

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 2024

Incumbent

The Revd. Joanna Porter

Bank

Lloyds Bank
31 Fore Street
Taunton
TA1 1HN

Independent Examiner

Alison Horsey
Fairways
West Hatch
Taunton
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The Parish of Stoke St Mary (with Thurlbear) – Annual Report for the Year 2024

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 South Somerset, 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 was Rector of the Seven Sowers Benefice throughout the year.

During 2024 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. 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 established in the second half of 2022 was maintained throughout the year, with a total of 20 regular services of worship being held at St Mary's (including two baptisms) and one at St Thomas's. There were a further two special services at St Mary's (on the same day) for Thurlbear School carols and a carol service for the Taunton Association of Bellringers; there were additionally three funerals/memorials/ashes burials. Services were also held outside the church buildings on the evening of the Winter Solstice.

The service pattern introduced in August 2022 continued throughout 2024 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.

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 2024 (or date of appointment, if later) until the date on which this report was approved were:

<i>Incumbent:</i>	The Revd Joanna Porter	
<i>Churchwarden:</i>	John Pugh	<i>(Until 2 April 2024)</i>
<i>Deanery Synod Representative:</i>	Tom Mayberry	<i>(ex-officio)</i>
<i>Elected Members:</i>	Rachel Drew	<i>(Co-opted: 13 May 2024)</i>
	Elizabeth Fothergill	
	Sarah Hampson	<i>(Secretary: with effect from 2 April 2024)</i>
	Roger Millard	
	John Pugh	<i>(Appointed: 2 April 2024 on retiring as Churchwarden);</i>
		<i>(Acting Secretary until 2 April 2024)</i>
		<i>(Treasurer throughout 2024)</i>
	Peter Renshaw	<i>(Died: 23 September 2024)</i>
	Graham Salter	<i>(Co-opted: 13 May 2024)</i>
	Rachel Woolvin	<i>(Appointed: 2 April 2024)</i>

Church Attendance

At the time of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in 2023 there were 40 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 30 or more at other regular services.

Sidesmen and Sideswomen

Sidesmen and Sideswomen are appointed for the year and had been organised by Peter Renshaw. In 2024 they were Liz Fothergill, Tom Mayberry, Neill Porter, 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-four was a year tinged with great sadness. Not only did we learn of the death of Sylvia Renshaw in July but her husband, Peter, was to die two months later in September. In a very short space of time we had lost two longstanding and highly dedicated members of our church community. Peter had been a churchwarden for many years and Sylvia a principal flower arranger; these roles, though, were but a small part of the enormous contribution they made to St Mary's.

In December we were greatly saddened to learn that our Rector, Joanna Porter, had decided to resign her position. Everyone who had been so invigorated by her energy and enthusiasm was so sorry to hear the news; but the burden of office is heavy and the resources available few. We will send her off with our very best wishes in March but the future of the parish is uncertain, with no candidate having put themselves forward for the role of churchwarden at the annual meeting in April.

On Easter Sunday the Benefice again held the popular sunrise service at the Slough Green Scout Hut, led this year by Revd. Joanna and followed by the usual welcome refreshments provided by the scout leaders. Later in the morning, we celebrated holy communion in St Mary's conducted by Rev Joanna.

On 30 June, a party from the Benefice travelled to Wells to attend the ordination of Rev Julie Kimber as curate. This was a moment of real joy, since Julie has been involved in our community for several years. The worship on Remembrance Sunday in St Mary's was led by Rev Julie, her first service in our church in her new capacity; we are very grateful to the many people who are involved in this still emotional service and who ensured its smooth running.

December was as busy as ever, with no less than seven services in the month. It started on the first Sunday in the month when Sue McKen, Lay Reader, led the traditional Advent carol service in St Thomas's; the refreshments afterwards in the school hall were very welcome although the outside temperature was unusually clement. Mid-month saw a carol service in St Mary's for the Taunton Association of Bellringers; they had so much enjoyed the service last year that they asked for it to be repeated. With much ringing before and afterwards, the event lasted almost three hours. The following day we hosted the Benefice communion service, although attendance was disappointing.

