

St Peter's Church, Great Asby

Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council

Year Ending 31st December 2023

Administrative Information

St Peter's Church is situated in the centre of Great Asby. It is part of the Benefice of the Heart of Eden in the Appleby Deanery of the Diocese of Carlisle within the Church of England. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a charity excepted from registration with the Charity Commission. The PCC members who have served from 1st January 2023 are as follows with their role on the Committee and dates of appointment in brackets where appropriate: -

Joint Priests-in-Charge (from May 2023): Revs Fran Parkinson & Andrew Burrell (completing his Curacy)

Churchwardens: Vacant

Representative on Deanery Synod: Mr John Bevan (Treasurer)

Elected Members: Mr Peter Miller (Lay Chairman & Safeguarding Co-ordinator)
Ms Karen Royle (Secretary)
Mrs Pat Bevan
Mrs Helen Cooper
Mrs Pam Cowey
Mrs Susan Walker (until 6th July 2023)

Structure, governance and management

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All Church attendants are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll & stand for election to the PCC.

Objectives and activities

St Peter's PCC has the responsibility of cooperating with the responsible priest, in promoting the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical in the ecclesiastical parish. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the Church building, and the Lychgate, both listed buildings.

Church attendance

At 31st December 2023 there were 25 Parishioners on the Church Electoral Roll, 4 of whom live outside the parish, 2 folk having moved from the area. We've had 2 weddings, 2 funerals and 1 committal in the churchyard, and, as last year, no baptisms.

We have continued with our monthly and fifth Sunday services, being shared with the Baptist Chapel.

Special services at Christmas included; Advent in the Barn (with 30 people attending), Carols around the village Christmas Tree (50 people) and Christmas Eve (with over 130 people).

Review of the year

The full PCC met 4 times during the year, with an average attendance of 83%.

In addition to the services already mentioned we also held a harvest festival, with gifts of food being made to the Appleby food bank, and cash donations to the Bishop's Harvest Appeal. The theme of the Christmas church windows this year was the Christmas story, and as in previous years we saw some beautiful and creative displays from groups societies and families in the village.

We also held spring fair and a Christmas fair to raise funds for church, and, for the 11th year running, villagers submitted photographs for inclusion in the Asby calendar. As in previous years we were grateful for the support of Nick and Barbara who gave their time once again to select the winning pictures and assist with the final production.

The PCC is extremely grateful for the support given by all those who play a valuable part in the life of the church: bell ringers; sides-people; cleaners; people who provide flowers, the Christmas tree and refreshments, and Mrs Pam Cowey, who has continued to be the church organist. The special thank you this year has to go to Stuart Marston (aided by Eddie Close) for his wonderful work renovating the Lychgate, which has now finally been completed, so it will serve the Asby community for another hundred or so years.

We would also like to thank Emily Wilkinson for her dedication, producing Asby Matters over the last three years even whilst travelling and away from the village. Thank you also to Rosie Collin, who joined Emily last year, to add her graphic design talents to the newsletter. Together they have moved Asby Matters into a new era with a more colourful image. Both Emily and Rosie have now progressed onto other work and adventures in their own lives, and so, stepping into their shoes, we now have the talents of Chris Hollett who is taking Asby Matters into another new phase, and we're excited to see how it will develop.

Moving Asby Matters forwards with a new look, also fits nicely with wider consultations that we have had with the community over this last year, through which we have explored what people in the parish would like to see in and from their local church. Through this process, we have gathered many new ideas, which we are now excited to see develop over the coming year, to build a wider church community. Ideas have included structural changes, new styles of services and community events such as coffee mornings and concerts, which Peter will say more about in the next section.

Message from St Peter's PCC Lay Chairperson: Peter Miller

As trailed in my last report to the APCM in March 2023 a highlight of the year was the licencing in May 2024 of Rev Frances Parkinson & Rev Andrew Burrell (Fr Andrew) as joint Priests in Charge of the Heart of Eden Benefice.

