**St Denys Church Colmworth**

**Annual Report - 2024**

Colmworth is a village situated nine miles north of Bedford. The Parish of St Denys, Colmworth extends for five miles and has 400 residents. It is included in the Benefices of Wilden with Colmworth and Ravensden, and Keysoe with Bolnhurst, in the Sharnbrook Deanery of the Diocese of St Albans.

The Parochial Church Council is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of St Denys Church and churchyard. It is a corporate body established by the Church of England. It has a gross income under £100,000 and is not a registered charity. It operates under the Parochial Church Council Measure and is excepted, by order, from registering with the Charity Commission.

Revd Tim Wilson has continued as Priest in Charge of the Benefice. We are very grateful to Geraldine Skinner (Lay-reader) who continues to give support and care throughout the Benefice. Alison Belding is Benefice Administration officer.

**Aims and Objectives**

Our primary objective is the promotion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. We co-operate with the incumbent of the Benefices of Wilden with Colmworth and Ravensden and Keysoe with Bolnhurst in promoting the mission of the church (pastoral, social and ecumenical) in the Benefice and in the ecclesiastical parish. The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to join our parish community at St Denys and thereby belong to the Benefice community.

**Worship**

There were three services held in church each month: 10.00am Holy Communion on the second Sunday, a short Holy Communion service at 11.00am on the fourth Wednesday and 11.15am All Age Worship service on the fourth Sunday. In December services were changed to accommodate a winter schedule and Christmas.

We had services at St Denys on Mothering Sunday (5 children and 34 adults) and Palm Sunday. During the six weeks of Lent, Benefice Lent meetings were held weekly at Ravensden and Keysoe. On Maundy Thursday 17 people joined in a simple meal and service and on Easter Sunday 25 people celebrated Holy Communion. Harvest Festival was held on Sunday September 24th and was followed by lunch in church, which was supported by 24 people. The Remembrance Sunday service started in church and concluded outside by the Forgotten Soldier in the Country Park, with input again from the Jewish community in Colmworth. At Christmas we had a successful, well-attended children’s service on Christmas Eve. With fewer young children wanting to take part, there was more emphasis on singing and musical instruments. There was a well-attended family Holy Communion service on Christmas Day.

The PCC met five times during 2024 with the APCM held on March 18th. Nobody stood as churchwarden and existing PCC members were re-elected. Jane Snaith continued to represent us as safe-guarding officer

There was one wedding held during the year (W Bates/L Wells), one baptism (Elsie Abrahams) and two funerals (Peter Jennings and Julie Reilly). The church continued to be open most days for private prayer. The number of comments from visitors saying how much they appreciate being able to access the church and spend some quiet time in there was very rewarding. The dogs’ water bowl also appears to be appreciated by canine visitors to the Country Park.

**Faculties**

A faculty was granted in Dec 24 authorising a grave reservation for Heather and Michael Baker.

**Social Events**

Coffee-Stop was held regularly on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. Between 6 and 12 people usually came and we often welcomed walkers who happened to be passing the church. Community lunches have been held monthly and have continued to be well-supported and appreciated by those who came. We would like to thank everyone who has helped with the cooking and preparation.

Most months there was at least one social event held: Beetle Drive, Concert by Alma Singers, Jigsaw Challenge, Quiz, Sponsored Cycle Ride (two parishoners took part), Games Evening. The Garden Party was held again at Manor Farm on August Bank Holiday Monday, kindly hosted by Bernie Bulkin and Vivien Rose. It was very well-supported and a great success. It was held in tandem with the village Gardening Club’s Craft and Produce Show which was held in the church. Friends of St Denys continued to hold monthly Cars and Bikes of Character meetings at the Village Hall. These meetings have gone from strength to strength and have raised a significant amount of funds for the Restoration Fund, making it easier for us to apply for grants for restoration

Sadly, ‘Carols and Lighting the triangle lights’ had to be cancelled because of Storm Darragh in early December. On December 21st, the church was decorated ready for Christmas and we held a children’s activity morning which was enjoyed by adults and children.

A lot of work goes into organising these events and we are very grateful to the social committee and everyone else for their help and support.

**The Church Building**

St Denys Church was built in the perpendicular style in the 15th century. It is Grade 1 listed and has several outstanding features, including the Dyer Monument. It has a tall spire and the bell-tower houses six bells. Iain Frearson, the church architect, carried out the latest Quinquennial Inspection in September 2023 and we received the report in Jan 24.

