



# Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31.12.2023



**St John's**  
CHURCH



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# **Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

## **Agenda**

1. Prayer
2. Meeting of Parishioners for the choosing of two Churchwardens
3. The Annual Parochial Church Meeting of St. John's Electoral Roll
  - a. Apologies for absence
  - b. Minutes of the previous year's meeting
  - c. Electoral Roll Officer's report
  - d. Report on the proceedings of the PCC/Church members
  - e. Churchwardens report on the fabric, goods and ornaments
  - f. Proceedings of Deanery and Diocesan Synods
  - g. Vicar's remarks
  - h. Any reports from Church organisations
4. Report on the financial affairs of the parish
  - Examined Accounts for the previous calendar year
5. Choosing of an Independent Examiner for the current year
6. Closing Prayer

## Vicar's Reflection

When I take time to look back across the year just gone, I am always amazed at the amount of activity we cram into a year and I am always reminded that none of it would be possible without the help of the volunteers at Church who give so much of their time, energy and effort, often while carrying their own burdens to make sure that the doors are open, the kettle is on, people are welcomed and all the other myriad of jobs that go into running our church. My utmost gratitude must go to them, first and foremost. Our aspiration as a church is 'to love like Jesus loves' and this is demonstrated in numerous ways, both small and large and they all enable others to feel welcome and create a space where the love of Jesus can be shared in word and action.

2023 was a year of change for me vocationally as I stepped into the role of Area Dean of Lancaster and Morecambe, a role I was invited to take on by the Bishop following consultation with the clergy in the deanery. I often say 'every day is a school day' and that has certainly been true in 2023 as I learn what it means to be an area dean. I am grateful that the Church of England has released finances to be able to support this ministry through the employment of a part-time administrator, primarily to help out with parish administration, to release some time for me to undertake the new role. We welcomed Jennifer Cloran in the Autumn and she has quickly found her feet [despite having to work with me!]

We have benefited from three great ordinands in my time at St. John's but sadly we said goodbye to our current one, Emily Barry, this year. We benefitted hugely from her ministry, particularly with our children's work and she also brought a creative voice to our preaching and teaching. She was ordained in June at the Cathedral and has settled in well to her ministry at St. Mary's, Ribbleson and the Church of the Ascension, Brookfield.

There were a number of events across the year, some are annual fixtures while others were new. We continued to support local initiatives like the Children's Treat, the bonfire and fireworks at the village hall and the Gaslight show [significant this year because my scones won first prize – I couldn't let the year pass without mentioning it!] and holding our own events like the Teddy Bears' picnic, Apple-Fest, coffee mornings, crib festival and a new Christmas Pudding evening.

Of particular note this year was our first ever Beer Festival combining music, food and drink as well as activities for children. The day was a huge success and well supported by the village and wider community. We also held an event for Chinese students to give them a taste of English culture and an opportunity for a tour of the church. They were treated to afternoon tea and activities in the church. We also hosted the University of Lancaster Music Society for a concert of music and singing.

2023 saw the Coronation of a new Monarch, King Charles III and this occasion was marked with an outdoor service, barbecue and celebration.

This is all on top of the regular ministry that happens in the parish – Jelly Tots, our toddler group, Sunday School, Messy Church, Youth group, regular christenings, weddings and funerals and our Sunday worship and seasonal celebratory worship.

As God's people, we are made in His image to know, love and worship Him, the uniqueness of the Church of England is that we have a presence in every community in the nation. I remain eternally grateful for the church and community that we are and which we serve.

Reverend Craig Abbott



# **Draft Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting for the year 2022, held on April 23, 2023**

The Annual Report and Accounts were made available on St John's website in advance of the meeting.

- 1) The proceedings opened with welcome from the Craig and prayers for the PCC and the business of the church and for last year, today and the future at 11.57am.

Craig introduced the meeting and outlined we were continuing to be flexible and agile in responding as we continued to contend with. Craig thanked Ian his Curate, Lay Reader Di, the Churchwardens and the PCC and all those supporting the work of St John's Ellet.

## **2) Meeting of Parishioners for the choosing of two Churchwarden**

This meeting is open to all who live in the parish and has been advertised. The purpose of the meeting is to elect two Churchwardens.

- Helen Ballard is stepping down has after 6 years of full and faithful service. Formal thanks were noted to Helen for her substantial contribution over the years. Usually, people can serve 2 terms of 3 years as Churchwarden, but we would have made exception for Helen. We will be recognizing her contribution on the 14 May 2023 after the Coronation Service.
- Peter Harrison has agreed to stand as Churchwarden and will stay as Treasurer. Peter's nomination was proposed by Helen Ballard and seconded by Marjorie Odor. Carried unanimously.
- Stephanie Carter has indicated she is willing to continue as Churchwarden and her nomination was proposed by Kenneth Beales and seconded by Sylvia Beales on the form. All in were in favour, with no abstentions.

## **3) Annual Parochial Church Meeting of St John's Electoral Roll (for the year 2022)**

- a) **Present:** Rev Craig Abbott, Rev Ian McGrath, Peter Harrison, Stephanie Carter, Di Otto, Honor Rhodes, Dave and Meriel Cumming, Steven Moorhouse, Shaun Corkerry, Lisa Corkerry, Peter Otto, Margaret Houghton, Brian Speight, Pauline Dean, Graham Rand, Margaret Rand, Kenneth Beales, Garry Alder, Lyn McDonald, Penny Park, Suzanne Peat, Rebecca Battersby, Judith Jones, Marjorie Odor, Val Harrison

**Apologies:** Helen Ballard, Emily Barry, Di Armstrong, Cath Shaw, Sylvia Beales

- b) **Minutes of the last APCM** were in the Annual Report. They were received and approved unanimously as an accurate record of the APCM 2022 and signed by the Vicar.  
Matters arising – none.

- c) **Electoral Roll Officer's report.** This verbal update outlined that there were currently 80 on roll at April 2023.

d) **Election of PCC members:**

- There is one vacancy as Lena Eccles is not re-standing. Thanks were noted to Lena for her contribution over the years. We wish her well. PCC is for 3 years. Judith Battersby is willing to stand for PCC. She was nominated by Peter Harrison and seconded by Margaret Houghton. Marjorie was proposed by Penny Park and seconded by Meriel Cumming, for Deanery Synod Representative. Both proposals were carried unanimously.
- e) **The Vicar's report** was included in the full Annual Report for 2022. Key points: he has reflected that this has been a significant year for our community and nationally. We celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, but then had faced her death. It was good to take church outside to the community and our events attracted those who wouldn't normally attend our church itself.