This job share is a first for the Diocese of Carlisle and possibly the Church of England. As expected, they have hit the ground running and made an immediate impact. They each work 4 days a week although the reality is that they probably do far more.

The Parish and community of Asby has been actively considering how best to witness and reach out to the community. A well-attended, meeting was held during in July, when local people came together and shared their aspirations for the Church Family in our community. It was a lively discussion which brought forward many ideas.

Following this meeting a questionnaire survey was produced and responses sought to give a clear guide as to the priorities for action.

On analysis the main wishes were in four areas:

- Open up flexible space within the Church
- Have a regular 'pop up' café where folk can meet and share
- Hold concerts, drama, and other musical events
- Provide more variety in the style and times of services

In gathering a wider group of friends we hope to encourage the community to become involved in the life of St Peter's in different ways not necessarily demonstrated by attendance at regular services.

During 2023 renewal of the Lychgate has been completed. Fully seasoned oak was obtained, and the timber work carried out by Stuart Marston, assisted by Eddie Close, both of whom live in the Parish. The formal dedication ceremony is to take place on Sunday 23rd of June 2024, and to be conducted by the Right Reverend Rob Saner-Haigh, acting Bishop of Carlisle and Bishop of Penrith.

The work is of the highest standard and will form a fitting entrance to the Church for many decades to come. A new free standing notice board is now being designed and made by Stuart Marston. The various plates of dedication are also to be displayed.

There is a service within St Peter's almost every Sunday supported by Fran & Andrew and visiting priests. We are also grateful to Pat & John Bevan for their commitment to lead worship on a regular basis.

St Peter's is open each day during daylight hours for private prayer offering a peaceful place for prayer and reflection. The Church is visited by many visitors to the village many of whom add their names to our visitor's book and acknowledge the tranquillity and peace that the Church offers.

St Peter's is important in the life of the Asby community. Many living in the parish support the work of the Church whilst not being regular worshippers and we are extremely grateful for the help and support they give.

Throughout the year regular activities directly and indirectly linked to the Church provide opportunities for people to share and support each other, such as Fellowship, Mothers Union, Knit and Natter, a regular coffee morning, Diners, Messy Church and other village groups. These activities often involve those who do not regularly attend our worship but provide opportunities for social gatherings that add richness to the life of folk in our community.

Different forms of witness have become embedded in our calendar such as a service in a wood, our annual Lychgate Remembrance Service, Carols around the Christmas tree and of course, a village favourite, the Christmas Eve Carol Service made special by the active participation of many from a range of village groups including both young and old.

Through the commitment and care of the PCC and the active participation in the life of St Peter's we are well placed to meet the opportunities that lie ahead for our Church.

Asby Churches Together Fellowship

This group has been meeting together on a fortnightly basis for over 20 years now. We welcome folk from any denomination, or none, for an evening of fellowship, singing, study and discussion. During the year numbers have varied from as few as 3 to more than 10. We currently have members coming from not only Asby, but also Appleby and Wigton, and we are happy to welcome folk on just a one-off visit. One new regular member has joined during the year and one has moved away.

This year's themes included the story of St Peter as recorded in Acts (we'd followed his story in the Gospels in 2022); Moses; and the 'I AM' sayings of Jesus.

We are particularly grateful to Donald Marston and the Revs Andrew Burrell, Andrew Sterling and Fran Parkinson, who give up precious time to prepare and then join us to lead our discussions which can become quite lively! Other leaders come from within our regular membership and we thank them too as well as our hosts.

St Peter's Outreach

Asby Endowed School (AES): We have continued to work with the school in various ways during 2023 and were delighted when they decorated a church window to celebrate Easter.

The school has again been privileged to have regular visits from Andi of NISCU (Northern Inter-Schools Christian Union) who has amazing art ideas for the children to carry out in relation to various biblical topics. Now that we have our two Reverends they also find time to visit the school: the Rev Fran led a short service in church with lots of participation on St Peter's Day at the end of June.

