

ST MARTINS CHURCH SHUTFORD - ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024.

ST MARTINS CHURCH is one of six churches in the Wykeham Benefice created in 1996 and is part of the Deddington Deanery in the Oxford Diocese. The six parishes are Broughton with North Newington, Epwell, Shutford, Sibford, Swalcliffe and Tadmarton. The benefice became vacant in July 2023 with day to day responsibility for the promotion of the mission of the Church of England the duty of the churchwardens and PCC`s assisted by Reverend Canon John Tattersall who organised services and clergy. Revd Emily Robottom-Scott was licensed and installed as rector on 27th August in Broughton Church when she took on responsibility for the Wykeham Benefice

MEMBERS OF THE PCC are elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in accordance with Church of England rules and the following served during 2024. Warden – Ken Jeffs also Treasurer. Elected Members – John Bailey also Safeguarding Officer and Village Hall representative, Dominic Cadbury, Alasdair Gibbs, Clare McEwan also Secretary and Sue Roe-French Deanery Synod Representative. John & Julie Hodgkins served until March. Our new rector, Revd Emily Robottom-Scott, who joined the benefice in August, is an ex-officio PCC member.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Although our core congregation remains stable, overall church attendance during the year was 20% lower than the average seen in recent years as we had fewer family occasions, and others worshipped less often due to various health issues and family commitments. The church was open for private prayer each day and for worship on Saturday and Sunday. There were 12 members on the church electoral roll with a further 8 on the family roll. The average church attendance on a normal Sunday was 9, ranging from 4 to 15. A Benefice Service is usually held on the 1st Sunday of the month: there were two in Shutford in 2024 in March and August. On other Sundays Holy Communion BCP and Holy Communion Common Worship or All Age Family Worship have been held, with an occasional evening service. Online Benefice Worship from Tadmarton was held most Sundays. The usual time of worship was 9.30am. Morning Prayer on Saturday mornings had an average attendance of 3. Attendance on special occasions were as follows: Mothering Sunday 8, Easter Sunday 22, Harvest Thanksgiving 25, Remembrance Sunday 30, Nativity Carol Service 65 and Christmas Day 52. The number of communicants in 2024 was 283 and overall attendance 772. We have a core congregation of about 30 of whom half attend church once a month, others attend Family Church Events and special services. With many secular activities available on Sundays, families with children rarely attend worship in church. There was one funeral, an interment of ashes and one baptism during the year. Many villagers support fund raising and social outreach events and value a church presence in the village ensuring it remains part of village life.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The benefice was vacant at the start of the year, but after two advertisements for a new rector, we were fortunate that the Revd Emily Robottom-Scott accepted the challenge of leading the Wykeham Benefice and arrived in August.

The PCC met 5 times during the year (including APCM) with 60% attendance. Church services are varied and published well in advance. The Wykeham News, notice boards, A Church Near You, a weekly pewsheet and What's On in Shutford email, and Shutford-e-News all share information about church services and events. Information about Fairtrade is held in church. A Lent Lunch was in March which raised money for Katharine House Hospice. We supported Christian Aid Week in May with a door to door collection and envelope for donations. The churchwarden was enrolled on 19th June in Banbury. A Midsummer Village Fete was held in the Manor Field 22nd June at which a church team served teas. The annual OHCT Ride and Stride was held on 14th September with 7 visitors to church. Our Harvest Thanksgiving and Supper were held at the end of the month. The annual service of Remembrance was held on 10th November at 6.00pm with a brass band in church: Acts of Remembrance took place at the village war memorial at 11.00am on 10th and 11th November. A specially printed Christmas Card, with the theme Follow the Star, was delivered to every village household inviting residents to our Advent and Christmas Events and services. The churchwarden has kept the PCC up to date with finance and fabric issues. Collections and fundraising have helped Katharine House Hospice, Christian Aid, BYHP, OHCT, RBL Poppy Appeal and The Children`s Society. Our Illuminate and Celebrate initiative, to light the church tower to remember special occasions and loved ones, is much appreciated by villagers. A major restoration project to repair plaster and re-decorate the building was completed.

BENEFICE COUNCIL was set up to act in an advisory capacity and is made up of representatives from each village. There were several churchwarden`s meetings during the year to discuss the appointment of a new rector and her arrival. One of our benefactors, Lord Nathaniel Saye & Sele, died in January with his funeral in Broughton on 12th February. All festivals were celebrated either in individual churches or as a benefice occasion with average attendances of 40/50. A joint Benefice Service is held on the first Sunday of the month in one of our six churches with the benefice choir leading our singing on most occasions. Tadmarton church services have been broadcast on a Sunday morning with the installing of Wi-Fi in the church. There were charitable lunches held during in Lent. There was a pilgrimage to Christ Church Cathedral in May. A variety of fund raising, and social events took place across the benefice which are reported in the Wykeham News, our Bi-monthly benefice magazine. Good News from our various parishes including family occasions are shared. Ride and Striders raising funds for OHCT were welcomed in September. All churches support local charities and Christian Aid. Various restoration projects have been completed or are planned. The highlight of the year was the installation of Revd Emily Robottom-Scott as our rector on 27th August in Broughton. The Bishop of Dorchester and the Archdeacon officiated with the church full of supporters.

