

The Parish of Stoke St Mary (with Thurlbear)

In the Seven Sowers Benefice

(United Benefice of Beercrocombe, with Curry Mallet,
Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Staple Fitzpaine,
Stoke St Mary (with Thurlbear) and West Hatch)

**Annual Report
and
Financial Statements
of the
Parochial Church Council**

For the year ended 31st December 2025

Incumbent

The Benefice is currently in vacancy

Bank

Lloyds Bank
31 Fore Street
Taunton
TA1 1HN

Independent Examiner

Alison Horsey
Fairways
West Hatch
Taunton
TA3 5RS

The Parish of Stoke St Mary (with Thurlbear) – Annual Report for the Year 2025

Introduction

The ecclesiastical parish of Stoke St Mary (with Thurlbear) contains two parish churches, namely the church of St Mary the Virgin, Stoke St Mary, and the redundant church of St Thomas, Thurlbear. The two churches are located in the centre of their respective villages.

The parish forms part of the Seven Sowers Benefice, comprising the parishes of Beercrocombe with Curry Mallet, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Staple Fitzpaine, Stoke St Mary (with Thurlbear) and West Hatch. The parish is part of the Deanery of Somerset South, which in turn is part of the Diocese of Bath and Wells within the Church of England.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a charity excepted from registration with the Charity Commissioners.

The Revd Joanna Porter, who was the Rector at the start of the year and residing in Stoke St Mary, retired on 9th March. The Benefice is currently in vacancy.

During 2025 the PCC continued to support the Ministry Team in promoting the whole mission of the church – pastoral, social, evangelistic and ecumenical – within the ecclesiastical parish. The Revd Julie Kimber, who had been training under the Revd Joanna, was ordained at Wells Cathedral on 28th June and served in the Benefice throughout the year. Sue McKen, a licensed lay reader, served throughout the year; Brian Crudge, having retired from licensed lay readership in earlier years, now holds the title of Reader Emeritus. Holly Stevens served throughout the year as the Children's, Schools and Families Worker, employed by the PCC but funded by all the parishes in the Benefice. Sarah Hampson also served throughout the year as the Benefice Administrator.

The PCC is responsible for the care and maintenance of the Grade II* listed church building in Stoke St Mary and the surrounding churchyard. It is also responsible for the churchyard of St Thomas's Church, Thurlbear, where the church building itself is maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust.

The service pattern introduced in August 2022 continued throughout 2025 with the ten o'clock communion service rotating around the Benefice and hence a service in each of the churches once every seven weeks. At St Mary's there has been an 8.30 a.m. Book of Common Prayer service on the first Sunday of each month, unless that happened to coincide with our turn to host the ten o'clock Benefice service.

There were a total of 21 regular services of worship held at St Mary's (including one baptism) and two at St Thomas's. There was a special service of reflection at St Mary's on Good Friday. There was one funeral during the year, held in March.

Membership

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation rules. Members are elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and to stand for election to the PCC.

PCC members who served from 1st January 2025 (or date of appointment, if later) until the date on which this report was approved were:

Incumbent: The Revd Joanna Porter (Until her retirement on 9 March 2025)

Churchwarden: Position vacant

Deanery Synod Representative: Tom Mayberry (ex-officio)

Elected Members: Rebecca Clark (Co-opted: 6 October 2025)
Rachel Drew
Elizabeth Fothergill
Sarah Hampson (Secretary)
Roger Millard
John Pugh (Treasurer)
Graham Salter (Co-opted)
Rachel Woolvin

Church Attendance

At the time of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in 2025 there were 30 parishioners on the Electoral Roll. The weekly attendance at services varied from a minimum of about 8 at an 8.30 a.m. service up to 25 or more at other regular services.

Sidesmen and Sideswomen

Sidesmen and Sideswomen are appointed for the year. In 2025 they were Liz Fothergill, Tom Mayberry, John Pugh and Rachel Woolvin.

Other Roles

Other members of the congregation provide essential support to the work and worship of St Mary's Church by serving as bell ringers (Tower Captain: Rachel Drew), flower arrangers and cleaners, and by serving on the coffee-making rota. The Sacristan is Rachel Woolvin and the church architect is Annie Evans. The principal organist to St Mary's is David Bidgood.