Work eventually began in August to conserve the Dyer Monument. It was carried out by Skillingtons and cost £25,956. We received grants from Idlewilde Trust (£5,000), ChurchCare (£4,000) and The Society of Antiquaries (£1,500). The remaining funds were met from the Restoration Fund and we were able to reclaim VAT from The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

The two wooden figures, which were removed for safety reasons from under the roof in 2021 and are stored in the vestry were conserved by a specialist, Anthony Beech ACR (www.furniture conservation.co.uk) at a cost of £1,968.

The Expression of Interest for Heritage Lottery funding for £1 million, to restore the church roof and stonework and address the causes of damp in the church, was submitted in March and we heard that it had been accepted in April, enabling us to start submitting the application form for the Development Phase of our proposal. Following discussion with Iain Frearson it was decided to apply for a Diocesan Minor Repairs and Improvements grant to investigate the causes of damp. This should help prioritise repairs to the fabric of the building. Progression was complicated by a piece of render falling onto the church path during Storm Darragh. Heras fencing was erected and the path re-directed around the edge of the churchyard while an application for grant-funding to employ a steeplejack was submitted.

Churchyard mowing was carried out by Brian Smith and Richard Partridge and we are very grateful to them and to all the wonderful people who have helped with flower arranging and cleaning the church

**Pastoral care**

There is generally now an increased sense of care in the community with social media / WhatsApp groups facilitating contact. Coffee-Stop and Community Lunches have continued and there is a greater awareness of pastoral support.

**Church Electoral Roll**

All those who attend our services are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. At the end of 2023 there were 35 names on the Electoral Roll, of whom 11 were non-resident. Anne Chetwynd-Talbot passed away in 2023, two people moved away and there were no new names added.

**Benefice GDPR –**

Emails from the Benefice administrator continue to be sent BCC to preserve anonymity.

**Safeguarding – Jane Snaith**

*Safeguarding continues as a priority within the Church of England. There are regular newsletters and updates from the Diocesan office to remind us to be vigilant.*

*DBS checks are all completed for Wilden and Colmworth .*

*The required Safeguarding courses are being reviewed by myself and any person needing an update will be informed.*

*The Safeguarding Dashboard is a very helpful tool to ensure all Safeguarding issues and requirements are being kept under review. We are asked to discuss, at PCC meetings, any Church activities involving children and vulnerable adults and to agree to have this added to the Dashboard. All these activities must be risk assessed and recorded and a paper copy kept in church files.*

*All Safeguarding policies are to be reviewed by the PCC annually,*

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Jane Snaith has continued to represent Colmworth in addition to Wilden and we are grateful to her.

**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 have complied with their duty to have due regard to House of Bishops guidance on safeguarding and vulnerable adults

**Friends of St Denys – Neville Jephcote**

*The Friends of St Denys group had another successful fundraising year, presenting a cheque for £11,000 to the church.  These funds were achieved through the Cars and Bikes of Character events, held over eight Sundays, monthly throughout the summer.  An extensive team of volunteers work to park an ever increasing range of vehicles and to produce around 300 bacon rolls and coffees every month.  But beyond this and every bit as important, these events create a strong  community spirit, bring people together from surrounding areas and encourage friendship groups and a sense of belonging.*

**Bell-ringers**

Bell-ringing sessions have continued to be well-supported although it is sometimes difficult to get a team together to ring on Sundays. Two people in the village started to learn and two ringers moved away. Riversmeet ringers continued to ring once a month until December, when Roxton tower re-opened.

Jim Hills (Bolnhurst) and Mike Matthews (Eaton Socon) have continued to give us help and support. We had a visiting group of ringers early in the year and another group rang a full peal (three hours) in November this year. We ‘Rang for Peace’ to commemorate D Day on June 6th.

**Deanery Synod Report - Sharnbrook Deanery Report for APCMs (Rev Nick Munday)**

***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

**Rector’s Report**

**Financial Report – year ended 31st December 2024 – Margaret Seabrook**

**Administrative Information**

St Denys Church is situated in Church Road, Colmworth, Bedfordshire MK44 2JS

PCC correspondence address: Kate Abrahams, Woodfield, Honeydon Road, Colmworth, Beds MK44 2LZ.

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Email: kateabrahams1@yahoo.com

PCC members (2024)

Revd Tim Wilson

Mrs Margaret Seabrook (treasurer)

Mrs Kathryn Abrahams (secretary)

Mrs Elizabeth Wootton

Mrs Helen Brighton (Stark)

Independent examiner: Ellacotts Accountants LLP