The APCM is an opportunity for us to show what have we achieved and for Craig to say thank you for the huge number of those who work in our church building and church community, across a wide range of groups and services and who go into school and messy etc. Craig thanked the PCC and church wardens and Peter as Treasurer. Also, we have support from Ian as Curate, Graham, Diane and Emily. We are very lucky here. We are better supported than other churches around us and it is great to have more variety of individuals preaching and leading worship. Craig noted that Youth Group on Fridays now has between 20-30 young people attending.

- f) **The Report on the Proceedings of the PCC** was included in full in the Annual Report. The PCC regularly and robustly debates and agrees key matters related to St John's Ellel's business. This reminds us of what we do. (A typo in the report referring to 2021 not 2022 was noted.)

- a. Graham asked for updated details on Eco-Church. Craig replied that we had a meeting in March 2023. Those interested had been through the Eco Church survey and ticked off what they could and put questions down re other areas. The idea is to take good practice and move forward but not necessarily go for eg accreditation/awards. We do now have recycling boxes at the back of church and in the Vestry. Another meeting is planned in May 2023 to survey church grounds and look at eg bird and insect boxes. We are moving slowly, but we have started. We can ask for a report for next year's APCM. We are looking into attracting swifts, but we do have an infestation of pigeons in the tower which needs some volunteers to get them out.

- g) **The Churchwardens' report on the fabric, goods and ornaments** was included in full in the Annual Report.

- a. The big project to repair the south wall was begun in 2022 and is still not quite complete as there is some work still required over the porch. It will take years for the wall to dry out completely.
- b. We still have the issue re space working against us for our growing work with children and young people. At the July 2023 Parish Away Day we will talk through options for the building for the future.
- c. Heating is an issue as the current system is not reliable. We are also debating the issue of pews v flexible seating.
- d. Garry raised concerns over the re potholes on entrance to the drive and it was reported that someone has been identified to fill them in over next few weeks.
- e. Marjorie suggested could someone smooth out the area by piano -but the sandstone needs to breathe and at the other side patching has not been effective. We need to look at how we move the with something underneath.

**h) Proceedings of Deanery and Diocesan Synods** are captured in the full Annual Report for 2022. Craig is now Area Dean, and the Deanery is still in the midst of transitioning to face to face again from online.

i) **Safeguarding**: is captured in the relevant section of the Annual report.

j) Any reports from Church organisations, which show the range of activities undertaken, are captured in the Annual Report.

Any questions?

- \* Graham welcomes reflections from Ian and Emily. Emily has been with us an extra year due to starting in covid. Peter Otto has benefitted from Emily's musicianship. Craig appealed for others who want to offer their talents for music to contact Peter.

#### **4. Report on the financial affairs of the Parish - Examined accounts for 2022**

- \* Peter Harrison, Treasurer, gave an explanation of our accounts for 2022, which now contain a 3-year rolling comparison.
- a) Year went on cost of living came up and has affected everyone including us in the church and our congregation and we have seen falling collections. However, when we have asked for contributions, we have had a great response. Where cost increases have hit us most is gas costs, which were up 4 times those of 2021, although our gas is obtained through Parish Buying, which has saved over British Gas, but we have seen no help from government. The daily standing charge really is really hitting this year.
- b) The Social Committee looks at a programme of events and we have seen good income over expenditure.
- c) The South Wall project had £31000.00 of generous donations carried over from last year, but costs mean we had to draw down some of our shares in the sum of



£20,500.00. We have reduced our reserves and share income was down from £98000.00 in 2021 to £66000.00 in 2022.

- d) 2022 was the first year we ended with an in-year deficit of £4000.00, with costs up and despite an increase in income plus a subsidy from the Diocese for energy cost, a good gift aid return and increased one off donations.
- e) We have set our budget again to have a deficit, due to rising costs. We only had about £2500.00 working capital at end of year. We had £28000.00 in the bank, but £25500.00 of those funds are restricted.

Full financial details are in the Annual Report.

There were compliments to the Treasurer on the detailed and clear accounts that were noted.

Craig will look at stewardship again and talk to congregation.

We have had £17500.00 in support to help us meet our parish share and we have agreement for this year to do this too.

Any Questions?

- a) Graham asked about the situation with Shireshead and finances and the Shireshead's generosity. Craig replied that when he came fully from St Thomas's he came to legally separated parishes. He needed time to settle, and we have had to work with the Diocese for financial support over a 3 year, sliding scale. Talk then started of bringing our Parish and Shireshead together. The Diocese has been generous because of the aspiration that St John's and Shireshead will come back together in the future when Rev Peter Ballard retires. Shireshead will need to prepare for contributing to a full stipend that will be due by the new Parish and its component churches. Shireshead have been increasing giving beyond their parish share and this was offered back to us. Our respective churchwardens have been talking recently to discuss operations. The proposal is for one PCC and one set of accounts but there will be separate parts re restricted funds – some will be for our building and so will theirs for their buildings etc.

Craig has instructed the Archdeacon of Lancaster to start a pastoral measure for legal purposes. There will then be a draft and a consultation process with PCCs and the wider congregations etc. We will become one united benefice with Craig as Vicar, Ian as Curate. Ian is currently going to Shireshead once per month, though his Curacy finishes in the next 2 years. The Diocese will offer support but we don't know what it looks like yet. We will have to operate as 1 priest covering both so will need to reconsider service times. We are 10.30 they are 10am currently. Shireshead will be with us for some of our Parish Away Day with both PCCs meeting individually also.

- b) Ken Beales asked if we would discuss solar panels? Would the roof hold them? We could offset gas costs. The first piece of work is for someone to look at

strength of roof. May be there would be some grants. Brian Speight commented that the beams that come down are rotten towards end, o we would need work or re-beaming or treatment. If viable we would look at it going forward or maybe a windmill. The Diocese is committed to carbon net zero at some point so we will need to look at renewables.

The independently examined annual accounts for 2022 were formally accepted.

## **5. Approval for the Churchwardens and PCC to appoint members of the Electoral Roll as Sidespersons**

- \* A rota of individuals who meet and greet people as they come into church was re-introduced in 2022 after covid. Anyone who wishes to continue or be added to the Rota to talk to Craig or the Churchwardens.

## **6. Choosing of an Independent Examiner for the current year**

It was proposed that we choose Jonathan Dutton as he is willing to continue with this task. Agreed unanimously.