As part of their history project the children had written poems relating to World War II. On Remembrance Day they took these along and read them as part of the short commemoration around the Commonwealth War Grave in the churchyard. A number of people from the village were also present and were visibly moved by the compositions.

In December, Christmas Story Sacks were taken home again to set out the Crib Scenes and share the story with family members. School also decorated a window in the church for the Christmas season: this year's theme was 'The Christmas Story'. In conjunction with this, and with NISCU help, colourful stained individual pieces of artwork were created and displayed in church. The term finished with the now, traditional, Christingle service led by the Rev Judy Polkinhorn: this was also attended by a number of parents and MU members.

Messy Church: Messy Church was held with sessions in the February half term, the Easter holiday and the October half-term. These were organised by a new team consisting of Denise Frisby, Carole Cozens and Diane Blenkinsop. We are extremely grateful for the immense amount of work and ideas they have put into the project. Unfortunately, for various reasons, they are unable to continue with this valuable support and we are looking for a new team to come forward.

Village demographics have changed in recent years and we have very few young children actually resident in the parish. But AES activities and Messy Church enable us to reach out beyond parish boundaries.

Diners: The village welcomed Sam and Phil, the new licensees at the Three Greyhounds, early in the year and once they had settled in we were able to revive Diners, the monthly lunch club. We are very grateful to Sam and Phil for being so welcoming and providing tasty two-course meals. These give us the opportunity to get to know folk we might not normally meet at other times.

Upper Eden Food Bank: The collection point in St Peter's for groceries for the Upper Eden Food Bank has continued to be very successful. We have been able to hand over at least one, heavy (!) bag of groceries to the Food Bank each week.

The collection of unwanted spectacles gathered pace and we were able to deliver a boxful to the Specsavers collection point in Penrith where the sight of so many caused the shop staff to stop work to comment on and admire our contribution!

Great and Little Asby Mothers' Union

We have 10 members and we meet most months of the year in a member's home, where we appreciate their hospitality. New members are always welcome.

As in previous years, we have enjoyed many interesting speakers and shared much fellowship together, with our year again ending with the joy and creativity of decorating the church window for Christmas. A fulfilled and happy year and we're looking forward to the next.

Safeguarding: Church Policy and Guidance

Our Parish Safeguarding Officer is Mr Peter Miller.

All parishes are required to have agreed a formal statement of adoption of the House of Bishops 'Promoting a Safer Church: safeguarding policy statement', and of Church of England safeguarding policy and guidance.

Safeguarding is on the agenda of all PCC meetings. The Safeguarding Officer has always reported to the PCC and would have brought to their attention any matters that were of concern. PCC Members accept that each has an individual and collective responsibility to be mindful and aware of the well-being of both children and vulnerable adults in the Parish.

St Peter's PCC has adopted the 'Promoting a Safer Church: safeguarding policy statement', and the Church of England safeguarding policy and guidance. However, discussions at the PCC acknowledge that standard, national, policies can never be a 'one size fits all' solution and it has therefore agreed that there are statements within these policies that need to be interpreted appropriately to suit our own circumstances at St Peter's.

Each PCC member has completed the church's recommended on-line safeguard training module.

Safer Recruitment, and Training: our parish supports the Messy Church activity which has met during school holiday times and is the only regular church activity that involves working with children, young people or adults who are vulnerable.

The PCC has always been mindful of its responsibilities in regard to any groups which involve leaders working with children and vulnerable adults (see also re School links above). The PCC has thought carefully about Messy Church and concluded that because the meetings are infrequent and attended only by children with their parents/carers, they are confident that our policies and approaches do meet the necessary requirements.

We can confirm that the leaders and volunteers working with our groups have been safely recruited according to the Church's national guidance and we will continue to train all relevant people who are involved with these activities, as required by the Church.

