



**ANNUAL REPORT**

**ST MATTHEW'S CHURCH HARWELL**

**2024**

**Website: [harwellandchiltonchurches.org.uk](http://harwellandchiltonchurches.org.uk)**

**Registered Charity 115886**

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## 1. Introduction

This is the annual report of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) for St Matthew's Church Harwell, Oxfordshire. It covers the last financial accounting year, which was the calendar year ending 31st December 2024.

The primary aim of our Church and its PCC is the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. Specifically, our Church vision, adopted during 2015, is: "Growing God's Church, wider, deeper and closer".

The details of what our Church has been doing over the last year to further its vision are given in section 2.

This report was approved by the PCC at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and is signed on their behalf by the Chair of the PCC, Revd Jeremy Parsons.

Speaking personally, 2024 marked my first full year as Rector of Harwell and Chilton, enjoying the cycle of the church year and really getting to know the church and wider community. I would like to thank all the many people who, whether in up-front and visible ways, or working behind the scenes, give so generously of their time, energy and talents to make our churches places of welcome for all, and to share in ministry and service in the name of Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JP', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

*Revd Jeremy Parsons, Rector*

## 2. Review of the Year – Benefice Activities

### 2.1 Main events including Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals statistics

Roger Mawle ran an Alpha Course over eight weeks on a Monday evening at St Matthew's Church. There were 20 participants. There was also an Alpha course for the older youth in the Autumn term. It was a small but lovely group of 4 teenagers and with some great conversations.

All Saints' Chilton continued to follow a Church of England initiative *Season of Invitation* encouraging the congregation to invite friends and neighbours to festival services. The second Sunday in September at the Interactive Service regular attendees were encouraged to ask people along and share lunch together. Every household was invited to the Harvest service and cream teas in the afternoon. About 70 teas were served and many people enjoyed going up the bell tower and a couple of ringers were recruited.

A Gift Service was held at both Churches at the end of October, where shoe boxes were filled with items for wounded service men in Ukraine. The presents were distributed at hospitals in Eastern Ukraine. We contributed to around 600 Christmas boxes collected, meaning they could be shared even more widely than we had originally anticipated. The impact of these gifts has been tremendous, not only for the injured soldiers, but also on Ben and Tilda who arranged the distribution.

A Toy Service on the first Sunday of Advent, held at both Churches, collected gifts and toys for children living at the Oxford Women's Refuge. These gifts were an amazing blessing to them as they cope with the trauma they have experienced.

## Baptisms, Weddings, and Funerals

	St Matthew's Harwell			All Saints' Chilton		
	2024	2023	2022	2024	2023	2022
Baptisms	10	8	7	6	2	3
Thanksgivings for a child	0	1	0	0	0	0
Weddings	0	1 + 1B	3	0	2	2
Funerals in church	8	14	8	4	1	4
Thanksgiving services in church	0	0	1	0	4	4
Funerals at crematoria	0	4	4	0	1	0
Interments of ashes	1	0	0	4	5	4

## 2.2. Children, Youth and Family Work

### Sundays

Groups for our children and young people continued to meet twice a month at St Matthew's Harwell. CYF Volunteers led and helped at Kids' Church and Pathfinders groups, meeting with 15-20 young people across the pre-school/primary and secondary age groups. Our vestry was also open to toddlers during these services with Fledgelings' toys available to play with. On average, there were 32 adults and 17 children/teenagers at the monthly Interactive services in the Chilton Village Hall.

### Fledgelings

This baby and toddler group continued to run on Monday mornings at St Matthew's Harwell, and Wednesday morning in Chilton Community Room on Chilton Field during term time. The groups have grown in popularity and attendance, with some weeks reaching 60 people in Harwell. New members have reported hearing about how friendly and engaging the groups are, especially the story and song section. Lucy Ryan and Sarah Mawle have updated the Fledgelings programme introducing new craft, messy play, stories and songs

keeping God's love" at the centre of it all. Lucy has updated some of the Fledgelings toys in Harwell and they are now more accessible to all in the vestry.

