

## **PCC Secretary's Report 2022**

This report describes and explains the PCC's activities in 2022.

### **Finance**

The parish began 2022 in a reasonably healthy financial position, with its parish share debt fully paid off (this position took some time to be recognised by the diocese, but this recognition was finally achieved before the end of the year). Advertising revenue from the Bridge magazine continued to be healthy and was fully paid into our account by early spring. At the beginning of the year, David McCulloch was appointed as Assistant Treasurer in a paid post, due to Helen Davison's lack of availability. David Bennison took over as Treasurer at the 2022 APCM.

By the time of the APCM and the final version of the parish accounts, it had become clear that the parish's finances were in as healthy a situation as they had been for some years, although constant vigilance is always required. A significant contributor to this improvement had been the substantial take-up of the Parish Giving Scheme from many of our regular donors.

In the summer, David McCulloch was asked to investigate the possibility of allowing cashless donations in our churches, since the PCC discovered that this was an untapped source of donations at special services, in particular. For the rest of the year, he worked towards buying a machine that would enable donations by card, but decided to complete the process early next year to ensure the machine's arrival before the better weather.

The PCC investigated the likely substantial increase of fuel costs to heat and light our churches, following the dramatic rise in inflation generally, especially in gas and electricity. It was found that the cost would be offset by an increase of 10% in the charge we made to those who used our facilities i.e. the Barn, the coffee lounge and the church at St Mark's. This was planned for early in 2023.

Towards the end of the year, with rapidly increasing inflation, the PCC agreed to increase the wages of our paid employees, Sarah McHale and David McCulloch. In addition to his work as Assistant Treasurer, an investigation was promised into David's salary as organist and church musician.

### **Working Towards a New Plurality**

The resignation of Peter Leonard as Archdeacon at the beginning of the year meant that the PCC had to re-examine its plan to work more closely with the parishes of East Cowes and Whippingham, as the original plan was that the Archdeacon would be an intermediary for us. The PCC then appointed Ann Capps, Harry Kirby and David Bennison to be its representatives at meetings with members of the PCCs of East Cowes and Whippingham. These discussions started at the beginning of the year.

The discussions between the PCC's representatives and those of East Cowes and Whippingham got off to a tentative start initially, as there was not common understanding about what a plurality might look like, especially as Wootton was the only parish with

previous experience. In addition, a new Area Dean, Rev Steve Daughtery, and a new Bishop meant that discussions between them also got off to a slow start. A good deal of effort was put into the workability of a new NE Wight area in the first half of the year, a plan that Wootton was not intended to be part of. However, by the spring, progress was being made, and members from all three parishes in the proposed new plurality were reaching out to each other and worshipping regularly in each other's churches.

Towards the end of the year, it became clear that our current plurality with Binstead and Havenstreet would come to a natural end at the end of 2022, as Binstead and Havenstreet were joining the new Ryde area. Representatives of Wootton PCC worked hard with representatives from East Cowes and Whippingham to put together a working document to set up lines of future working together, called a Memorandum of Understanding. Initial misunderstanding about Wootton's financial situation and whether we owed parish share caused some delays but these were resolved by the end of the year.

At the end of the year, the new Archdeacon, Steve Daughtery, had been granted authority to assist us in moving the process of forming a new plurality forward. The existing meetings between representatives of Wootton, East Cowes and Whippingham were formalised under the chairmanship of Stuart McKerracher. Our representatives at the end of 2022 were Ann Capps, Harry Kirby and David Bennison. At the end of the year, the PCC recognised the contribution that had been made to our parish by Hilary Spurgeon and Rodney Fox, the Readers of Binstead and Havenstreet, and we formally thanked them for all that they had done for us.

### **Buildings, Land & Fabric**

A proposal was made early in 2022 to tidy up the copse opposite the entrance to St Edmund's, which is parish land. Eric and Wendy Griffiths were invited to PCC meetings to propose the project and ask the PCC's support. Although the PCC was enthusiastic to play a significant role, it soon became clear that the Griffiths' initial plan was for a transformation of the area which would have involved significant time, traffic planning, long-term management and fundraising. The Griffiths then left the area of Wootton in the summer, so this plan did not really get off the ground as the PCC by itself was unable to steer it towards completion. Later in the year, however, the PCC approved the proposal of two young people clearing and tidying the copse as part of their work towards a Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and this brought a major improvement to the external appearance of St Edmund's.

An interim faculty was obtained to temporarily reseal a grave belonging to a member of the List family, who was alive in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, that had been recently uncovered during work in St Edmund's churchyard. Mike Broadsmith and Doreen Gazey spent much time in researching whether there were any local family members willing to contribute to the cost of a permanent stone covering. A lot of work was done liaising with the Diocesan Registry, Chancellor, and County Archaeologist to ensure that every aspect of the work was done according to regulations. This work was not completed by the initial deadline and a renewed faculty had to be issued in the autumn to allow the work to be completed by spring 2023.

Significant work was done through the summer on the roof and windows of St Mark's, using scaffolding supplied locally, and it was largely completed by the labour of Stephen Capps, whose skills saved the PCC large sums of money. The PCC noted its ongoing thanks to Stephen for everything he has done for us. However by the end of the year, the full payment of the scaffolding had not been made, because an invoice was still outstanding. At the same time an investigation was made to see if the parish's finances would benefit from the fitting of solar panels. As at the end of 2022, the PCC had not been able to progress that work.