7. The meeting closed with a prayer by Ian at 12.55

# **Annual report on the business of the PCC for the calendar year 2022.**

It is the role of the PCC with the Vicar to consult together on matters of general concern and importance to the parish. Since the last APCM, the PCC has met regularly with Rev Craig Abbott as Chair and including our Curate Ian and Di Otto. Attendance and engagement by the PCC has been good, and there have been some challenging and interesting debates during the year which ensure a robust discharge of the PCC's duties and responsibilities. Meetings have been held in Church.

The Vicar, Churchwardens and Treasurer present updates at each meeting as does the Curate. Risk assessments and Safeguarding are standing items, as are updates from the Building and Social Committees, the Deanery Synod and any changes to the Electoral Roll are also received. New standing items in relation to War on Waste and Eco Church were added to our agendas during 2023.

Dave Cumming sadly had to relinquish his duties during 2023. Judith Jones joined the PCC and resigned within the year.

The PCC considers such matters as:

- Annual approval of the proposed budget for the year and the arrangements for independent scrutiny of our accounts.
- Monitoring at each PCC of actual income and expenditure versus forecasted budget and close monitoring of our Parish Share contributions and charitable giving, etc.
- Progressing the bringing together of St John's Ellet with St James Shireshead has been a key theme during 2023.
- Oversight of services including weddings, funerals and baptisms, new initiatives and review of activities delivered, Church Music and Choir activities.
- Preparation for Confirmation
- Oversight of special events eg the Coronation.
- Sunday School and Youth activities and Safeguarding, School links, Messy Church and Jelly Tots
- Reports from Deanery and Diocesan Synod meetings
- Oversight of the graveyard, its maintenance and plans to ensure capacity into the future.
- Social and fundraising events.
- GDPR related matters.
- Changes to the Electoral Roll.

The PCC has benefitted from having both leadership from Craig over the 12 months and input from a range of individual PCC members who each bring their own expertise and experience



to ensure robust oversight of management of the Church. We have been grateful for the input from our Curate, Ordinand and Lay Reader.

Honor Rhodes – PCC Secretary

## Finance

As reported last year, although we were fully out of the COVID era both the Church and its parishioners felt the increase in costs very hard, and this was reflected in both receipts and payments, although when the whole community came together, wonderful results could be achieved. The overall deficit within year was £13,200

**Receipts:** Giving through standing order and the plate was down by £1,700 and mirrored what we had seen towards the end of 2022. Some of this was down to losing 3 regular donors. Events again were successful raising nearly £7,000 but with costs of £1,600 still showed a good return, but the Social Report will give more details on this. Receipts from Messy Church and Childrens & Young Peoples have kept pace with expenditure. Again weddings and funerals generated £5,800 but this has a knock on effect in the DBF fees we pay to the Diocese and the Honorarium fees for music and verger. There was a VAT reclaim this year of £4,800 for the South Wall repairs, coming from the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. CBF Interest and dividends from the shares were higher due to issues with CCLA who manage our portfolio through the Diocese. There was an addition £900 and that was not received until February 23 which belonged to 2022. Although reported in these accounts they are not shown as dividends in Reserves position

**Payments:** The main areas of expenditure were the Parish Share. Following discussions with the Archdeacon we were able to negotiate a reduction in the share from £57,000 through support from Shireshead and the Diocese. During 2023 it became apparent that our interpretation and Diocese differed slightly which meant there was a deficit of £7,600. This matter has now been resolved with no additional payments. With regards to the cost of living the Church's gas and electricity costs had quadrupled from September 22, although we did see a reduction in October we still spent over £7,100 on gas and electricity. There was also the final payment for the South wall of £7,000. We continue to support Local, National and International charities to the tune of £2,430 and this included additional donations from the Coronation Open Air Service and Carol Singing, for the Olive Branch, the Bishops Harvest Appeal and some of the collections at Xmas going to the homeless shelter.

**Banking:** The balance in the bank accounts at 31st December 2022 was £15,237.84, and with the balance of the protected funds being £14,639.81 this means the current working capital is £600

**Reserves & Protected Funds:** The below sheet shows the current position with regards to the reserves held as shares and the locally held protected funds. Following selling £20,500 worth to help pay for the South Wall and a this has meant a reduction in dividends. The current balance/market Value is £73,164.32

	Annual budget	December Actual	Monthly Budget	Ytd Actual	Ytd Budget	Variance Ytd v Budget		Annual budget	December Actual	Monthly Budget	Ytd Actual	Ytd Budget	Variance Ytd v Budget
<b>RECEIPTS</b>							<b>PAYMENTS</b>						
Covenanted Giving	22,200	1,954	1,850	22,513	22,200	313	Missions, Charities & Donations	1,900	2,100	158	2,430	1,900	-530
Collection and Other Giving	3,100	691	258	3,759	3,100	659	Church Running Costs	900	24	75	856	900	44
Donations attracting Gift Aid	4,700	380	392	3,598	4,700	-1102	Clergy Expenses/Vicarage	3,500	338	292	3,856	3,500	-356
Online Giving - Stripe/Sum Up	700	118	58	701	700	1	Building Maintenance & Lighting	10,000	1,077	833	17,213	10,000	-7213
Income Tax Recovered	7,500		0	8,391	7,500	891	Church Insurance	2,820	265	235	3,066	2,820	-246
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,200</b>	<b>3,143</b>	<b>2,558</b>	<b>38,962</b>	<b>38,200</b>	<b>762</b>	Honorarium & Fees	100		8	390	100	-290
<b>Receipts from activities for generating funds</b>							Printing & Promotional work	400		33	540	400	-140
Events	4,000	45	333	6,959	4,000	2959	Vicar's Discretionary Fund	250		21	350	250	-100
Organ/Music Fund	0		0	720	0	720	Cost of Events	500	19	42	1,608	500	-1108
Church Building/Repairs	0		0	0	0	0	<b>Funds</b>						
Graveyard	100	5	8	60	100	-40	Messy Church	600	109	50	846	600	-246
Donations - Non Specific	1,800	336	150	1,518	1,800	-282	Childrens & Young People incl Jelly Tots	1000	192	83	1,021	1,000	-21
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,900</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>9,257</b>	<b>5,900</b>	<b>3357</b>	Graveyard	250		21	553	250	-303
<b>Receipts from Church Activities</b>							Organ Repairs/Music	600	80	50	800	600	-200
Childrens & Young People incl Jelly Tots	1,000	308	83	908	1,000	-92	Flower Fund	50		4	51	50	-1
Messy Church	750	128	63	506	750	-244	Flood Relief			0	0	0	0
Wedding and Funeral Fees	4,000	217	333	5,862	4,000	1862	Eco Church			0	0	0	0
<b>Other Receipts</b>							<b>Parish Share</b>						
Eco Church	0		0	358	0	358	Diocesan DBF Fees	1,500	2,425	125	2,425	1,500	-925
Diocesan DBE/Energy Support	0	59	0	157	0	157	Diocesan Parish Share	41,090	3,590	3,424	41,090	41,090	0
VAT Refund	5,000		0	4,843	5,000	-157							
<b>Receipts from Investments</b>													
CBF Fund Transfer				0	0	0							
CBF Interest and Dividend	1,600	343	133	2,931	1,600	1331							
Bank Interest	60	31	5	103	60	43							
<b>Total</b>	<b>56,510</b>	<b>4,615</b>	<b>3,668</b>	<b>63,887</b>	<b>56,510</b>	<b>7,377</b>		<b>65,460</b>	<b>10,219</b>	<b>5,455</b>	<b>77,095</b>	<b>65,460</b>	<b>-11,635</b>