### Holiday Club

We were unable to run Holiday Club this year due to the CYF Worker post remaining vacant throughout 2024.

### Reflective spaces

We were unable to run Reflective Spaces in the village primary schools due to the CYF Worker post remaining vacant throughout 2024.

### Youth Fellowship (YF) Groups

CYF Volunteers, Sarah Barrett, Tim Brook and Roger Mawle have kept this popular youth group running fortnightly during term time in the absence of a CYF Worker. They met in the Church Hall on Sunday evenings engaging in a range of games and activities exploring the Christian faith in a fun and relaxed way. Roger Mawle and other CYF volunteers also led a Youth Alpha Group following on from some YF groups.

### Youth Trust

We have been unable to work with Echo as we have done in previous years due to the CYF Worker post remaining vacant. However, Lucy and Sarah Barrett have been in regular contact with Hannah Field and have continued to provide two CYF volunteers at Echo events. We also continued to advertise their events, Youth Café and Soul Sport sessions to our Church community. The Youth Café often has around 100 young people attending.

### CYF Events

Lucy and the faithful team of CYF volunteers ran a variety of events throughout the year: during school holidays including summer picnics and games for Fledgelings groups, Craft and Song Time at our Church Open Tower during the Village's Hare Trail, Fork Biscuit Baking and Summer Craft and a Light Party in October half term. These events were mainly targeted at pre-school and primary aged children but a few of our young people from YF got involved by volunteering at some of these events.

In the days up to Christmas, our popular Christmas Tree Decorating event attracted many local families, including Fledgelings families. Volunteers, Sarah Barrett and Esther Corbishley also coordinated a "Living Advent Calendar" in the village for local families to learn more about the Christmas story.

## 2.3 Pastoral, Social and Community Activities

The *Pastoral Care* teams, and many individual members of our Churches', visit parishioners in their homes and offer a loving Christian presence and a listening ear to those who are ill, bereaved or who feel lonely.

There is a Pastoral Care Team in each parish.

In Chilton, the Team operates under the leadership of Pat Moseley who is joined by five other lay members plus the Associate Ministers. Some villagers already receive wonderful emotional and/or practical support from their friends and families on those (hopefully rare) occasions when such care is necessary. Other folk need reassurance of the Love of God and that "underneath are the everlasting arms". Home visits, the Oasis Cafe and the Warm Welcome Cafe provide opportunities for the Team to provide pastoral care to our neighbours.

In Harwell, Marilyn Thomas became the leader of the Pastoral Care Team in July and there are now eleven other members. The Chilton team joined us in September for a training morning in the Church Hall, and the Harwell team meet every two months for prayer and discussion for mutual encouragement and support. A monthly prayer diary has been made covering both parishes which was given out to anyone in both congregations who wanted it, so that everyone on the electoral roll can be prayed for at least once a month.

Home Communion is normally offered four times a year to those parishioners who are not very mobile – Easter, Summer, Harvest, and Christmas. Our Churches are also part of a team of ministers who take Communion to the new care home, Oxford Manor (formerly Alma Barn Lodge), in Harwell parish.

*Generation Gold services*, initiated by Revd Jan Radford and Revd Pam Rolls in 2015, were continued in 2024. Our theme for the year was 'The Seasons' and we reflected on the characteristics of the different seasons at our quarterly services.

At our September meeting in Chilton Village Hall we enjoyed a wonderful harvest lunch which was served to us by a professional caterer. We are very grateful to a willing band of helpers who assisted throughout the year with delivering invitations, catering, and playing the piano and organ, and to the generous people whose donations made our special treats and reverse collections possible. Plans are now in hand for *Generation Gold* for 2025 where we will be reflecting on the theme 'God Provides', beginning with Jesus feeding the 5,000.

Both our churches have continued to collect non-perishable food for *Didcot Emergency Foodbank* throughout the year, with a special collection in both churches at Harvest time. During 2024, the need for the Foodbank became more crucial as households struggled with the cost of living crisis.