DEANERY SYNOD met twice during the year in June and November with detailed minutes circulated. Sue Roe-French is our representative. A new Synod was elected in June. There are 29 parishes and 12 benefice groups in the Deddington Deanery. Meeting agenda items included Finance including Deanery Parish Share of £500k per annum, Wildlife in churchyards, Social Justice, OHCT, Children & Young People in church, clergy changes and lay leadership. Marigold Short was appointed lay chairwoman of the Deanery Synod. There was a Deanery Day in February. Good News from various parishes was shared. Information from Diocesan Synod meetings was shared. Alicia Baker was appointed Area Dean, replacing Sarah Sharp, and her lay chairwoman who completed their terms of office in February 2024. Safeguarding dominated discussions following the Makin Report which highlighted shortcomings at a high level in the Church of England, resulting in the resignation of Archbishop Justin Welby.

FABRIC (including churchwarden`s report)

St Martins is loved and well looked after by the PCC and many parishioners. All flowers, cleaning materials and refreshments, when served, are donated. The grass in the churchyard was cut by the churchwarden but the Sibford Road churchyard extension grass has been cut by W C Lovesey and financed by Shutford Parish Council. Areas of brambles and other invasive vegetation has been removed from the perimeters of the churchyard extension which will encourage wildflowers to flourish. Small areas of grass by the church have been left uncut for conservation reasons with an abundance of wildflowers during spring, especially snowdrops and primroses, and summer. The village hall steps allow access to the hall for use of the facilities. Swallows no longer nest in the church porch but butterflies have been seen all year round. There is some evidence of bats visiting. Health and Safety issues are considered, including hygiene measures required to protect worshippers from viruses. Gravestones are checked regularly with the removal of ivy as needed. Church records and inventory are reviewed from time to time and presented to the PCC at the annual meeting. 2020 Quinquennial Inspection work, including repairs to plaster and re-decoration throughout the church which was completed to a high standard in October. This work was approved by the Archdeacon of Dorchester with additional maintenance of porch timbers and church doors by the Oxford Diocesan Consistory Court. A box to collect non-perishable food items etc for the Banbury Young Homeless Project is in church. Fire Extinguishers have been checked. Repairs to flood lighting has been done. An upgrade of the Viscount Organ authorised in the autumn was completed in January 2025. Cleaning is done by a small group of volunteers. Sue Roe French, helped by 8 enthusiastic ladies, oversees church flowers with flowers throughout the building at Easter, Harvest and Christmas in addition to those on the altar. The church is open daily, 10.30am – 4.30pm, for private prayer and solace, for all to use.

FINANCE

Planned Giving at £11251 has covered cost of ministry and benefice costs due to the generosity of our regular worshippers. Other giving of £1949 includes collections, donations, re-imbusement of retired clergy fees, and church box. Fees of £964 came from a funeral, a memorial change, an interment of ashes and stone tablet: a % is paid to the Diocese. Fund raising of £1080 came from a Christian Aid Collection (£285), Lent Lunch (£315) Harvest Supper (£480) and Illuminate and Celebrate Initiative (£110 + *£500). Investment income was £1254. Total General Income was £11609 with regular donations of flowers, cleaning materials, refreshments and parishioners` valuable time. After ministry costs at £8399, donations to good causes of £1505 and General Expenses of £3351 there was a surplus of £3354 on General account increasing assets to £30684. Income in the Restoration Account: *£500 from Illuminate & Celebrate, £1000 Village Fete and OHCT Grant of £8000 & LPW Grant of £5822. £2168 Investment Income. Payments: £2134 for building insurance, £34935 for plaster repairs and re-decoration throughout building (cost after grants £21k). Restoration Funds reduced by £19579 to £36806. The present financial position is good, however there is a reliance on the generosity of a relatively small number of donors who cover our main ministry costs. See separate detailed financial statement held in church: the accounts have been drawn up on an income and expenditure basis.

SUMMARY

2024 has been a good year thanks to the support of a small good natured congregation who ensure that St Martin`s Church is available for everyone to use. Although attendance numbers are lower than seen in recent years, there is a core congregation of about 30, half of whom worship at least once a month with many more attending special services and family events. Long planned restoration work was completed successfully, and on budget. The benefice became vacant in July 2023, but we were pleased to welcome Revd Emily Robottom-Scott in August 2024 as our new rector. Our Associate Priest, Rev Canon John Tattersall, led worship during the vacancy assisted by Reverends Glyn Evans, David Pym, Brian Fairbank and Graeme Arthur. Our lay minister, Joselyn Merris left the benefice in the summer to take up a teaching post in Yorkshire. There was lay led worship most months. With no obvious successors to those presently running the church, there is a need for younger members of our community to help keep the church viable and part of village life. Most work and financial support falls on the shoulders of a few older villagers. Pastoral care, mission and outreach in our community is important with the need to grow our congregation by encouraging families with children to join us. With Revd Emily now leading us, we look forward to a challenging but successful year in 2025. Financially stable and with good attendances at less formal worship in December and the anticipation of Fun Family Church style get-togethers, and the redesign of some worship formats, we have cause for optimism.