On the nineteenth, a Thursday, it was the turn of Thurlbear School's KS2 pupils to hold their carol service in St Mary's, with services at 9.30 and 11.00. On the twenty-first, to mark the Winter Solstice, we held an outdoor service behind Higher Broughton Farmhouse, with carols and readings relevant to the shortest day. The following evening we had a traditional carol service in church, including pieces sung by the choir and a variety of interesting readings. The final service of the year - the Crib Service at four o'clock on Christmas Eve - was taken by Holly Stevens, our Children's Worker. The church was packed with 130 attending and plenty of opportunity for the children to take part.

The PCC held five meetings during 2024 (including the annual meeting) and discussed a wide variety of issues. Safeguarding remains a very live topic and was discussed at each meeting. Roger Millard was appointed as Safeguarding Lead and, in conjunction with Helen Hossell, the Safeguarding Officer for the Benefice, has assisted all PCC Members in getting their training records up to date. The PCC was represented at the Benefice Purpose Meeting held in West Hatch in October, which aimed to look at what we, as a Benefice, stand for. The morning-long workshop was a fascinating exercise and resulted in greater clarity of what our purpose is and how this should be represented to the public.

We held several outreach/fundraising events – sometimes it's difficult to label what they are, even after they've happened. The summer tea party in July, hosted by Stephanie Crockett, definitely ticked both boxes and was very well supported. The Harvest Celebration lunch in mid-October was designed as outreach; being intended as a revision of the traditional Harvest Supper, it aimed to attract young families for a lunchtime soup and baguette. It coincided – by design – with the reopening of the playpark adjacent to the Village Hall and the two events piggy-backed off each other. It was a great success – both socially and financially. The Seed Swap in March and Plant Sales in May were similarly aimed at engaging with the wider community; both showed promise for future years. By far the most successful

pure fundraiser though was the 100 Club, which was sold out for the third year running. We have eschewed the temptation to enlarge the scheme and remain very satisfied with the way it operates.

Throughout the year, the Open-the-Book team were active in Curry Mallet and Hatch Beauchamp schools and later in Thurlbear school too. Messy Church was also active throughout the year, usually on the first Saturday of each month and normally operating from Hatch Beauchamp Village Hall. These activities with children, run by Holly Stevens, are well supported by the church community.

During the year we received a significant donation of £2,000 from Peter Renshaw in memory of his late wife. We also received a welcome contribution of £876 from the Benefice Magazine, which succeeds in raising money primarily through 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 were disappointed to learn that Somerset Council has decided to cease contributing towards the upkeep of the churchyards in the county. These grants had been paid annually through the relevant Parish Council. We were very heartened and very grateful to hear that Stoke St Mary PC had agreed to continue the funding at the same level as previously; Neroche PC, in whose parish Thurlbear stands, are still considering the matter.

There have been several issues relating to the fabric of the building and its contents arising this year. The replacement for the principal altar table, which was approved last year, was delivered and installed in January. A service of dedication, which Ron Smith was able to attend, was held in July; he had funded the table in memory of his late wife, Betty. The five-yearly electrical survey was also carried out in January, as a result of which the entire fuseboard had to be replaced. Finally, in October, the church architect, Annie Evans, carried out her five-yearly inspection and has made a number of recommendations for the PCC to consider.

Financial Review

Total receipts on the General Fund were £19,040 (including the donations referred to above) and total payments £20,402, including a transfer to the Community, Mission and Charitable Fund of £1,904. The income in the year from services and regular giving was marginally up against the prior year but fees from weddings and funerals in church was sharply down; interest received was significantly higher reflecting the higher rates available. The largest item of expenditure (£15,772) 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 £2,775, which included our contributions to funding the Children's Worker and 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 £2,233. The Churchyard Fund had a surplus in the year of £162 reflecting a higher level of fees received from graveyard burials.

The Fabric Fund had a deficit in the year of £3,627, reflecting the two major items of capital expenditure referred to above. The balance on this fund at the year-end stood at £23,751.