The Benefice continues to be a partner church of the *Didcot and Wallingford Area CAP (Christians Against Poverty)* Debt Centre. As well as supporting the Debt Centre financially, members of the churches also volunteer supporting clients in their journey out of debt. The Centre is very grateful for the Christmas gifts and treats that the congregations provided for the eight families in Chilton and Harwell being helped by CAP. The number of people who became debt free in 2024 totalled 18, bringing the total to 95 over ten years.

The committed Money Coaches continued to run *CAP Money Courses* now called *Money Coaching* in Didcot Baptist Church as well as online if required. The new style course was delivered to six people helping them with budgeting and managing their money. Often people signed up to attend the course but did not turn up, so it has been decided to run the courses next year in a secular venue hoping to encourage greater attendance.

All Saints' Group continue to meet on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm in All Saints Church. We welcome women and men from both Chilton and Harwell. Speakers during 2024 have covered a wide range of topics, Morocco, Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue, Reverend Jeremy Parsons, Costa Rica, 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day, Festival Spirit "Making dreams a reality" an amazing charity providing full festival experiences for life-limited and disabled people, Joan Impey's "Road to Ordination", Doctoring in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and "See Saw".

The All Saints' Group, with great support from Chilton villagers, have continued to hold the monthly Charity market on Crafts End Green raising the great total of £12,072.35 in 2024.

The *Oasis Café* continues to meet at All Saints' Church on most third Saturdays of the month between 10.00am and 12.00 noon, and is free to all comers. On average twenty- two people enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and a convivial chat in relaxed surrounding

*The Community Cafe* at St Matthew's meets on the first Thursday in the month at 10.30am in the morning at St Matthews Church Harwell. It is free but people like to give a donation for the refreshments. Any money collected goes to CAP via the Church treasurer. We are a very informal group. Our numbers are increasing, but vary with the time of year and the weather.

#### *Harwellcome Community Café.*

The Harwellcome cafe is a joint venture, organised by St Matthews and hosted by the Harwellian. It arose out of the Warm Spaces initiative. The cafe runs every Thursday from 1- 4pm at the Harwellian.

Debbie Greenfield successfully applied for Community grant funding for the cafe and for the Music for Memories which is held monthly. This enables us not only to offer a warm friendly place to meet, but free refreshments which are welcomed by all. We quite often have over 30 visitors per week not just from Harwell but from other local communities and many of our visitors come regularly.

The volunteers are a mixture of church and community volunteers who come to welcome and if necessary chat with those that come along. We are fortunate to have a member of the Harwellian staff who works to provide the refreshments paid for with the grant funding.

There are board games for visitors to use if they want to and we have a regular group of Scrabble players. We sometimes hold special events such as advice on housing, home insulation and hearing loss depending on what is available. The most important thing is that visitors receive a warm welcome and a place to talk with others if they want to. The conversations are many and varied.

It is a place for St Matthew's to be amongst the community and to, with God's help, show His love and care. We are required in respect to the grant funding to undertake some sort of feedback which we do quite simply. Every week many visitors are feeding back to us that we are making a positive difference to their lives.

### *Sanctuary*

The vision for Saturday Sanctuary is to provide a space where all women can gather, have time to chat, breathe and feel cherished. We aim to feed everyone physically, emotionally and spiritually. We have delicious food and usually a glass of bubbles in a beautiful environment. We have lots of time for conversation and then a short testimony or thought to feed us spiritually and time for silence to allow everyone to breath, paint nails, write a note, do some colouring and encounter Jesus.

January, March and September were afternoon tea and in June we had a Summer soiree evening. We averaged about 40 people, most are women from our church but we also get lots of friends. It's a very welcoming and accessible event.

We also hosted a Saturday Soak evening, after feeling a prompt to provide a space where we could all spend more time soaking with Jesus and that is what we tried to do. This was for women from our churches to have an evening of encountering Jesus through worship, dwelling in the word and sharing what we felt Jesus was saying to us. We finished with tea and brownies. We had about 15 women and hope to do a similar evening again in 2025, after Easter.