Health and Safety

St Peter's has a policy statement, and maintains a Log Book & Accident Register. The PCC Members collectively and individually keep a watching brief and draw to the attention of the designated member (Peter Miller) any matters that require attention in order to avoid potential accidents.

The firefighting apparatus is maintained and placed in strategic locations within the Church. During 2023 there were no recorded accidents.

Financial and Fabric (Ways & Means) review

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with SORP requirements, have been inspected, and were signed off on 15 February 2024. We paid our Parish Offer in accordance with the PCC's decisions [notified to the Diocese] about payments during the inter-regnum. Proceeds from carol singing at the village tree and the Christmas Eve and other collections were donated to charities, in particular Alzheimers Research UK, the Great North Air Ambulance, and Hospice at Home. Our direct donations to selected charities are shown in the accounts. Our commitments have all been met in full.

Full details are set out in the accompanying financial statements and attention is drawn to the notes. As is normal, income tax on gift aid donations is claimed and received following the calendar year in which the relevant donations were made.

A special note about our banking challenges late in the year should be made. For reasons that were never properly explained, Barclays Bank required extended details from us in relation to our account, its signatories, and the PCC's role in its operation. So far as the requests could be understood, they were fully complied with to the required schedules. It became clear, however, that much of the material we had submitted had not been looked at properly (or at all?), and we were notified of Barclays intention to close our account at short notice. While we dealt with this threat, we were very grateful to the Diocese, which agreed at necessarily short notice to receive much the larger part of our balances into its own bank account for safe keeping. We learned from the Diocese that we were not the only local Church account to be having difficulties with the bank. After some effort, the matter was resolved, largely by being able during some very lengthy phone calls eventually to reach a few bank employees who actually helped us by taking sensible decisions. Our account is now fully operational again, although we were notified shortly after the end of our financial year that Barclays intends to close its branches in both Kirkby Stephen and Penrith in a few months time, and that our nearest branch is likely to be that in Kendal.

The Church furnishings and plate are included in the inventory and formally vested in the Church Wardens in special trust (although there are currently no Church Wardens in post). Our insurance policy is maintained with Ecclesiastical Insurance. The older Church assets and metal are marked (AlphaDot and SmartWater) as previously advised.

The refurbishment of the Lychgate (which is a separately listed structure) has been completed, but work on a replacement Notice Board is still at an early stage. We were able to hold our annual Remembrance Service at the replaced Lychgate, and it is scheduled to be blessed by our Suffragan Bishop in June this year.

The Church electric systems, the fire extinguishers, and the boiler etc, have been tested and appropriately certified.

As scheduled, a Quinquennial Inspection was undertaken late in the year by our architect, James Innerdale, but as of the close of the year we had not yet received his report, although he was kind enough to note in our Visitors Book "*Lovely church & v.well looked after thankyou*".

Having regard to the style and age of the building there are inevitable ongoing repairs required but in general the building is in a good and fair state of repair.

Clergy Review of the year

We want to begin by saying a huge thank you to you all for your incredible support and encouragement in our first months in post, from May to December 2023. We are not even a year in and already we are so thankful for all your hard work and efforts to support our parish churches and their communities. It's a joy to minister with you!

2023 saw the launch of our monthly 'Service Leaders' meeting which is going well and is well-supported. It's a space where we share resources, reflection, encouragement and prayer and is open to anyone and everyone who is involved in services. Thank you all for your support!

It has been lovely to renew the licenses for three of our retired clergy, and to welcome three new people to the team - John & Lesley Riley, who are also Methodist Presbyters, and Lisle Ryder who comes to us with both pastoral and environmental experience. We are also fortunate to have the wonderful Stephen Plant who takes services when he is on vacation from Cambridge. And we have welcomed our two interns, Nathan and Eve, to our ministry team this year, and it has been lovely getting to know them and be a part of their discernment process as they explore ordained ministry for themselves. We need to offer our thanks to Kristy & Dan Pattimore, and to Andrew Sterling, for their hard work to support this programme.

