**Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Keysoe**

**Reports for 2024 for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting to be held on 11th May 2025**



**Details of the services and events within the Benefices are given on the wcrchurches.org website.**

**ALL ENQUIRIES about Baptisms, Weddings or Funerals (Church, Crematorium or Woodland Site) or on pastoral matters to:**

**Mrs Alison Belding, PA to Reverend Timothy Wilson , Rector for the Parishes of St Nicholas Wilden, St Denys Colmworth, All Saints Ravensden, St Marys Keysoe and St Dunstans Bolnhurst
Email:** **rectorspa@wcrchurches.org**

**or Reverend Tim Wilson (Rector)** **revtimwilson@wcrchurches.org**

**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**

**Safeguarding Report for 2024**

Safeguarding continues as a priority within the Church of England. All Churches and Chaplaincies in the Diocese of St Albans receive regular newsletters and updates from the Safeguarding Team.

The Safeguarding Hub has been introduced to sit alongside the Parish Dashboard, this has been designed to help with safer recruitment and people management.

All the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for St Mary’s Church, Keysoe PCC have been updated. A WiFi system for the Benefice has been established to enable the process to be completed regarding the training courses. It is planned that these will take place with the PCC members and those of the Benefice. This will ensure the training is undertaken in a supportive environment.

**All Safeguarding Policies are to be reviewed annually by the PCC.**

**Safeguarding APCM Declaration**

‘PCC members consider that they have, to the best of their knowledge, taken all reasonable steps to comply with their duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016. They confirm that there have been no incidents recorded since the last APCM’.

**Benefice Safeguarding Co-ordinators – Mrs Alison Baggott and Mrs Jane Snaith**

**Hon Secretary’s Report for 2024**

In 2024 the PCC consisted of 8 members, Mrs Griffin having resigned at the APCM due to her forthcoming marriage. We wish her well and thank her for all her work for St Mary’s over the last few years:

Mrs Mary Clay,Mrs Peggy Robins,Mrs Jenny Carter,Mr Jeff Kearns, Mrs Ruth Gill,Mrs Christine Cinnamond,Mrs Geraldine Skinner and Rev Tim Wilson.

Mr Jeff Kearns resigned at the end of 2024, leaving the council consisting of 7 members going forward.

Mr Kearns will continue to look after the faceless clock and the heating for which we are very grateful. We thank him for his input on building and repairs and ensuring we have music at our services.

Mrs Tania Pickett took over the treasurership in 2024 from Mrs Geraldine Skinner who had kindly stood in temporarily following the resignation of Mr Bob Bryans. A big thank you to Mrs Tania Pickett who has now been our Treasurer for one year. She has kept our accounts in good order and has taken us to on line banking (how did we manage without it)!

In January 2025 Mr Peter Platt agreed to act as Independent External Examiner for Keysoe PCC following the resignation of Mr Nick Robinson.

Despite our reservations over the sale of Glebeland, it would appear that the Diocese has moved forward to an agreement on the sale, to be finalised In 2025.

3 funerals took place during the year, and 2 weddings were celebrated.

St Mary’s hosted the Archdeacon’s visitation in July and refreshments were provided and enjoyed by a congregation of 90.

The Fundraising group worked hard and arranged several events: cream teas, Hog roast, whit walk, grand draw and harvest lunch.

An Open Gardens afternoon in conjunction with St Dunstan’s Bolnhurst proved most successful.

Thanks are due to our hard working clergy: Rev Tim Wilson, Rev David Miller , Rev Jane Bass and especially to Reader Mrs Geraldine Skinner who helped keep us going during Rev Tim’s sabbatical. We wish her a speedy recovery from her present ill health.

**Hon Secretary - Christine Cinnamond - February 2025**

**Report on the Electoral Roll**

The Electoral Roll remained during constant in 2024 at 26.

**Electoral Roll Officer. - Ruth Gill - February 2025**

**Report on the Fabric, Goods and Ornaments**

The inventory is up to date and now available both as a paper copy and electronically. Following the visit from the Archdeacon for the annual inspection in September 2024 we were pleased to have the opportunity to talk to him about one or two ideas we have and to receive his report.

The annual checks were undertaken in 2024– organ, fire extinguishers, boiler, lightening conductor and PAT testing. Two extension leads were removed from Church as they did not pass the PAT test. Quotes were requested for the full mains electrical test which is due.

The Fire Risk Assessment was updated and discussed at the PCC meeting in October.