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 2024, the balance on the General and CMC Funds of £17,180 equated to 295 days of payments (2023: 397 days). The PCC are conscious of the need to continue monitoring this metric closely.

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*)

10 February, 2025

Independent Examiner's Report to the PCC of Stoke St Mary Parish Church For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

I report to the PCC on my examination of the accounts of the PCC (the Charity) for the year ended 31 December 2024 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:

11th February 2025

Stoke St Mary PCC

Receipts & Payments

For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

GENERAL FUND (Unrestricted Fund)

	Notes	2024 £	2023 £
RECEIPTS			
Service Collections		3,049	2,756
Regular giving through bank		6,300	6,340
Income tax recovered	3	2,591	2,761
Donations	4	2,397	2,465
Benefice magazine surplus		876	864
Fees (Weddings etc.)		525	1,439
Events	5	2,416	2,351
Bank Interest		886	523
Total Receipts		19,040	19,499
PAYMENTS			
Parish Share		(15,772)	(13,674)
Clergy Expenses		(676)	(96)
Organist Fees		(275)	(325)
Organ Maintenance		-	-
Heat & Light		(755)	(1,092)
Insurance		(711)	(691)
Transferred to Community, Mission and Charitable Fund		(1,904)	(1,950)
Sundry	8	(309)	(47)
Total Payments		(20,402)	(17,875)
Excess of Receipts over Payments		(1,362)	1,624
Fund balance at 1 January 2024		18,471	16,847
Fund balance at 31 December 2024	9	17,109	18,471

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		1,904	1,950
PAYMENTS			
Charity: Various charitable causes	6	(1,078)	(1,202)
Community: Children's Worker funding	7	(735)	(735)
Mission: Benefice Administrator funding	7	(962)	-
Excess/(Deficit) of Receipts over Payments		(871)	13
Fund balance at 1 January 2024		942	929
Fund balance at 31 December 2024	9	71	942

Stoke St Mary PCC

Receipts & Payments

For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

CHURCHYARD FUND (Part Restricted Fund)

	Notes	2024 £	2023 £
RECEIPTS			
TDBC Grant - Stoke St. Mary	(a)	300	300
TDBC Grant - Thurlbear	(a)	-	530
Donations, burial fees etc.		1,258	720
		<u>1,558</u>	<u>1,550</u>
PAYMENTS			
Stoke St. Mary: Grass Cutting		(1,046)	(1,216)
Felling of ash tree		-	(1,920)
Thurlbear: Grass Cutting		(350)	(350)
		<u>(1,396)</u>	<u>(3,486)</u>
(Deficit)/Excess of Receipts over Payments		162	(1,936)
Fund balance at 1 January 2024		(266)	1,670
Fund balance at 31 December 2024	9	<u>(104)</u>	<u>(266)</u>

(a) During 2024 Somerset Council decided to cease funding Parish Councils regarding the care of churchyards.

Stoke St Mary Parish Council elected to continue to fund the PCC; Neroche PC are still considering their position.

At 31 December 2024 and 2023, all the funds carried forward were Designated Funds.

FABRIC FUND (Part Restricted Fund)

	£	£
RECEIPTS		
Other donations and related Gift Aid recovered	1,335	800
Bank Interest	1,194	823
Listed Places of Worship Scheme	967	160
Insurance recovery	-	300
	<u>3,496</u>	<u>2,083</u>
PAYMENTS		
New electricity switchboard	(3,762)	-
New communion table and repairs to carpet	(2,217)	(83)
Quinquennial inspection: architect's fee	(527)	-
LED uplighters & sundry electrical & plumbing work	(347)	(25)
Fire safety survey	(198)	(91)
Lightening conductor survey and related works	(72)	(72)
Repairs to ceiling & organ following fall of plaster	-	(1,810)
Excess of Receipts over Payments	<u>(3,627)</u>	<u>2</u>
Fund balance at 1 January 2024	27,378	27,376
Fund balance at 31 December 2024	9 <u>23,751</u>	<u>27,378</u>

At 31 December 2024 £1,275 (2023: £1,275) of the funds carried forward were Designated Funds.