## **2.4 World Mission**

The World Mission Group seeks to promote the engagement of our churches with world mission and proposes to each PCC how each church could spend its world mission budget.

We focus our World Mission financial support and prayer around the Anglican Five Marks of Mission. The Marks and the corresponding organisations are:

- 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom:** Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). The work of MAF enables mission workers to reach difficult and isolated places to share Christianity.
- 2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers:** Scripture Union (SU). Through Bible studies, resources and camps, SU aims to share the Christian faith, and disciple children and young people in particular.
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service:** The Leprosy Mission (TLM). TLM diagnoses, treats and offers specialist care such as reconstructive surgery, as well as rehabilitation programmes and health education in communities.

- 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.** Chris and Suzy Wilson are mission partners for Church Mission Society (CMS) and are based in Ethiopia and South Sudan. They work with a project that aims to equip and encourage churches in conflict-affected regions to actively work for peace.
- 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the Earth.** ARocha, a Christian conservation organisation which works in the UK and internationally.

During 2024, we continued to support financially several organisations in line with the 5 marks of mission; MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship), Scripture Union, The Leprosy Mission and ARocha.

We also continued to support financially several individual mission partners: Chris and Suzy Wilson who are with Church Mission Society in Ethiopia; Endri and Dyshi Tabacu of The Light of the World church in Albania, and John Abu Bakker with Fellowship For Neighbours, India.

The three members of the world mission group have met together during 2024. The group would love more people to join if you have a heart for world mission.

### **3. Looking Forward – Plans and Challenges for 2025**

During 2025 we will be continuing with a focus on children, young people and families. We aim to be a deeply intergenerational church, a community of disciples that spans the generations. We will make this more and more evident in our services and events, recognising that a flourishing and sustainable church must make room for and include everyone: each generation, every stage of faith, the full spectrum of Christian spirituality, embracing human diversity as a reflection of God's image. We are called to deep Christian unity, not to uniformity.

The Valley Park development saw its first homes occupied late last year, and 2025 will see rapid growth. We will have an additional focus in 2025 on strengthening ties with GWP Church, and we plan to recruit a youth minister with a special focus on Western Valley (the civic parish that includes the Great Western Park and Valley Park developments), as well as strengthening our children & families work.

As our communities continue to grow and change, we will need to find new ways to work together in each of our contexts. We are greatly blessed with all that God has placed into our hands, and I have already seen the enthusiasm our churches are bringing to the opportunities, and of course the challenges, that come with growth and change.

#### **4. Governance and Structure**

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a corporate body, established by the Church of England, and operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure.

St Matthew's, Harwell and All Saints', Chilton each has its own PCC. St Matthews' PCC met four times and All Saints' PCC met three times in 2024

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules (2022). The membership of the PCC consists of all clergy licensed to the Benefice, Churchwardens, Deanery Synod members and other lay members elected by those on the Electoral Roll of the Church. All those who attend our services/members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election for the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the Parish, including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent.

Given its wide responsibilities, PCC operate through several committees. Each committee deals with a particular aspect of Parish life. The committees report back regularly at PCC meetings, with minutes of their meetings or their decisions and recommendations being received, and discussed as necessary. The Rector is automatically a member of every committee.

**Standing Committees of St Matthew's and All Saints'**

These are the only committees required by Church law. They meet to set PCC agendas and, occasionally, when there are urgent decisions to be made, between PCC meetings. They consist of the Clergy, Churchwardens and the Treasurer plus the Vice-chair and the Secretary. St Matthew's and

All Saints' Standing Committee met six times in 2024.

### Combined PCC

For efficiency and convenience St Matthew's, Harwell PCC and All Saints', Chilton PCC regularly hold Combined PCC meetings, where members of the two PCCs come together to discuss matters that are common to both parishes. Meetings of the Joint PCC (see below) are held as part of Combined PCC meetings. As such, voting by Joint PCC members on any decisions required by the Joint PCC generally follows discussion by the Combined PCC. The Combined PCC met twice during 2024, on Zoom.