		Opening Balance as at 01/01/23	28,446
		Excess Receipts & Payments	- 13,208
		Closing Balance as at 31/12/23	<u>15,238</u>
<b><u>Bank Balances</u></b>			
Current a/c 31/12/22	19,911	Current a/c 31/12/23	6,599
Savings a/c 31/12/22	<u>8,535</u>	Savings a/c 31/12/23	<u>8,639</u>
	<u>28,446</u>		<u>15,238</u>

**Year on Year Analysis 2021-2023**

	<b>2023 Actual</b>	<b>2022 Actual</b>	<b>2021 Actual</b>		<b>2023 Actual</b>	<b>2022 Actual</b>	<b>2021 Actual</b>
<b>RECEIPTS</b>				<b>PAYMENTS</b>			
Covenanted Giving	22,513	23,750	20,709	Missions, Charities & Donations	2,430	2,116	1,892
Collection and Other Giving	3,759	3,100	3,421	Church Running Costs	856	1,089	797
Donations attracting Gift Aid	3,598	4,696	4,684	Clergy Expenses/Vicarage	3,856	3,401	3,789
Online Giving - Stripe/Sum Up	701	669	684	Building Maintenance & Lighting	17,213	33,005	3,799
Income Tax Recovered	8,391	8,544	7,202	Church Insurance	3,066	2,923	2,782
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,962</b>	<b>40,759</b>	<b>36,700</b>	Honorarium & Fees	390	320	45
				Printing & Promotional work	540	402	830
<b>Receipts from activities for generating funds</b>				Vicar's Discretionary Fund	350	0	300
Events	6,959	4,200	4,151				
Organ/Music Fund	720	0	0	Cost of Events	1,608	461	861
Church Repairs	0	3,727	16,626				
Graveyard	60	66	85	<b>Funds</b>			
Donations - Non Specific	1,518	1,794	1,927	Messy Church	846	604	208
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,257</b>	<b>9,787</b>	<b>22,789</b>	Childrens & Young People incl Jelly Tots	1,021	1,403	1,049
				Graveyard	553	395	241
<b>Receipts from Church Activities</b>				Organ Repairs/Music	800	350	0
Childrens & Young People incl Jelly Tots	908	1,441	473	Flower Fund	51	0	0
Messy Church	506	755	1,164	Flood Relief	0	0	0
Wedding and Funeral Fees	5,862	7,413	3,298				
				<b>Parish Share</b>			
<b>Other Receipts</b>				Diocesan DBF Fees	2,425	2,805	1,577
Flood Relief		0	0	Diocesan Parish Share	41,090	39,730	44,753
Eco Church	358						
Contribution from Trinity Church/Diocese/St Thomas's	157	1,809	414				
VAT Refund	4,843	0	385				
<b>Receipts from Investments</b>							
CBF Fund Transfer	0	20,500	5,300				
CBF Interest and Dividend	2,931	1,647	2,533				
Bank Interest	103	18	1				
<b>Total</b>	<b>63,887</b>	<b>84,129</b>	<b>73,057</b>				
				<b>Opening Balance as at 01/01</b>	<b>28,446</b>	<b>33,321</b>	<b>23,186</b>

	-		
Excess Receipts & Payments	13,208	-4,875	10,134
Closing Balance as at 31/12	<u>15,238</u>	<u>28,446</u>	<u>33,321</u>
Current a/c 31/12	6,599	19,911	24,805
Parish Share a/c 31/12	0	0	0
Savings a/c 31/12	<u>8,639</u>	<u>8,535</u>	<u>8,517</u>
	<u>15,238</u>	<u>28,446</u>	<u>33,321</u>
Restricted Funds	14,640	25,538	28,664
Working Capital	<u>598</u>	<u>2,908</u>	<u>4,657</u>



**Investment Accounts - Held at the Diocese**

Legacy	No of Shares	Market Value as at 31/12/23 £	Market Value as at 31/12/22 £	Dividend Earned 2023 £	
Sunday School	277	6,261.67	5,723.21	171.17	Restricted
Grubb Legacy (1)	278.50	6,295.58	5,754.20	172.07	Unrestricted
Taylor Legacy	185	4,181.98	3,835.36	114.32	Unrestricted
Coleman Legacy	2,496.10	56,425.09	51,572.92	1,542.33	Restricted Building
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,236.60</b>	<b>73,164.32</b>	<b>66,885.69</b>	<b>1,999.89</b>	(2)

**Restricted Funds - Held in the PCC Bank Account**

Fund	Balance as at 31/12/22 £	Balance as at 31/12/22 £	
Organ/Music Fund	72.29	152.29	(3)
Church Building/ Repairs	6,887.79	17,542.62	
ECO Church	358.00	0.00	
Children & Young People Incl Jelly Tots	1,604.51	1,429.16	
Graveyard	1,647.58	2,125.24	
War Memorial	0.00	0.00	
Messy Church	3,467.14	3,686.41	
Flood Relief	602.50	602.50	
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,639.81</b>	<b>25,538.22</b>	

**Notes:**

- (1) 959.5 shares sold for £20,500 in November 22 to go towards payment of the South Wall
- (2) Due to issues at CCLA the final payment of £931.50 for dividends usually paid in December 22 was not paid until February 23 so is not included in 23's dividends
- (3) For 2023 the PCC have decided to amalgamate the Organ & Choir Funds and just have one named the Organ/Music Fund

# Independent Examiner's report to the members/trustees of St John's Church Ellel, Parochial Church Council

## Independent Examiner's report to the members/trustees of St John's Church Ellel, Parochial Church Council

I report on the accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023

### Respective Responsibilities of the Trustees and Independent examiner

As trustees of the charity, the members of the PCC are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. They consider that as audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to

: examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act.

: follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act and

: state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

### Basis of Independent Examiner's Statement

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission. My examination includes the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts and seeking explanations from the management committee concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in a full audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the accounts.

### Independent Examiner's Statement

In connection with my examination, no matters have come to my attention

1 – which give me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements to keep accounting records in accordance with s.130 of the 2011 Act or

- To prepare accounts which accord with these accounting records have not been met, or

2- to which in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed

Date

 C Hawson  
19/2/24

# Youth Group

Friday evenings in church:     6pm – 7pm for those in School Year 6.  
   7pm – 8pm for those in School Year 7 and above.

Our Youth Group continues to run on Friday evenings during term time for those in School Year 6 and above. We run two groups, split into two age groups to manage our numbers, which regularly reach around 25-30 on a weekly basis, with more on the books. Our weekly sessions are a mix of organised games and activities, tuck shop, free time, and a short thought or discussion based on a particular theme that encourages the young people to think about their own values and beliefs in light of the story of Jesus and teaching from the Bible; our desire is that each and every young person that comes along not only finds a home with us as part of our church family, but will come to have a growing faith in Christ for themselves. We continue to use materials provided by Urban Saints to assist us in our planning.

We also seek to do some extra special social evenings that are a little bit different and out of the ordinary. Some of this year's highlights include a trip to Crazy Golf at the Flower Bowl near Garstang, our 'Ice Cream Bonanza' which included a drain-pipe's worth of ice cream, water games and a free-for-all water fight, and our annual Christmas party. We also joined in with the wider church family in helping set up for Children's Treat and with the delivery of our parish Christmas card.



One area of development this year has been in our inter-church relationships. Spearheaded by our local schools workers from NISCU and the youth team at St. Thomas's Church in Lancaster, there is now a termly youth event called 'Resolute' that seeks to bring young people from churches and schools across the local area for an evening of fun, friendship and a chance to hear something about what it means to follow Jesus and how we can do that for ourselves. These evenings have included, pizza, donuts, tuck shop, craft activities, giant inflatables (sumo suits, bucking broncos!), popcorn machines, indoor archery to name but a few, and it's been great to see a mix of ages and young people from across the local area coming together. It is also an encouragement for our young people to realise that there are others

around them and in their schools who are actively engaged with church and who are seeking to follow Christ for themselves.

Please continue to pray for our young people and our leaders, currently: myself, Rev. Craig Abbott, Diane Otto, Marjorie Odor, Meriel Cumming and Amanda Faulconbridge. Some of our older youth also help with the younger group. Pray for safety, fun, wisdom, and creativity for us as leaders as we seek to plan engaging programmes that also communicate the love of Christ effectively.

Do also pray for more leaders – and consider whether this could be a ministry God is calling you to – as numbers of young people attending are increasing, and as I write this, Diane Otto has stepped back from helping due to her other commitments to wider church and community ministry. Thanks, Di, for your ministry! Thank you also to parents who step in occasionally to help us for extra events and when leader numbers are low.

One of the things some of us got involved in this year was a youth leader training course called ‘Launchpad’ that was run by the Diocese. This was a great chance to meet with other youth leaders in the Diocese, as well as gain some ideas and practical skills relating to youth work. Please note that there are training opportunities available that aren’t labour intensive and requiring heavy time commitments, so don’t let lack of experience put you off from looking into getting involved if you feel a pull towards serving our young people!

Another key prayer point for our young people is their link with the wider church community and notably our worship together on Sunday mornings. A couple of our youth attend and help with Sunday School, but youth presence amongst us on Sundays is a notable and felt absence. Space is always an issue for us on Sunday mornings with the numbers of children who attend, even without our youth, but do pray for our outreach to this age group and their families, and let’s consider together how God might be leading us to help build on our links through youth group and help these young people find a home in our worshipping life as co-disciples of Christ.

## Confirmation

There was no confirmation service held at Ellet St. John's in 2023, but one of our young people, Joshua Battersby, was confirmed by Bishop Geoff Pearson, former Bishop of Lancaster, down in our neighbouring parish of St. James', Shireshead. Our continued prayers for Josh and his family as he continues his own journey of faith as part of our church family here.



In the Autumn of 2023, we began Confirmation preparation for 8 of our young people ahead of a planned service with Bishop Jill, Bishop of Lancaster, in May 2024. I have been leading this course alongside Rev. Craig Abbott and Marjorie Odor. We are meeting once per month at the vicarage and have been using material based on a resource produced for young people by the Diocese of Bristol called 'Live Life.' Please pray for our young people who are

planning to be Confirmed, and a couple who will also be baptised, at the service in May.

All our leaders are DBS checked and have undergone safeguarding training in accordance with our own and diocesan policies and procedures.

*Reverend Ian McGrath - Assistant Curate*

## Report on our Wednesday Lunchtime Communion

Wednesdays, 12pm – 12.30pm, in church.

Each Wednesday at noon, a handful of our congregation gather in church for a short, spoken service of Holy Communion together. This is a lovely space in the middle of the week to gather to pray, reflect on God's word (we tend to reflect on the Gospel reading for the day), and break bread together. Anywhere between 6 and 12 of us usually meet, but anyone is welcome to join us. If you have half an hour and are in the village, you'd be more than welcome to come and join us. For more info, speak to myself or Rev. Craig Abbott.

*Reverend Ian McGrath - Assistant Curate*



## Curate's Report



Having been priested last year, I have continued to support Craig in the leading of our Sunday services and our midweek Holy Communion service, where I also preach regularly and help with leading music. I am also on hand to help the team with leading our monthly Messy Church. In view of the upcoming merger of Ellel St. John's and Shireshead St. James' into one parish after Easter 2024, I have also continued to preach and preside at St. James' on a regular basis and at the invitation of Rev. Canon Peter Ballard, who is currently priest-in-charge there.

Beyond our Sunday morning services, I try to involve myself in as much of our parish life as I can. I regularly attend our coffee mornings, our weekly prayer meeting, and our fortnightly house group. I help with our Jelly Tots group when I'm needed, and I try to pop down to Golden Gates and the village 'Warm Welcome' space when I can. I involve myself in all social and fundraising events we do throughout the year as a church family, and this year I got to perform with my old university band for a set at our beer festival. We last played together 20 years ago, so this was a special moment, even if we weren't as polished as we would have liked to have been!



