

Church life in Wootton Bridge 2024

2024 was a very significant year in the life of this parish.

Ann and Mary had been Church Wardens for several years during our 4.5 years of interregnum. In their joint time of office, they had thought “out of the box” to create a church which looked out to its community and tried to meet physical, emotional as well as spiritual needs.

Innovations such as Elephant Club, Café Communion, Bible Study, Big Mac talk, Mark’s Brothers, Brunch, Stay and Play all created a richness in styles of worship and social opportunities. Over the years we developed a strong, enthusiastic lay-led ministry supported by very loyal PTOs

These activities continued and thrived following their standing down at the last APCM.

Before that, and during my time as Chairman of the PCC, then subsequently as Church Warden, we began the exploration of working with St Mildred’s and St James’ parishes as a plurality. You will already be aware of those early meetings between their representatives and ours, namely Ann, David B and myself. We then worked on a document, the Parish Profile, illustrating how we stood at the moment and how we could move forward as a plurality. Our congregations were consulted via the questionnaire “A Parish Vacancy What Next”. Those responses were borne in mind as we advertised for a priest to develop and coordinate ministry here. Eventually in June we interviewed Sandra Matthews. As far as we were concerned, bearing in mind the views of Wootton parishioners, Sandra ticked all our boxes and we considered her a Godsend.

Through ecclesiastical and parliamentary bureaucracy, we had to wait until October before we celebrated her being licensed, inducted and installed at St Mildred’s! We were only too pleased to also welcome her husband Roy, a retired priest.

During this long period, we continued working as a team to maintain all our activities. Once in post Sandra met Church Wardens of the three parishes to explore ways of working together. The “working together” has been more of a challenge than either me, as Church Warden of Wootton, and others, were expecting. Wootton having been in a plurality previously, had some experience of this and anticipated bringing our experiences to help the new plurality. The challenge for us is how to develop that enthusiasm.

Sandra has developed a team of PTOs, including husband Roy, and all three parishes are now receiving the pattern of Eucharist services they sought. We have continued our lay-led services supported, encouraged and advised by our new Rector. We did not experience a “new broom sweeping clean”, but more a Rector recognising our existing good practices and working with us to further develop God’s kingdom.

You will be aware of one significant change impacting on all our activities, Safeguarding. I am so grateful to Steve, our SGO for undertaking this role and trying to ensure we meet the required standards in Safeguarding practice and also with Risk Assessments and Policies, we had a lot to catch up with in the light of changing demands. In conforming to current requirements, as Church Warden, I have made decisions which have hurt some of our church family, for this I am truly sorry.

As I have been trying to fulfil my duties as Church Warden, I have been supported by an amazing team offering me advice, support and encouragement. That “team” consists of most of you as you bring a wide variety of skills and experiences to help me. Many thanks to all of you.

Harry Kirby, Church Warden, APCM 2025