### Joint PCC

The Pastoral Measure provides for a Joint PCC in addition to the separate PCCs of our two Churches. It comprises the Benefice clergy, Churchwardens and the Treasurer plus the Vice-chair and the Secretary of each PCC.

The two PCCs can agree to place in the hands of the Joint PCC any matters involving both parishes. So far, the PCCs have delegated responsibility for the following matters to the Joint PCC:

- Safeguarding
- Staffing
- Data compliance.

### Safeguarding

The Benefice complies fully with national and Church of England law on Safeguarding. Safeguarding is managed at Benefice level, currently by Judy Gold from Chilton Parish and Sue Greatbanks from Harwell Parish. Both Safeguarding Officers have continued to work together and regularly meet to discuss progress and future action necessary to continue our service in accordance with our Safeguarding Policy.

Sue and Judy have carried on with DBS applications for volunteers whose Certificates have expired and checks for new volunteers. We would like to stress the importance and need of registering with the Update Service as it makes the renewal of a DBS certificate so simple and time saving. Registration with the Service must be completed within 30 days of issue of a certificate and is free for volunteers. Safeguarding training should be completed every three years by PCC

members and volunteers working with children. We are pleased to report that this is generally up to date.

### **Staffing**

The Benefice employs an Administrator working 20 hours a week and a Children and Families Worker. We have a vacancy for a Children and Families Worker vacancy which was covered, in 2024, by a combination of volunteers and temporary freelance paid help.

Staffing matters are overseen by the Benefice employment committee which is concerned with meeting the statutory regulations around employment, ensuring that performance assessment and development of staff employed by the PCCs is carried out, and that recruitment procedures are correctly followed.

### **Data Compliance**

In 2024, we have continued to work to ensure that our Churches are compliant with current national data governance legislation in the form of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

## **5. Finance Report**

### **Finance**

The PCC has the significant responsibility of setting the budget and monitoring the income and expenditure of the church. This task is carried out by the Finance Committee, which reviews in detail the different purposes of the expenditure, as well as the different forms of income and giving to the church.

#### **Financial Position**

The final financial position for St Matthews church showed a deficit of £9,855. While regular general planned giving has remained broadly level during the last five years, costs have increased, so reserves have been depleted to fund this deficit (see reserves policy below).

St. Matthews participates in the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS), which removes significant administration time from the handling of regular giving. Currently the PGS accounts for more than half of regular giving and regular donors.

Income in 2024 was £117,497. Expenditure in 2024 was £127,352.

We are grateful for the continued support for the Children and Families Worker Fund, which allowed the role to be financed without access to the stretched general giving pool. The level of the Fund at the end of 2024 was £56,929 which has given us confidence in our recruiting campaign for the future.

## Reserves Policy

Reserves are held to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet the cost of emergencies. It has previously been a PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves of at least 6 months unrestricted payments, although this figure is now 4 months after funding the current account deficit. A fundraising campaign is taking place in 2025 with the aim of increasing regular giving to our general fund, which will allow us to plan our expenditure with greater confidence.

As at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 the PCC held £45,144 in unrestricted reserves after transfer into the current account

## Buildings

The PCC is charged with the care, maintenance and insurance of the church buildings, including St Matthew's Church Hall. The property and movable goods of the church are vested in the Churchwardens, who are also responsible for inspecting the fabric of the church and making an annual report (the Fabric Report) first to the PCC and then to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

The PCC is also concerned with developing our buildings to accommodate our own activities more effectively, and to enable us to connect better with and serve the wider community. A key aim is to have a main church building that is flexible, comfortable, and accessible, whilst maintaining and even enhancing its beauty.

### **St Matthew's church building**

St Matthew's church is a Grade 1 listed building, parts of which date back to 1190. It is kept in a good state of repair by the **Buildings Committee** and other volunteers. Some of this work is maintenance and general repairs that continue in a very similar fashion year in year out. In addition, the church is cleaned

regularly by a combination of a paid cleaner and a small faithful team of volunteers.

