we are in a ‘Mr Micawber’ kind of way hoping something will happen, even though we are people of faith and of course constantly look to God for His guidance and provision. But we also have to step out in faith and face the challenges God allows to be before us. Lots is said about ‘small is beautiful’, ‘you’re never too old’, ‘a satsuma is not a failed orange’ and whilst these are all true they must not be used as an excuse not to face our challenges. We do have to look at pruning in order to encourage new growth and life. And maybe we need to look more to those around us especially in our Deanery to work more closely together. And also amongst our 5 wonderful congregations as we support each other. But let’s carry on in faith, risk, trust and hope, as we know that Jesus has promised that He will build His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But that does not mean that the church will just continue in the way it always has as the church has changed so much over the centuries. Together we seek to proclaim afresh the Good News of Jesus Christ to this and the next generation.

Timothy Wilson, Rector of the Benefices of Wilden with Colmworth and Ravensden,
 and of the Benefice of Bolnhurst with Keysoe; March 2025.

**c) Treasurer’s Report**

**Ravensden Treasurers Report 2024.**

Unfortunately things do not get any easier for small rural parishes. The amount of required expenditure on essentials such as light, heat, water, insurance and the maintenance of both the property and the churchyard, continues to increase.

The Balance on the main Church Account at 31st. December 2024 showed a reduction of £1456 – 00 over the previous year. This is mainly due to a reduced income {more of which later} but also the Church being required to find a larger amount in respect of maintenance of the churchyard, the cutting of the grass etc. The Grant from the Parish Council has been greatly reduced over recent years.

The balance on the Friends Account {administered by the P.C.C. but particularly restricted to maintenance and repair of the building] was also reduced by £26000 - 00 due entirely to the completion of the restoration of the internal walls project, the installation of the new Chancel step and redecoration on completion. General opinion appears to be most favourable.

A new oil tank was installed {to replace that which was leaking into the bund} but fortunately the whole cost of this was recovered by grants. Not so of course the actual cost of a full fill of oil, which was rather a shock !

The recent Q.I. has suggested some much needed repairs to sections of the exterior stonework although fortunately not to the level of expenditure required on the walls.

Fund raising by the Friends will hopefully be resumed shortly to enable us to get these works put in hand before they become even more costly.

Our thanks must be recorded to the Friends organisation as without their consistent efforts none of this essential maintenance work would have been possible

The continuation of the Gift Aided ’’ Parish Giving Scheme’’ has meant an improved regular cashflow situation. This produces a guaranteed income plus tax refund each month, which can actually be budgeted for. Therefore, there is at least some certain income with which to meet routine expenditure.

However it should be said at this point that Ravensden has experienced a reduction in its income of around £500 – 00 this year, simply because of the smaller number of services that have been held here and with the consequent loss of a plate collection. This is in no way a criticism of either the Rector or the Benefice but simply a fact of life, in that our one ordained member of the clergy is now being expected to spread himself over more parishes.

Although we have not met our Parish Share Contribution {the amount that we are required to pay to St. Albans Diocese every year} in full, we did manage to pay £4000 – 00 almost half of that requested.

The Cross on the tower was lit again this year. Thanks are once more due to the extremely kind person who every year makes a contribution that covers the entire cost of the additional electricity required to keep this lit. Thank you so much.

The P.A.T Testing of all portable electrical appliances is due during the coming year and this will add a not insignificant amount to our routine expenditure.

A copy of the Annual Accounts is attached together with the Internal Examiners Clearance Certificate (see attachment 1). Thank you also to Carolyn for continuing to undertake this examination on our behalf.

Trevor N. Stewart.

Hon. Treasurer. 16.4.2025

**d) Appointment of the Independent Financial Examiner for 2024**

**e) Financial report for the year ending 31st December 2024**

**See attachment 2**

**f) Ravensden Church Electoral Roll**

**5. Elections**

**6. Other Reports**

a) Building and Churchyard Report

b) Sharnbrook Deanery Synod Report

**Sharnbrook Deanery Report for APCMs**

**Meetings**

Synod met three times this year (the February meeting was cancelled because of illness). We were addressed by Becky May from the Resources Cupboard, Suzanne Clackson from the Diocesan Dispute Advisory Service. At the final meeting, a discussion on stewardship was followed by a ‘lay-only’ session on the subject of lay representation, at which **James Stewart from Melchbourne was elected as our new Lay Co-Chair**: we are delighted to welcome him to the post – please talk to him if you have anything to raise at deanery or diocesan level. A ‘Walk Through the Bible’ training session on the Old Testament took place in February and a Deanery Quiet Day on ‘The Parables of Jesus’ in September.