Security cameras were installed at St Edmund's in the late summer, as it was recognised by the PCC that lone working policies would be supported by new cameras and people praying alone in the church would probably feel more secure if they knew that cameras were present. Safety signs at St Edmund's were also upgraded at the end of the year, especially as some concern was raised about the slipperiness of the flagstone path when it was wet.

Work was begun at the end of the year towards investigating the repair of the bell at St Edmund's. Around the time of the Queen's death and funeral, it was discovered that the bell had become frozen. Repairs might be necessary to ring it safely next year for the King's Coronation. The PCC agreed to ask the Friends of St Edmund's whether they were willing to contribute to the cost of repair.

### **Safeguarding**

Hilary Baldwin continued her work at the start of the year to ensure that PCC members were DBS checked. This was gradually achieved during the course of 2022. Additionally, it was realised that DBS checks for paid parish posts were likely to incur costs to the PCC, because the diocese was no longer willing to do DBS checks in these circumstances for free.

In the spring, the diocese began to direct PCC members and those playing leadership roles in the parish e.g. churchwardens, Lay Worship Leaders etc. to attend face-to-face training sessions. However, these were not always forthcoming as scheduled.

In the summer, a request was made to the PCC about a man who wished to use one of our churches to pray regularly, particularly to recite a quasi-monastic Office when he was available in the parish. After some deliberation and concerns about safeguarding, this was permitted, as long as it was made clear that he would lock the door of St Edmund's while he was praying to avoid accusations that he was an official representative of the parish, to ensure that the public would not disturb him, and ensure the safety of all.

At the end of the year, Hilary Baldwin realised that her work as Anna Chaplain and other responsibilities would prevent her from continuing as the parish Safeguarding officer. However, Steve Beynon was willing to replace her with immediate effect, and his experience and competence has given the PCC much reassurance, while the training requirements of the diocese for those in leadership roles continues to increase. The PCC greatly appreciate the safeguarding work that Hilary Baldwin did on our behalf.

## **Pastoral Activities**

In addition to the annual Electoral Roll update undertaken by the Electoral Roll officer, the PCC decided that Ann Capps should compile a family list for those people, especially families with children, who are in regular contact with the parish but are not necessarily attending church services. This was completed early in 2022, subject to GDPR regulations.

By the autumn, Hilary Baldwin had been licensed to begin her work as Anna Chaplain. It was recognised by her and the PCC that there was important outreach to be done in care homes for the elderly, and a monthly service was set up at Solent Grange led by Hilary, David Bennison and Helen Hopper. It was inevitably unclear how Hilary's work would develop, but it was assumed that she could begin her work in Wootton, and if a plurality was set up in the future, her work would grow into the parishes of East Cowes and Whippingham, subject to their PCCs' approval.

Three Confirmation candidates began their preparation in the spring, and were confirmed in early summer. They were prepared by three senior members of the congregation. The service took place in early October.

During the summer, Café Communion was started on the first Wednesday of the month at 1115am at St Mark's for elderly people who had said they felt unable to get ready for Sunday services starting at 930am, or who were nervous about attending church services regularly after Covid. Rev Len Fox volunteered to be the regular priest at these services and lunch is provided afterwards. The PCC recognise the hard work that Ann Capps and others have put in and enabled this new form of outreach and ministry to be such a success.

In the summer, parish coffee mornings were given a boost by the PCC's request to Steve and Sue Beynon to take over its organisation. The inclusion of delicious homemade cakes had an immediate impact and the numbers of people taking part increased significantly. The Mark's Brothers Men's Group continues to run successfully under the leadership of Harry Kirby.

## **Miscellaneous Activities**

In the spring, Ann Capps proposed that the PCC financially support Wootton's primary school in trying to close the reading deficit among young children, which had increased during the pandemic since children had had to spend so much time at home. The PCC initially agreed to fund book tokens for the neediest children and this proposal was approved by the school's leaders. More than £1000 was raised by Easter that was handed over to the school by early summer. The parish continued to support the School's Hardship Fund to safeguard the accessibility of cheap school meals for disadvantaged children until the end of the year, and regular collections were taken at the new Café Communion service, which were generously supported.

Before Easter, Ann Capps arranged for a survey of whether or how far the parish should return to some of our pre-Covid worship practices. After the consultation, it was agreed that there would again be some movement around the church at Brunch, especially for children and those wishing to use the prayer corner. The Scripture study that used to take place at Brunch had essentially be taken over by the institution of the Big Mac talk after the 3<sup>rd</sup>

Sunday 930am service. Additionally, the PCC approved that drinking from the common cup should be permitted if a person wished. Intinction of the wafer into the chalice by the communicant was not permitted by the Church, but, with the priest intincting the wafer, it has become the parish's standard practise. Other Covid practices, such as increased ventilation during services, remained in place. David McCulloch was asked to coordinate the Sunday morning services at St Mark's and liaise with visiting priests to ensure that they were aware of the day being celebrated, the readings and the hymns.

As early summer arrived, work was done on removing saplings and controlling the growth of trees at Briddlesford cemetery. Also, rose bushes were planted near the entrance of St Edmund's as our parish contribution to the celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

At the end of the year, the PCC made a few alterations to our Christmas services, to enable clergy to be available to lead Holy Communion services, and to have skilled lay leadership of services such as Christingle. The services were well attended, particularly Christingle on Christmas Eve afternoon, when St Mark's was almost packed. The PCC noted how well planned, advertised and executed worship created an enthusiasm for churchgoing that was starting to revive after the shock of Covid. Our primary duty as a PCC is to encourage that desire for God among the people that our parish serves.