The Buildings Committee maintains an **Action List** of ongoing tasks. The Church Architect carried out the **Quinquennial Inspection** of the Church building in June 2021. The recommendations are being followed up and where relevant have been incorporated in the Action List. The overall condition of the church building is good and the Architect in his report commented *'It is clear....that the PCC take a great deal of care and pride in looking after the fabric of this Church'*.

The detailed Fabric Report by the Churchwardens is provided in a separate document.

The following are examples of work carried out during the last year.

- The south porch rendering has been repaired and the walls and ceiling re-decorated. The notice boards were painted and re-mounted. The lower walls of the vestry have also been re-decorated with Classidur paint.
- The external oak doors have been treated with teak oil and the metalwork painted with Hammerite water based black paint. All metal windows and ferrous glazing bars have been cleaned off and painted with Hammerite water based black paint.
- Flooding of the lobby of the extension has been a continuing problem when there has been exceptionally heavy rainfall. The problem is caused by the very large amount of water falling on the north side of the church roof, overwhelming the gutters and running under the extension door. A plan drawn up to re-lay the paving and provide a new drainage channel has now been implemented.
- The gutters and downpipes have all been cleaned and repainted.
- Swift boxes have been installed in the south and east windows of the bell chamber.



Re-decorated porch and notice boards Improved drainage by the Extension door

Photos: Tony Hughes

The **Friends of St Matthew's** scheme to stimulate interest in the church building, and ultimately help to provide for the costs of keeping it in good order, has continued in 2024 through a Facebook page: **[www.facebook.com/HarwellChurchFriends](https://www.facebook.com/HarwellChurchFriends)**.

This is aimed particularly at descendants of the Harwell family lineage in the USA. The Facebook page has had a lot of visits and interest and consideration continues as to how this interest can be used to increase donations to help with the cost of maintenance of the church.

### **St Matthew's Church Hall**

The Church Hall is located on the corner of The Park and Wellshead, approximately 100m south of the church. Its fabric is generally in good order; the surrounding grass and boundary hedges are cut when necessary.

The Hall has been used less than is ideal during 2024. In November 2023 the PCC had agreed to set up a new Project Group to pick up from the conclusions of the Working Group that reported in March 2023, in order to map out a path for the future of the Hall, and to advise the PCC of the best options to follow in the short and longer terms. This Group started work in early 2024 and recommended that every effort should be made to increase bookings for the hall, and that a number of improvements should be made to make the Hall more attractive to users. These included soundproofing in the main hall, better lighting and re-decoration of the main hall. The PCC accepted the recommendations, and provided a starting budget for improvements. Some members of the Group then formed a new Hall Management Committee, that has very energetically obtained grants to add to the budget, implemented improvements, established a trial booking system in collaboration with the Village Hall, and, importantly, found a potential

user that would use the hall on every weekday. It has also taken over general maintenance of the Hall from the Church Buildings Committee.

## **Appendix 1 – Administrative Information**

The correspondence address for the Rector is:

The Rectory  
Church Lane  
Harwell, Didcot  
OX11 0EZ

The Independent Examiner of the PCC Financial Accounts is:

Mrs Jane Moreton  
Harrow House  
Burr Street  
Harwell, Didcot  
OX11 0DT

## **Appendix 2: St Matthew's Church Membership**

### **Electoral Roll**

The Electoral Roll stood at **89** in April 2024 compared to 66 in April 2023

### **Appendix 3 -St Matthew's PCC Membership**

During 2024, the membership of St Matthew's PCC has been:

#### **Clergy**

- Revd Jeremy Parsons
- Revd Pam Rolls (Associate Minister)
- Revd Janet Radford (Assistant Minister)
- Rev'd Sasha Reeves (Curate)

#### **Churchwarden**

- Jane Woolley

#### **Elected Deanery Synod representatives**

none

#### **Other Elected representatives**

- Tony Hughes (Vice-Chair)
- Elizabeth Clarke (Secretary)
- Tim Roberts (Treasurer)
- Rebecca Lewis
- Liz Roberts
- Phil Johnston
- Adrian Lance- McGregor
- Adrian Bollon
- Stephen Manning