I also continue to support Craig in offering pastoral care and the occasional home communion to those unable to join us regularly for Sunday worship, and work alongside Craig in responding to funerals, weddings, and baptisms. It is always a privilege to walk alongside people in these significant moments in their lives, and I pray that in doing so people will experience something of Christ's love and comfort for themselves.

I help coordinate our Youth Group on Friday evenings, and this year have taken the lead on preparing our young people for Confirmation.



The relationship we have with Ellel St. John's CE Primary School is something I have cherished since I arrived, and I am always keen to be involved in any way I can. This year I have led worship on Friday mornings as part of a rota with Craig, taken the odd lesson, helped lead our half-termly Holy Communion services in school alongside various classes, been involved in spirituality days, helped with end of term and special services like our school Christingle service, and even helped on the

occasional school trip. Mrs Fitzgerald, the children, and school staff have always made me feel welcome, and I am very grateful to play a small part in what goes on there.

As per last year, I was invited to take the Year 7 Christmas Eucharist Service at Ripley St. Thomas CE Academy. This was a wonderful opportunity to share something of the good news of Christmas with those new to secondary school, as well as see some familiar faces from our own church youth group.

During 2023, I have continued to support Craig in offering Anglican Chaplaincy to Lancaster University as the Diocese seek to appoint a new person to the post. Craig and I offer a short, spoken communion service on a Wednesday afternoon, and I am involved, alongside others, in cooking soup lunches beforehand for about 30 students.

My curacy here at St. John's has been a training post in order to equip me for a future ministry, probably as an incumbent in a parish elsewhere. This has included attending a number of training days and residentials throughout the year as part of the Diocese's 'Start of Ministry' training for curates and first incumbents. But as I write this, I am in the process of considering the next steps for me and my family following my sign-off from Bishop Philip. The future is unknown for us yet, but we would very much appreciate your prayers as we discern where God is calling us next. I still have the best part of a year on my contract with you, but I am now free to move at any point should a post arise.



So, I will finish with just saying a huge thank you to you all for your acceptance, love, and support of me as your Curate, and for all the ministry we have shared together. I also owe a great deal to Craig for his wisdom, encouragement, and leadership. Please be assured of my continued prayers for you as a church as we all move forward into new things, and I look forward to being part of the journey ahead with you and

St. James', Shireshead, at least for a little while. May Christ continue to be the rock on which we build our lives, and may our love for one another and our faith in Christ bring many more in our village to know Christ's love personally and to be part of the fellowship of St. John's now and in many years to come.

*Reverend Ian McGrath - Assistant Curate*

# Eco Church Report

Last year we finally made an active commitment to look at our Church grounds and Church life through an ecological lens to improve our stewardship of our resources. A small committee of interested people got together and initially carried out an audit of some aspect of our Church life, using the Eco-Church documents from A-Rocha. The committee is made up of Peter Harrison (Church Warden), Margaret Rand (who had first drawn our attention to the issue), Louise Gill and myself.

Inside the Church we agreed to improve our recycling and disposal of teabags and coffee grounds. Small actions, but we have to start somewhere!

We took a look at the grounds and made a plan for managing them to improve their biodiversity. A plan showing our suggestions is displayed on the noticeboard. These plans included a different mowing regime to be more wildlife friendly and the installation of swift boxes in the Church Tower. Di Otto placed 2 boxes in the tower last spring and, with the help of the RSPB's swift coordinator, we are hoping to place at least 6 on the north or east sides of the tower this spring. We applied for, and received, a grant from The University Environmental Development Fund which covered the costs of these actions.

We have had 2 working parties in the grounds. The school and Messy Church placed materials to make a bug hotel in the North east corner and we dug out a damp scrape in the North west. We hope to be able to carry out further tweaks this year.

It is very difficult to reduce the carbon footprint of an Edwardian Church without considerable investment so that will be a much longer term project but I am hopeful that we can continue to look at our responsibilities in this field and do what we can. We are always open to ideas and donations to further this work.

Helen Ballard

## Jelly Tots 2023

Jellytots celebrated its 6th birthday last November and it has gone from strength to strength. We now have over 30 children on our books, coming with mums, dads, grandparents, aunties and childminders and with an age span from just weeks old to 4 years old. There is an average of 15 children attending each week.

Each week our dedicated small team provide hot drinks, toast and biscuits for children and their carers. Although the Church is not an ideal place for the under 5s due to the hard floor and sometimes chilly temperature, it does provide a good space for riding trikes and trains up and down the aisle and hiding toys in strange places!

We also try to provide a creative experience each week, linking it to the seasons of the year or the story. We have painted with our hands, made flowers for the mums, done sticker scenes for harvest and Christmas and even planted onions!

The favourite time of the week for some of the children is story and music time for the last 25 minutes of the session. We have a welcome and farewell song which is the same every week, joined in enthusiastically. We have a variety of stories both biblical and secular, followed by singing with instruments and without. In fact giving out the instruments can be the most stressful part of the whole morning!!

Last year in May we said goodbye to Emily who had been running Jellytots since 2021. Since then we have been a small team working hard to keep things going. A big thanks to Marjorie Odor, who gets all the toys out each week as well as coordinating refreshments, and to Marjorie Bradwell, who has displayed a great talent for craft! We are also grateful to those who will step in when we are short of helpers but it would be great to welcome a couple more volunteers to the rota, if you feel you could help.

Helen Ballard



## Sunday School 2023

In our Sunday School journey this year, we began by delving into the Bible linearly, exploring the lives of notable figures like Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, Esther, Mary, Peter, and Paul. The children responded enthusiastically to this approach, engaging with the stories of these individuals. Later in the year, we shifted our focus to the Church as theme, which we explored from September to December.

On Palm Sunday, the children had a special role in distributing crosses to the congregation, which was a heartwarming experience. We've noticed more children actively participating in discussions with Craig, Ian, and the congregation about their Sunday School activities.

To enhance engagement, our team has been experimenting with alternative session formats, leading to a noticeable increase in attendance. Each child now has their own personalised lanyard, decorated by themselves, helping everyone remember each other's names amidst the growing number of attendees, sometimes reaching up to 30 children in the vestry.

Managing session preparations has been a challenge, with the vestry's limited space occasionally posing a logistical hurdle. Nevertheless, we've introduced various engaging elements like a Sunday School playlist, videos, alternative storytelling methods, and diverse craft activities, such as clay modelling, beadwork, balloon art, pebble painting, and memory games. The introduction of Christmas bingo was particularly well-received. We also had Craig join us to discuss the significance of Communion with the children, an essential aspect of our faith journey.