Review of the Year

Twenty twenty-five proved to be quite a challenging year. As noted in last year's report, we were greatly saddened to learn that our Rector, Joanna Porter, had decided to resign her position. She and her husband, Neill, left the Benefice in March for a new life in Bath; there was a farewell service in Hatch Beauchamp followed by a bring-and-share lunch in Curry Mallet Village Hall.

To external eyes, the process of recruiting a Rector and managing a Vacancy is tortuous but it is a well-worn path; the Church Wardens knuckled down to the task, led by the very capable Sue McKen. In very short order she succeeded in arranging for retired ordained ministers to cover all the gaps that had appeared in the service schedule.

On the morning of Good Friday we were very blessed when the team from St Peter's, Staple Fitzpaine, led us in a service of reflective worship. Two days later, on Easter Sunday, the Benefice again held the popular sunrise service at the Slough Green Scout Hut, led this year by Sue McKen and followed by the usual welcome refreshments provided by the scout leaders.

On 28 June, a party from the Benefice travelled to Wells to attend the priesting of the Revd Julie Kimber as a fully ordained minister. A celebratory lunch was held in the Benefice the following day. She has subsequently presided over a number of services in St Mary's including the very special worship on Remembrance Sunday; we are very grateful to the many people who are involved in this emotionally charged service and who ensured its smooth running.

On the last day of November, Sue McKen led the traditional Advent carol service in St Thomas's as the gathering gloom was replaced by the flickering of a multitude of candles. The church was as full as it has been in many a year with over a hundred present to hear the choir from Thurlbear School, making their first appearance at this service, treat us to two very pretty songs. The refreshments afterwards in the school hall were very welcome.

December was slightly less busy than usual, with the school deciding not to hold the service for their KS2 pupils in church on account of the particularly wet weather. However, the month did start on a very high note: on a day when the weather proved to be slightly less dire than had been predicted, we were honoured and delighted to welcome the Rt Reverend Michael Beasley, the Bishop of Bath & Wells, to preside at the ten o'clock communion service. This was a momentous event for St Mary's (the last Bishop of Bath & Wells to visit us was Bishop Edward Henderson in the late 1960's) and, in keeping with this, the service commenced with a formal procession around the nave, including the churchwardens from the other Benefice churches. He was an extremely outgoing and sociable individual, talking to as many of the congregation as possible even before the service – not at all the stuffy image so often portrayed of clerics in high office. His sermon was very engaging, amusing and spoke directly to the woes of modern life.

At six o'clock on the twenty-first the traditional carol service in church, lay led, was held. The final service of the year - the Crib Service at four o'clock on Christmas Eve - was taken by Holly Stevens. The church was packed with 130 attending and plenty of opportunity for the children to take part.

The PCC held five meetings during 2025 (including the annual meeting) and, as always, discussed a wide variety of issues. Representatives of our PCC also liaised closely with the Church Warden group and attended most of their meetings, the principal focus of which being issues arising from the Vacancy. Sue McKen led the Church Warden group and spearheaded the drive to produce an updated Benefice Profile; in this effort she was very ably assisted by Sarah Hampson, wearing her Benefice Administrator hat. The culmination of all this work was the formal Section 11 meeting in December, at which all seven PCCs agreed a common strategy in relation to the recruitment of a new Rector. The post was finally ready to be advertised on the Diocese website in early January.

A significant hurdle in the pre-recruitment process was a requirement of the Diocese that all parishes in the Benefice attest to their ability to contribute fully to the Benefice Share over the coming five years.

This caused much head scratching but eventually each parish addressed this quandary by producing a fund-raising leaflet directed at the residents of the different parishes. Tom Mayberry wrote the narrative for each of the parishes, Mary Bell provided an inspirational graphic and Sarah Hampson put them all together in record time. The leaflets in our parish were delivered to households in late November and early December. It was a revelation to many that the parishes pay all their own running costs as well as the expense of employing a Rector. The early results have been encouraging.

Our most successful annual fundraiser remains the 100 Club, despite falling a handful of tickets short of a full house; we are very grateful to those who continue to support it. Among a number of outreach/fundraising events, the inaugural Somerset Day celebration on May 11th was a notable success. Not only did it bring a huge number of villagers together in the pub garden, it also raised over £600. The summer tea party in June, hosted by Stephanie Crockett, was another very well supported event. The Seed Swap in March succeeded in engaging with the wider community. The card reader acquired in April for £279 recorded receipts of £543 during the remainder of the year.