The PCC obtained a grant to pay for the reports from the Structural Engineer and Quantity Surveyor. The reports gave the PCC an indication of costs for the major work needed. A meeting was then held with Iain Frearson, our Church Architect, which was attended also by Mrs Ann Wise the Diocesan Buildings Officer. Initially following that meeting the PCC took the decision that they would try to undertake all of the work required in one project but subsequently it was decided to get the interim repairs done to the Church Tower which would secure the leaning parapet on the tower until such time as the major works on the Church can be undertaken.

We continue to have water ingress through the ‘temporary’ roof on the North chancel near the chimney and also on the lead roof of the nave. Minor repairs are planned until grants can be obtained to replace the temporary roof and lead roof over the Chancel.

The PCC continue to be grateful for the help and advice given by the Church Architect, Mr Iain Frearson.

There were no faculties during 2024.

Our thanks to those who worked in various ways in the Churchyard during 2024, the hedge cutter, the grass cutter and those who undertook general maintenance.

This is an opportunity to give our thanks to **everyone** who helps at St Mary's Church and Churchyard throughout the year.

Many give their time by arranging flowers, laundering the linen, polishing the brass, cleaning on a rota basis, maintaining the Churchyard and woodland burial ground, organising the refreshments, taking on and dealing with maintenance issues, ringing the bells, setting the clock to the correct time, ensuring we are warm and have music to sing to, ensuring we have posters advertising our Church and fund raising events, chopping down and bringing in the Christmas tree , cooking and carving the pig for our Hog Roast, cooking the meat and carving and cooking for Harvest and endless other small tasks.

 Your help and care of the fabric, goods and ornaments and your support in other ways is greatly appreciated.

Without the help of a dedicated group of people who organise social events to raise money for the maintenance and repairs of the Church building we would not be in a position where we can think about applying for grants for bigger major repairs. Thank you to that group and also all who support us at our events throughout each year.

Thank you all very much for your love, support and help at St Mary’s, Keysoe.

**PCC Member -Jenny Carter - March 2025**

**Report of the Sharnbrook Deanery Synod -- January -December 2024**

**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**

**Report from the Bell Ringers**

Little has changed since last year. The bells are still difficult to ring. There is a slight improvement as the new steeple keeper has discovered a very thick oil and an occasional squirt of this helps a lot but a rehang is the only long term cure. Service ringing has been maintained but with a band with an average age in the low seventies absences are to be expected. We have lost two long time members of the band due to ill health this year but gained no new recruits. Practices, particularly in the winter months, are often cancelled or curtailed due to lack of numbers and cold weather.

**Bell Captain - Jim Hills - March 2025**

**GDPR:**The PCC of Keysoe Church is committed to ensuring the security and protection of the personal information that we process, and to provide a compliant and consistent approach to data protection.

**Keysoe (St Mary’s Church) PCC Treasurer’s Report 2024**

**Finance report 2024** – The cash balance held by the PCC £26,273.34

The Chancel fund (held by the Diocese) had a cash balance of £7,722.98

No withdrawals were made from the fund for repairs to the chancel this year.

CCLA Fund General Balance of £632.55

CCLA Bell Fund balance of £1,274.53

CCLA Fabric fund balance of £272.64

CCLA Chancel Fund balance of £2,761.82

**General fund** – Balance held is £6743.44.

The Parish share was paid in full £8,357 and other expenditure was due to increases of running costs for the church.

As we have paid our Parish Share in full for the last three years we successfully applied for our unpaid shares of just over £22,289 to be written off.

Thank you to all who contributed to the Church throughout 2024.

The Parish Share for 2025 will be £10,730 which we will be unable to meet with present levels of giving through the Parish Giving Scheme and collection plate.

**Church yard –** We thank everyone for their help in maintaining the Churchyard. Expenses for the year were paid out but were returned to the Church to be ring fenced towards costs when the path to the Church door is repaired. For this donation we are extremely grateful.

**Fabric Fund** – Balance held is £19529.90.

This year £11720 was raised from various activities and from generous donations . Our payments amounted to £7077.52 (being insurance, bank charges, Architects fees, Surveys for future work). Special mention must be made again of the open gardens, hog roast, and the harvest festival with lunch.

The church is in need of a great deal of work and is grateful for all the help and generosity for the coming year to put it into good order.

The organising committee are to be thanked for all the hard work in organising the various events during this year, and all who helped and donated to the St Marys’ Church.

Thanks are expressed to Mr Nick Robinson for his help as external examiner for our accounts for several years. Mr Robinson stepped down midway through 2024 and we are grateful and extend our thanks to Mr Peter Platt who the PCC named in January 2025 as our external examiner and who has undertaken the examination for the 2024 accounts.

**Hon Treasurer - Tania Pickett – April 2025**