**Work with Children, Young People and Families**

Drawing on the experience of the Deanery Our Voice project, the Deanery Hub has now been in operation for over a year, with the help of the Resources Cupboard, Scripture Union and The Alban Way, and resourced by the national church Growing Faith Foundation. This project is one of the first in the diocese and the only one covering a rural deanery. It has helped to resource new forms of worship, including youth-led services, supported churches with advice and new projects and has been developing materials for schools to cover the moving up from Year 6 to secondary school and work to support grandparents. The Resources Hub would be delighted to hear from you if you would value help or support in these areas.

**Changes of People in 2024**

We were pleased to welcome **Revd Simon Aley** as Priest-in-Charge of the Stodden Benefice.

After many years of sterling service as Lay Co-Chair and work with Our Voice, **Keith Williams** finally called time on his work with the Deanery Hub and we are very grateful for his huge contribution. **Revd Tim Wilson** is now the main contact between the Deanery Hub and the Deanery Standing Committee.

**Lisa Mitchell** has retired from the Standing Committee and as minute-taker for the Deanery Synod and we thank her for her valuable service.

In the **Diocesan Synod** elections in May the following were elected: Lay members: David Clark (Clapham),

Graeme Dawson (Felmersham), Gillian Nursaw-Smith (Yelden), James Stewart (Melchbourne).

Clergy members: Revd Canon Stephen Liley (Clapham), Revd Dr Min-Min Peaker, Revd Dr Diana Stretton (Sharnbrook), Revd Tim Wilson (WCRKB).

**Revd Dr Diana Stretton** has been appointed to the Diocesan Board of Mission & Ministry and **Revd Tim Wilson** to the Board of Education.

**Revd Canon Stephen Liley** ends his ten-year term as Rural Dean in May 2025; **Revd Nick Munday** is also stepping down as Assistant Rural Dean.

**Parish Share**

In 2024 the Deanery paid 83.5% of the share requested by the Diocese, leaving a shortfall of just over £90,000 (about the same as last year). Although this was well below the average for the diocese as a whole, it is recognized that this still represents a sacrifice on the part of many parishes and individuals. Thank you for all your support. Please continue to be generous, reflecting our Lord’s abundant generosity to us; and do seek help from Kate Ford (the Diocesan Giving Officer) if you need advice on how to make easier the task of raising finances in these difficult times.

Revd Nick Munday (Assistant Rural Dean)

March 2025

c) Friends of Ravensden Church Report

Report from The Friends of the Church for 2024

6th February 2024 was our first meeting of the Friends. Alison updated us about the architect’s specifications and the estimated cost of the work inside the church. £30 - 35K plus VAT and then the architect’s fees +VAT. The current bank balance was £28,862 so more fundraising was discussed. We agreed to arrange a pub night in the village hall with music by Freddie’s Barnet. More suggestions were another cheese and wine evening in the church and a coffee morning in the summer.

 30th April - at our next meeting we were updated on the cost of the works in church. Quote of £23K + VAT, with architect's fees of about 13% of the quote, with VAT being reclaimable. The meeting was mainly to discuss the arrangements for the pub night on Saturday 8th June. More expenditure - the oil tank has had to be replaced, and the Friends agreed to pay for this. It was decided to postpone the cheese and wine evening until after the work had been finished in the church.

Saturday 8th June – Pub Night. We had lots of offers of help and donations of vouchers for the raffle. The village hall did not charge us for the evening, but we donated money to their building capital programme. The evening was not as well attended as I had hoped but those who came really enjoyed themselves.

Saturday 6th July - fundraising coffee morning in church.

Cross lighting and Carol Service - as usual the Friends provided the refreshments for both of these services. Many thanks to all those who donated mince pies and mulled wine, helped set up and clear away. We asked for donations and people were very generous.

Cheese and wine evening update - to save me having sleepless nights and others on the Friends having to ask favours of their friends I have contacted The Bedford Cheese Company/ The Barn at Cardington to ask if they will organise an evening for us. They do arrange events, but the boss is in hospital at the moment, so I was asked to phone back in about a week (beginning of May)

 Chris Bend. Chair Friends of the Church 24th April 2025

d) Ravensden Primary School

**7.Safeguarding**

**8. GDPR**

**9. Any Other Business**

**Attachment 1**



**Attachment 2**