Throughout the year, the Open-the-Book team were active in our three Benefice schools; Messy Church was also active throughout the year, usually on the first Saturday of each month. These activities are run by Holly Stevens, our Children's Worker, who also takes Collective Worship in each school as well as organising Holiday Clubs, Experience Days, Journey to Bethlehem etc – the list is impressive.

During the year we received a welcome contribution of £867 from the Benefice Magazine, whose income derives primarily from the sale of advertising space. Its contribution to informing the wider community about events related to the church is a vital medium of communication.

We also received two donations of £1,000 each and a legacy of £1,000 towards the upkeep of Thurlbear churchyard, which was timely since we appointed a new contractor during the year to undertake this work; in the absence of burials in that churchyard, we have no source of income to meet these outgoings. The Quinquennial work commenced at the start of the year and is ongoing.

Financial Review

Total receipts on the General Fund were £19,567 and total payments £22,491, including a transfer to the Community, Mission and Charitable Fund of £1,957. The income in the year from services was marginally up against the prior year but regular giving, and fees from weddings and funerals reduced. The largest item of expenditure (£16,549) was the Parish Share paid to the Diocese, which enables it to provide the parish with clergy and support services. Community, Mission and Charitable outgoings amounted to £2,623, which included our contributions to funding the Children's Worker and the Benefice Administrator.

The unrestricted funds (comprising the General Fund and the Community, Mission and Charitable Fund) had a deficit of receipts over payments in the year of £3,590. The Churchyard Fund had a deficit in the year of £644 reflecting higher maintenance costs and no grants received in the year.

The Fabric Fund had a surplus in the year of £806, reflecting minimal expenditure.

Reserves Policy

The PCC has had a policy of maintaining a balance on unrestricted funds, if possible, equating to approximately six months' unrestricted payments. This policy was aimed at covering any unforeseen emergency situations that may arise. At 31st December 2025, the balance on the General and CMC Funds of £13,590 equated to 215 days of payments (2024: 295 days). The PCC are conscious of the need to continue monitoring this metric closely in order to arrest its steep decline.

It is the strategy of the PCC to invest the monetary assets of long-term funds, including the Fabric Fund, in deposits with the Church of England Deposit Fund. Surplus monetary assets, which may be required at shorter notice, are held with Lloyds Bank on current and deposit accounts, as appropriate.

John Pugh (*Treasurer*)

2 February, 2026

**Independent Examiner's Report
to the PCC of Stoke St Mary Parish Church
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025**

I report to the PCC on my examination of the accounts of the PCC (the Charity) for the year ended 31 December 2025 which are set out on pages 6 to 10.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the Charity's trustees (i.e. the members of the PCC) you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the Charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that, in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with the accounting records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

A Horsey

Mrs Alison Horsey
Fairways,
West Hatch,
Taunton.
TA3 5RS

Date: *8th February 2026*

Stoke St Mary PCC

Receipts & Payments

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

GENERAL FUND (Unrestricted Fund)

	Notes	2025 £	2024 £
RECEIPTS			
Service Collections		3,525	3,049
Regular giving through bank		5,665	6,300
Income tax recovered	3	2,982	2,591
Donations	4	3,258	2,397
Benefice magazine surplus		867	876
Fees (Weddings etc.)		270	525
Events	5	2,236	2,416
Bank Interest		764	886
Total Receipts		19,567	19,040
PAYMENTS			
Parish Share		(16,549)	(15,772)
Clergy Expenses		(983)	(676)
Organist Fees		(325)	(275)
Organ Maintenance		(384)	-
Heat & Light		(809)	(755)
Insurance		(970)	(711)
Transferred to Community, Mission and Charitable Fund		(1,957)	(1,904)
Sundry (incl purchase of card reader £279)	8	(514)	(309)
Total Payments		(22,491)	(20,402)
(Deficit)/Excess of Receipts over Payments		(2,924)	(1,362)
Fund balance at 1 January 2025		17,109	18,471
Fund balance at 31 December 2025	9	14,185	17,109

COMMUNITY, MISSION AND CHARITABLE FUND (Designated Fund)

This Fund was established in 2004 following the decision of the PCC to tithe General Fund income.