Stoke St Mary PCC

Statement of Assets and Liabilities As at 31 December 2024

	Notes	2024 £	2023 £
ASSETS			
Cash funds			
Lloyds Bank current account		577	1,174
Lloyds Bank deposit account		1,791	2,870
CCLA deposit account - General Account		16,770	15,925
CCLA deposit account - Fabric Account		21,689	26,496
Cash in Hand		-	60
Monetary assets	9	40,827	46,525
Debtors and prepayments (General Fund, unless stated otherwise)			
Income tax recoverable (estimated)		2,157	2,099
CCLA Interest for 2024Q4 (General Fund)	(a)	198	214
CCLA Interest for 2024Q4 (Fabric Fund)	(a)	258	355
Clergy expenses paid in advance		250	250
Service collections taken electronically		-	52
Other monetary assets		2,862	2,970

(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)

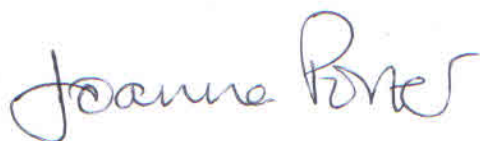
Clergy/Benefice expenses (Q4 estimate)	(a)	235	625
Benefice Administrator expense (Q4 estimate)	(a)	260	375
Utilities	(b)	70	130
Christian Copyright Licensing International	(c)	-	93
		565	1,223

(a) A hiatus in preparing accounts for clergy/benefice expenses resulted in no payments being made for 2023.

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

(c) The 2023 CCLI invoice was paid in 2024 after an (unsuccessful) application was made to be licenced as a benefice.

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 10 February 2025 and are signed on its behalf by the Rector and the Treasurer.



Revd. Joanna Porter



John Pugh

Stoke St Mary PCC

Notes to the Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

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 2024 covering the periods from 6 April to 31 December 2023 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".

	2024	2023
	£	£
4. Donations received		
Gift Aided donations	2,028	1,027
Non-Gift Aided donations	214	1,389
Stoke St Mary and Taunton Bellringers	155	49
Income from donations	2,397	2,465
5. Events		
	£	£
100 Club (net of prize money of £560; 2023: £560)	1,440	1,440
Harvest Celebration Lunch (2023: Supper)	396	93
Seed swap (March), plant sale (May)	361	-
Community teas	219	187
Christmas Bazaar	-	631
Income from events	2,416	2,351
6. Donations to charitable causes		
	£	£
Thurlbear School Leavers' Bibles	378	355
Churches Conservation Trust	288	227
Children's Society	202	230
Royal British Legion	150	140
Farming Community Network	60	-
Red Cross Turkey Appeal	-	250
Donations to charitable causes	1,078	1,202

Stoke St Mary PCC

Notes to the Financial Statements (continued) For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

7. Funding for Children's Worker and Benefice Administrator

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.

	2024 £	2023 £
8. Sundry payments		
Church Copyright Licence (2023 & 2024)	190	-
Harvest Celebration expenses	54	-
Ilminster Deanery Fund	25	-
Bath & Wells Change Ringers	20	15
SumUp transaction fees	20	-
Replacement hose for Henry	-	30
Sundry supplies	-	2
Total sundry payments	309	47

9. Funds

Fund balances at 31 December 2024 were as follows:

	£	£
General Fund (Unrestricted)	17,109	18,471
Designated funds:		
Community Mission & Charitable Fund	71	942
Part Restricted funds:		
Churchyard Fund (all Designated)	(104)	(266)
Fabric Fund (£1,275 Designated. 2023: £1,275)	23,751	27,378
Monetary assets carried forward	40,827	46,525

Reconciliation of movements in funds

	Monetary assets brought forward £	Receipts/ (payments) in the year £	Monetary assets carried forward £
General Fund	18,471	(1,362)	17,109
Community Mission & Charitable Fund	942	(871)	71
Churchyard Fund	(266)	162	(104)
Fabric Fund	27,378	(3,627)	23,751
	46,525	(5,698)	40,827