Last year we had three great Benefice services – the first a Songs of Praise at Long Marton which was well-attended and very moving. Andrew organised our wellbeing weekend which involved a service at St Lawrence's followed by an interactive and creative workshop that inspired much thinking about the well-being of our communities. We finished the year with a lovely New Year's Eve reflection (put together by Nathan) and a Communion service hosted by St Edmund's at Newbiggin. We have much more planned for '24, so watch this space!

Our Occasional Offices are receiving positive responses and up to December '23 we have managed to connect with 7 Wedding couples, 10 Baptism families. There are many more in the diary for this year.

Schools work is also really encouraging, with opportunities to lead collective worship in our two Church primary schools (Warcop and Temple Sowerby) and Appleby, Asby and Long Marton village schools – two of whom took part in our Rest under the Stars Journey which was hosted by St Lawrence's. Andrew continues to be Chair of Governors at Warcop and is currently ex-officio Governor at Temple Sowerby. Fran has recently been recruited as a Member of the Governors at Appleby Grammar School. Andrew is also very involved at the Re-Charge youth group at AGS and the Friday night youth group at the Sands, while Fran's focus is the Healthy Healing Hub which runs every Tuesday afternoon at SLA. Both roles are providing some great networking opportunities.

In Advent we shared with our Methodist friends exploring 'Images of God' which was engaging and well attended. Christmas services were amazing, reaching over 1,000 people across the whole benefice. Ecumenical/Churches together – it has been a real privilege to work within that group and many villages also are doing great things. Working with Andrew Sterling and Fr. John Winstanley is such fun and we look forward to more opportunities.

Andrew has worked hard to launch our own Heart of Eden website in '23 (<https://heartofeden.org.uk>) which holds up-to-date information about service rotas, contact details and the latest Heart of Eden magazine, and not forgetting our Christmas Elf Yourself! There is potential for so much more here and, in time, we hope it will become a useful outreach resource for both our churches and communities.

Overall, it's been a busy and productive year! And along the way we've also had the opportunity to meet some lovely people at various musical events, coffee mornings, etc. And, of course, there is so much going on across the individual parishes. Here's just a brief taster . . .

Appleby/Murton – Hosted Rest under the Stars. Broadband. And Appleby/Murton explore meeting and ideas. Plenty of musical events to support.

Asby – Real engagement with the Community. Conversations about Church and changing the layout to be more user friendly. Supporting Destiny Africa choir.

Duffton – Thanks to Leigh and the lay-led services. Looking to extend the graveyard and plant more trees.

Kirkby Thore – Being able to support Harvest and Christmas service which gave us the chance to get to know the School better!

Long Marton – Support from the community to keep it open. Services once a month. Alternate HC at 9.15, and Lay led the other month at 10:30. Engagement with the school.

Milburn – Being able to support all the wonderful work going on there, we need to make more of the great social events that they put on!

Newbiggin – Hosting New Year Benefice Service and we look forward to more engagement with the local villages.

Ormside – Continuing a bid to get a loo into the hearse house.

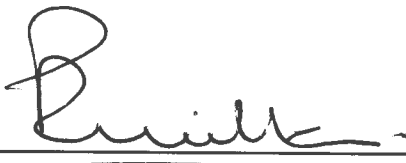
Temple Sowerby – Being part of the relationship with the church and school and supporting the amazing Destiny Africa choir.

Warcop/ Musgrave (not forgetting Bleatarn services) – Starting an all-age worship service to connect with families. Hosted the great evening for the Well Being Benefice service/discussion soup and a roll evening.

Collectively, we've done our utmost to maintain the level of services that parishes have asked for and will continue to try to do so. There is so much more we could mention, but just to say we are very encouraged by the way you are all working hard to keep your churches open, supporting lay-led services and engaging with your local communities.

May God richly bless you in 2024.

Fran and Andrew

Signed: 

(designation HAY-CHAPEL)

Date: 17th March 2024