		£	£
RECEIPTS			
Transferred from General Fund		1,957	1,904
PAYMENTS			
Charity: Various charitable causes	6	(924)	(1,078)
Community: Children's Worker funding	7	(747)	(735)
Mission: Admin Assistant funding	7	(952)	(962)
(Deficit)/Excess of Receipts over Payments		(666)	(871)
Fund balance at 1 January 2025		71	942
Fund balance at 31 December 2025	9	(595)	71

Stoke St Mary PCC

Receipts & Payments

For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

CHURCHYARD FUND (Part Restricted Fund)

	Notes	2025 £	2024 £
RECEIPTS			
Legacies, donations, burial fees etc.	(a)	1,159	1,258
Grant from Stoke St Mary PC: St Mary's	(b)	-	300
Grant from Neroche PC: St Thomas's	(b)	-	-
		<u>1,159</u>	<u>1,558</u>
PAYMENTS			
Stoke St. Mary: Grass Cutting		(997)	(1,046)
Thurlbear: Grass Cutting		(806)	(350)
		<u>(1,803)</u>	<u>(1,396)</u>
(Deficit)/Excess of Receipts over Payments		(644)	162
Fund balance at 1 January 2025		(104)	(266)
Fund balance at 31 December 2025	9	<u>(748)</u>	<u>(104)</u>

(a) During 2025 a legacy (with interest) of £1,009 was received; £100 of the collection taken at the Advent service is credited here to Thurlbear.

(b) During 2024 Somerset Council decided to cease funding Parish Councils regarding the care of churchyards. Stoke St Mary Parish Council intend to continue to fund the PCC; Neroche PC are considering their position.

When this Fund was last in surplus, at the end of 2022, all the funds were Designated Funds.

FABRIC FUND (Part Restricted Fund)

		£	£
RECEIPTS			
Bank Interest		982	1,194
Other donations and related Gift Aid recovered		-	1,335
Listed Places of Worship Scheme		-	967
		<u>982</u>	<u>3,496</u>
PAYMENTS			
Fire safety survey		(104)	(198)
Lightening conductor survey and related works		(72)	(72)
New electricity switchboard		-	(3,762)
New communion table and repairs to carpet		-	(2,217)
Quinquennial inspection: architect's fee		-	(527)
LED uplighters & sundry electrical & plumbing work		-	(347)
Excess/(Deficit) of Receipts over Payments		<u>806</u>	<u>(3,627)</u>
Fund balance at 1 January 2025		23,751	27,378
Fund balance at 31 December 2025	9	<u>24,557</u>	<u>23,751</u>

At 31 December 2025 £1,275 (2024: £1,275) of the funds carried forward were Designated Funds.

Stoke St Mary PCC

Statement of Assets and Liabilities As at 31 December 2025

	Notes	2025 £	2024 £
ASSETS			
Cash funds			
Lloyds Bank current account		717	577
Lloyds Bank deposit account		488	1,791
CCLA deposit account - General Account		13,523	16,770
CCLA deposit account - Fabric Account		22,671	21,689
Cash in Hand		-	-
Monetary assets	9	<u>37,399</u>	<u>40,827</u>
Debtors and prepayments (General Fund, unless stated otherwise)			
Income tax recoverable (estimated)	3	2,053	2,157
Grant from Stoke St Mary PC re churchyard		300	-
CCLA Interest for 2025Q4 (General Fund)	(a)	141	197
CCLA Interest for 2025Q4 (Fabric Fund)	(a)	230	258
Clergy expenses paid in advance		250	250
Other monetary assets		<u>2,974</u>	<u>2,862</u>

(a) Following a change in Transfer Agent in 2023Q4, CCLA now credit interest in the first week of the following quarter.

LIABILITIES

Creditors and Accruals (General Fund, unless stated otherwise)

Clergy/Benefice expenses (Q4 estimate)		287	283
Admin Assistant expense (Q4 estimate)		282	212
Utilities	(a)	133	70
		<u>702</u>	<u>565</u>

(b) EDF installed a Smart meter in April 2023; monthly invoices are raised, one month in arrears, based on actual readings.

The above Statement of Assets and Liabilities and the associated Receipts and Payments Accounts, including the notes on the following two pages, were approved by the Parochial Church Council on 2 February 2026 and are signed on its behalf by the Chairman and the Treasurer.