Our weekly attendance averages around 20 children, though we've prepared up to 50 lanyards to accommodate a mix of regulars and newcomers. Currently, we've noticed a trend of more younger children attending, possibly influenced by Year 6 children joining the church youth group.

To celebrate the children's birthdays, we've purchased age-appropriate gifts—a book with a Bible story for younger children and a pen with the message "God loves you" for older children.

Our team of volunteers, including Anna Sachs, Geraint Harries, Emily Carthew, Louise Gill, Helen Ballard, Danielle Smith, and Tessa Gibson, has been invaluable. We're delighted to welcome Corinne Roskell, Gill Park, Katie O'Donnell, and Samantha Carr to the team. Special thanks to Anna for hosting, managing minutes, and organising the rota, and to Geraint for handling social media.

We're immensely grateful for everyone's dedication and support, and we continue to pray for the children and our leaders as we journey together in faith in the year ahead.





## Messy Church

In 2023 we met seven times for Messy Church, with a great variety of activities and food offerings! We average an attendance of about 60 children at these afternoons and there is an atmosphere of great fun and community.

Our topics cover the main festivals of Easter, Pentecost and Advent/Christmas as well as the parables and actions of Jesus and Creation.

Each session lasts 1 1/2 hours and starts with a gathering activity. These are usually messy with paint or glue making a large community picture based on the theme or noisy games and give chance for everyone to arrive before we start in earnest with worship and an introduction to the subject. The challenge is to find 4 or 5 different engaging activities which develop the ideas of the theme. These can range from modelling with clay, planting bulbs or seeds or building a model using biscuits, icing and sweets! Some activities will try to engage the children in a reflective or prayerful activity and encourage them to take these ideas into their daily lives in the week to come.

Each Messy Church meeting we experience the energy and enthusiasm of young children and their families. It is a privilege to take part in this work, sharing God's love with our community. We are grateful for those who help to organise the activities, make the meal and, of course, clear up afterwards – thank you to you all.

If you would like to share this experience we would love for you to join us and we can always use help, either with the craft activities or in the kitchen. Just half an hour helping to set up or clear up would make a big difference. Please think about how you might support this work. Our next session is on Good Friday, March 29th at 11.30-1.00.

Helen Ballard



## APCM Safeguarding Report for 2023

As our work with children, young people and our wider community continues to develop, it is important we ensure proper procedures and protocols are in place to protect both the vulnerable that we come into contact with, and those who support those people.

The Parish Safeguarding Handbook is the key point of reference. It can be found on the national Church of England website at [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org). It brings together the safeguarding responsibilities to which we must ensure we pay due regard as per the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and Practice. During 2023 the Church of England has launched a series of 5 Safeguarding Standards which are having been working through. Some of the ways we map against the standards are detailed below.

- Safeguarding and Risk Assessments are a standing item at all PCC meetings with any risk assessments needing consideration between meetings scrutinised by Standing Committee.
- Ongoing DBS checks and any required references for eg new PCC members, Sunday School and Youth group helpers, Pastoral Assistants etc
- Renewal of those in roles requiring DBS both on the PCC and assisting our children and youth groups to continue the move from a 5 year to a 3 year requirement for DBS renewal.
- We use a third-party provider for DBS checks and they have introduced online digital ID checking facility this year.
- Promotion of the new Blackburn Diocese Training portal which allows those undertaking online Safeguarding Training to share their results with the Safeguarding Officer at St John's Ellel. This makes for easy tracking for individuals and the Safeguarding Officer. The training online is contextualised to church settings and now also includes a module on Domestic Violence.
- Adoption of the House of Bishops "Promoting a Safer Church" as per our annually approved Parish Safeguarding Policy.
- Agreement that the Safeguarding Officer will report Serious Incidents to the Diocesan Safeguarding lead as per the Charity Commission's requirements.
- Agreement of the contacts for the Safeguarding Poster for display in the church foyer and Vestry which were amended to reflect Diocesan Safeguarding Role changes.
- Approval of the Parish Statement on Domestic Violence
- Inclusion of a prominent link to Safeguarding on the front page of our website.

My thanks to all who support safeguarding in the Parish and give their time to support our children and young people's activity and outreach work.

Honor Rhodes - Safeguarding Officer

# Home Group

At the beginning of 2023 the Home Group was on hold until April, nor was there a Lent course. During the summer we considered several topical issues, under the generic title of “How can the Bible help us think about xxx?”. The topics were: Refugees, Environment, Poverty, Finance, Marriage, Race, and Politics. There were some stimulating discussions.

During the summer, Emily Barry moved to her curacy in Ribbleson. Those in the Home Group have been very thankful for many insightful contributions from Emily, and are sure she will be a blessing to those in her new parish.

In the Autumn, we took the opportunity to explore the passages and sermon from the previous Sunday and the preachers set some questions for us to consider. It gave an opportunity, not only to revisit the lectionary readings which the preacher had used, but also to look at those that had not been used.

Very sadly Dave Cumming passed away in November. With Meriel, he was an integral member of the Home Group since its inception and is greatly missed. The celebration of his life at St. Thomas', Lancaster, was a very moving occasion. Jesus said that his “Father’s house has many rooms” (John 14:2). That’s a home group Dave has now joined, and to which we can look forward.

Leading up to Christmas, we shared an Advent series with Shireshead, using selected daily readings from Stick with love by Bishop Arun Arora.

Graham Rand – Home group co-ordinator

## Social Committee Report

Looking back over the previous year when preparing these reports, I am always surprised by the amount and variety of activities we have participated in. I feel that the Social Committee has a dual role; to provide opportunities to build community and to raise much needed money for the Church. Last year of all our events, the Beer Festival in September certainly ticked both those boxes, probably more than any event we have ever done. It was a real team effort! There were some concerns expressed about the Church staging a Beer festival but the music that accompanied it certainly drew in the crowds and perhaps gives us a model to repeat in another year.

Whilst the Beer festival was a unique experiment, we had several events that have become traditional! Our monthly coffee mornings, known as coffee and chat, provide a valuable opportunity for some of our members to get out of the house and have a change of scene as well as bringing in a small but steady income. They are held on the third Thursday of each month so if you are free why not come along?

Craig and Ian's links with the University has had a spin off which led to two fund raising events in March 23. Firstly we welcomed their Spring Concert for which we provided the "bar" and refreshments and a raffle. The following week we hosted a group of Chinese students for a traditional English afternoon tea, which was a real money spinner!

The summer brought our usual outdoor events. The service celebrating the King's Coronation was held on the Green in Galgate and was well attended. This was definitely a community event and not meant to be a fund raiser.

In June we said goodbye to Emily and Family with a barbecue and then ran a refreshment tent again at the Childrens' Treat. The Treat is growing year-on-year and its great that the village Church plays an important role in the planning of it now.

The end of term brought the Teddy Bear's Picnic, which has become a regular event for our youngest members. The highlight of the afternoon was parachuting the teddies from the bucket of a tractor!

October brought our third AppleFest. As we had been very busy with the Beer Festival in September, it was agreed that Apple fest would be more low key than in previous years but you will see from the figures below it was well-worth the effort in monetary terms and maybe it has to be a yearly event going forward. It does, of course, rely on those same people who bake for us time after time and we are really grateful to them. If you could help in this area, it would be very much appreciated.

More baking was needed for Bonfire Night as we were offered the chance to run a cake stall at the village Bonfire. Again this was a worthwhile event for us and a chance to be part of the village community.

Christmas is a highlight of any year and we enjoy the celebrations that we are part of! A new venture this year was to celebrate Stir-up-Sunday by holding a Pudding making evening in the School. We had great fun as Mums, Grandmas and kids came together to mix their Christmas puddings helped along by a little Prosecco! I think this is going to be a new tradition!

Dec 1st saw our Lights Switch On with an opportunity to savour the variety of Nativity scenes that people display at Christmas. Of course mulled wine was a must!!

We were able to do a full village pub crawl on Dec 22nd as we sang carols in The Plough, The New Inn and The Beer Hall. We got a warm welcome in each pub and on that occasion we raised money for the Olive Branch.

And so another year begins!

We are always looking for new ideas and ways to enjoy ourselves whilst raising the money needed to keep our Church functioning at a time of rising costs. We would love to have some new blood bringing new ideas and some more people to join the teams to help to spread the burden. We have a great time! Could you help us?

		<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Costs</b>	<b>Profit</b>
Beer Festival		4,197.36	1,108.25	3,089.11
Applefest		544.85	4.10	540.75
Coffee Mornings		243.24	3.40	239.84
War Memorial		274.20	0.00	274.20
Treat Day		306.04	16.04	290.00
Pudding Night		274.29	123.63	150.66
Bonfire Night		257.00	42.00	215.00
Lancaster University - Afternoon Tea		330.00	32.38	297.62
Lancaster University - Music Concert		244.33		244.33
Coronation Service - On the Green		250.00	262.09	-12.09
Crib Festival		37.36	15.80	21.56
		<b>6,958.67</b>	<b>1,607.69</b>	<b>5,350.98</b>

## Church Fabric Report

Having done a major building project in 2022 of getting the South Wall repointed, and the additional challenges of our increased energy prices, the emphasis in 2023 was getting some smaller jobs done within the church building. The fire extinguishers in the building have all been replaced with new units installed in order for us to be compliant with fire safety requirements and we have PAT tested all of the electrical equipment in the church.

A less glamorous job was dealing with an infestation of pigeons in the church tower due to the failure of a window grate. The infestation was dealt with, the mess cleaned up and the window grate reinstalled. One species of bird that we would like to attract to the church tower is the swift and so we have been working with the RSPB to have swift boxes installed. We hope that 2024 will be the year that we have our first swift nests to which they should return in future years.

The swift boxes are part of our commitment to reduce our environmental impact and an Eco-council has been working in a few ways to enable this and other things to happen. You may have noticed a few extra recycling boxes in the building and we also had a Messy Church special in the church building when we built bug houses, made our own personal commitments to help the environment and dug a wet area in our church ground to broaden the wildlife in our grounds. One of the classes at school came to build a 'bug hotel' behind the church as part of their Archbishop of York's Youth Trust Award. We look forward to seeing how many residents have moved in over the year.

The PCC remained committed to providing additional space in our building for our growing ministries. At the PCC away day in the Autumn, various ideas were discussed, and this idea will be pursued in 2024.

Reverend Craig Abbott

# Graveyard Report

The Parish graveyard continues to offer a place of peace and reflection, surrounded by memories of those who lived and died in this village. Its maintenance is carried out by a small team of people, many of whom do not have links with those lying in the graveyard. We hold an evening “Graveyard Bash” about once each month from April to September in an effort to keep paths and gravestones clear of weeds. Dates are published on Social Media in the village – do encourage folk to come and join us.

During the year we needed repairs to our lawn mowers. They are now ready to go for the new season.

I’m also grateful to those residents of Chapel Lane who have managed the rubbish on a regular basis and take it into their own bins. We have taken the decision to remove the bin for the present. If you go to the graveyard, please take your empty bottles home and put dead flowers on the compost!

Helen Ballard



## Proceedings of Diocesan & Deanery Synods

Having become the Area Dean for Lancaster and Morecambe in 2023, it became my responsibility to, in partnership with the Lay Chair and others, to oversee the proceedings of Deanery Synod. Across the year, we held three synod meetings, the first of which we hosted at St. John's thinking about the theme of growing leaders with the lead for Parish Renewal in the Diocese, Rev. Steve Haskett. In the Summer, our focus was on the cost of living crisis and we welcomed Suzie Shearsby from Christians Against Poverty with information about how they, and others, are supporting some of the poorest in our communities. Finally, in October, we welcomed Bishop Phillip for a synod meeting having spent a full day in the deanery visiting clergy, schools and projects in the area. This was part of the Bishop's tour round each deanery as he settles into his new role.

The Diocesan Synod deals with a wide range of business and it would be difficult to do justice to the full range of work and ministry of this synod but of particular note throughout the year were: In March, the synod welcomed Bishop Joseph Aba from Liwolo Diocese, South Sudan as part of a visit to the diocese. As a Bishop in part of the world torn apart by war, much of his ministry is done with exiled people and his ministry is focussed very much on rebuilding, not just a diocese but the entire country. This visit inspired our own Bishop to support the Diocese of Liwolo in the Harvest appeal, raising more than double what is normally collected. The March synod also received the report 'From Lament to Action' establishing a Racial Justice Strategy for the Diocese.

In October, the synod considered in more detail what strategies would need to be in place for the Diocese, its churches and schools to work towards net zero carbon.

Throughout the year, Synod has also received updates about the SMMI [Strategic Mission and Ministry Initiative] funding bid to the Church of England nationally. If successful, the finances would enable the employment of a number of children and youth workers as well as lay pioneers across the diocese. This would have a huge impact in the Diocese and we await its outcome.

One of the dominant issues throughout the year was the response to the Living in Love and Faith conversation as the College of Bishops and General Synod debated how it would respond. As ever, this remains a contentious issue and is still a live one as we move into 2024 and await further information.

Reverend Craig Abbott