Roger Millard



John Pugh

Stoke St Mary PCC

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

1. Presentation of financial information

The financial statements of the PCC have been prepared in accordance with the Church Accounting Regulations 2006 using the Receipts and Payments basis.

2. Accounting policies

The financial statements include monetary transactions, assets and liabilities for which the PCC can be held responsible. They do not include the accounts of other Church groups that owe an affiliation to another body nor those that are informal gatherings of Church members.

Receipts are included as received and expenditure when irrevocably paid.

Restricted funds must be used for the purpose for which the money was given or donated.

General funds represent unrestricted money that can be used for the general charitable purposes of the PCC.

Designated funds represent unrestricted money that has been earmarked for a specific purpose by the PCC. This money may be undesignated at any time.

The origin and purpose of each fund within the fund classification are given beneath the title of each fund.

3. Income tax recovered

A claim for recovery of income tax under the Gift Aid scheme may be made at any time during the year and the receipts from two claims were received in 2025 covering the periods from 6 April to 31 December 2024 and from 1 January to 5 April 2024. A claim for the period to 31 December 2024 will be submitted in 2025 and this is shown in these accounts as a receivable amount in the "Statement of assets and liabilities".

	2025	2024
	£	£
4. Donations received		
Gift Aided donations	2,268	2,028
Non-Gift Aided donations	975	214
Stoke St Mary and Taunton Bellringers	15	155
Income from donations	<u>3,258</u>	<u>2,397</u>
5. Events		
	£	£
100 Club (net of prize money of £560; 2024: £560)	1,360	1,440
Somerset Day celebrations (net of costs of £20)	611	-
Community teas	265	219
Harvest Celebration Lunch	-	396
Seed swap (March), plant sale (May)	-	361
Income from events	<u>2,236</u>	<u>2,416</u>
6. Donations to charitable causes		
	£	£
Thurlbear School Leavers' Bibles	503	378
Royal British Legion	126	150
Churches Conservation Trust	100	288
Children's Society	100	202
Taunton Food Bank (2024: Farming Community Network)	50	60
St Peter's, Staple Fitzpaine (share of Good Friday collection)	45	-
Donations to charitable causes	<u>924</u>	<u>1,078</u>

Stoke St Mary PCC

Notes to the Financial Statements (continued) For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

7. Funding for Children's Worker and Admin Assistant within the Benefice

Funding is being provided by the churches in the Benefice towards the cost of a part-time Children's, Schools and Families Worker, who is legally employed by Stoke St Mary PCC. Contributions are paid over to The Seven Sowers Charitable Trust, who are responsible for paying the salary cost and related employment overheads. The underlying costs therefore appear in the annual accounts of The Seven Sowers Charitable Trust, rather than in the annual accounts of Stoke St Mary PCC.

Funding has also been provided on a co-share basis among the Benefice churches to meet the cost of an Administrator in the Benefice office, whose services have been provided through a services company since the start of the contract in September 2023. These costs are paid out of the same Benefice bank account from which clergy expenses and other shared costs are met.

	2025	2024
	£	£
8. Sundry payments		
Purchase of SumUp terminal	279	-
Church Copyright Licence (2023 & 2024)	100	190
Lloyds Bank charges	54	-
Solstice expenses (2024: Harvest)	53	54
Bath & Wells Change Ringers	20	20
SumUp transaction fees	8	20
Ilminster Deanery Fund	-	25
Total sundry payments	<u>514</u>	<u>309</u>

9. Funds

Fund balances at 31 December were as follows:

	£	£
General Fund (Unrestricted)	14,185	17,109
Designated funds:		
Community Mission & Charitable Fund	(595)	71
Part Restricted funds:		
Churchyard Fund (all Designated)	(748)	(104)
Fabric Fund - Designated	1,275	1,275
Total Unrestricted funds	<u>14,117</u>	<u>18,351</u>
Fabric Fund - Restricted	23,282	22,476
Monetary assets carried forward	<u>37,399</u>	<u>40,827</u>

Reconciliation of movements in funds

	Monetary assets brought forward	Receipts/ (payments) in the year	Monetary assets carried forward
	£	£	£
General Fund	17,109	(2,924)	14,185
Community Mission & Charitable Fund	71	(666)	(595)
Churchyard Fund	(104)	(644)	(748)
Fabric Fund	23,751	806	24,557
	<u>40,827</u>	<u>(3,428)</u>	<u>37,399</u>