

**THE ECCLESIASTICAL
PARISH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, ASHWELL**

Registered Charity number 1134776
in the Deanery of Buntingford and the Diocese of St Albans

**Annual Meeting of Parishioners &
Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

Sunday 26 April 2026 at 12.00 noon

**in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Mill Street, Ashwell,
Hertfordshire, SG7 5LY**



Reports for 2025 and Information for the meetings

**The Rev'd Chris Campbell, Rector of the United Benefice
of Ashwell with Hinxworth and Newnham,
including Edworth and Caldecote**

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AGENDAS for the two annual meetings

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THE ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS

The persons whose names are entered on the church electoral roll of the parish, and persons resident in the parish whose names are entered on a register of local government electors by reason of such residence, shall be deemed to be a meeting of the parishioners for the purposes of this Measure.

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1 To approve the Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners held on 18 May 2025	
2 To elect two churchwardens to serve for one year, 2026 / 2027	

THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

All lay persons whose names are entered on the church electoral roll of the parish shall be entitled to attend the annual meeting. No other lay persons shall be so entitled.

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3 To receive from the parochial church council and be free to discuss:	
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3.6	The annual fabric report on St Mary’s Church buildings, under section 50 of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018	25
3.7	A report on the proceedings of the Buntingford Deanery Synod	25
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4	To elect the following lay representatives and make an appointment:	
4.1	Buntingford Deanery Synod - Two lay representatives for the period 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2029	
4.2	Parochial Church Council (PCC) -	
4.2.1	Three lay representatives to APCM 2029	
4.2.2	One lay representative to APCM 2027	
4.2.3	One lay representative to APCM 2028	
4.3	Independent Examiner - To appoint an independent examiner to the PCC for 2026 The person appointed must not be a member of the PCC.	
5	Business – miscellaneous Any person who is entitled to attend the annual meeting may ask a question about parochial church matters or bring about a discussion of any matter of parochial or general church interest –	
5.1	by moving a general resolution, or	
5.2	by moving to make a particular recommendation to the council in relation to its duties.	
6	Legal and Administrative details	29

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners
held on Sunday 18 May 2025 at noon
in St Mary the Virgin Church, Ashwell**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2024 were approved and signed by the Rev’d Chris Campbell, Rector.

The purpose of the meeting is to elect two Churchwardens for one year 2025 / 2026.

Two nominations had been received for:

Julia Mitchell
John Chilton

In the absence of any other nominations, both nominees were elected unanimously.

35 parishioners were in attendance.

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm.

**Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting
held on Sunday 18 May 2025
in St Mary the Virgin Church, Ashwell**

1 Apologies were received from:

The Rev'd Ian Friars and Jenny, Rosemary Gillborn, John and Gaye Rowlands.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2024

These were approved and signed by the Rev'd Chris Campbell. There were no matters arising

3 3.1 Numbers entered on the New Electoral Roll.

85.

3.2 Annual report on the proceedings of the PCC

This report was received and is included in the APCM pack. The report included a statement that the PCC has complied with its duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.

3.3 Safeguarding report

This was received and noted.

3.4 Reports of Activities in 2023 within the Parish generally

All reports are included in the APCM pack, which is attached to these Minutes. Contributions included:

Ashwell Food Pantry; Ashwell Music Festival; Bellringing; Churchyard; Communications, inc. the Ashwell Village News; Discoverers', Friday@5 and other Children's activities; Eco Church and path to net zero; Flower Arrangers; Ashwell Wellbeing Hub; Mission, Worship & Discipleship; Music and Choir; Parish Room cards and Bric-a-Brac stall; Sunday Afternoon Teas; The Friends of St Mary's; The Mothers' Union and the Social & Events committee.

Additional comments:

Churchyard: Andrew Gillborn asked about the care of the Commonwealth War Graves? Julia Mitchell replied that the churchyard is the responsibility of the Parish Clerk and Joan Yates of the Parish Council held the brief on behalf of the Council. Another policy was being prepared about the churchyard.

Ashwell Village Hub: Ruth ten Hove advised the Hub was well established and in use at the URC Hall. The facility reached out to the community. No referrals were required. It was a very useful social strength. The Rector thanked Ruth for her work in establishing the Hub.

Eco Church: The Rector advised that Emily was leading the church survey including energy and all aspects used by the church. Jo Adams advised that it was intended to use Fairtrade products, for coffee, tea etc. Emily will be putting up posters in cupboards.

Mission, Worship & Discipleship: Andrew Gillborn raised the question about the church being "warm". The Rector commented that heating the church was an ongoing matter, together with the condition of the boiler and its roof, renewable gas and electricity whether in the church or PCR.

3.5 Financial statements of the PCC for the 12 months to 31 December 2024, independently examined.

The financial review and statements are included in the APCM pack.

- i. Mark Eaton, Treasurer of the PCC, thanked John Rowlands for his work throughout 2024.

In addition, he thought the church would breakeven in 2025. The Miss Wade legacy had funded the refurbishment of 8 Swan Street, and the Choir Stalls funded by the Hymnathons, and donations.

- ii. Sue Birch commented that Miss Wade was not a churchgoer. Julia Mitchell added she had been comforted during the Pandemic as the church was open.
- iii. The Rector thanked Mark and John Rowlands for their work during the past year.

3.6 The annual fabric report under section 50 of the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018.

This report is included in the APCM pack.

- i. John Chilton thanked the Fabric committee.
- ii. The Rector commented that there had been a variety of bits and pieces achieved but were accompanied by frustration with contractors, some who had withdrawn, faculties and data required to process applications. It was hoped de-frassing on the tower, a tower inspection and holding repairs and tower lighting will be completed in 2025. The south door access was the major project for 2025.

3.7 A report on the proceedings of the Buntingford Deanery Synod

This report is included in the APCM pack.

3.8 A report from the Rector

This report is included in the APCM pack.

4 Elections and Appointments

4.1 Three parochial representatives of the laity to the PCC to APCM 2028

Nominations were received from Johnathan Fisher and David Richards.

These people were elected.

One Vacancy remains to be filled.

4.2 One parochial representative of the laity to the PCC to APCM 2026

The Vacancy was not filled.

4.3 Appointment of an Independent Examiner

The PCC recommended to the Annual Meeting, Mrs Jackie Pritchard, BCom, ACMA, CGMA to be the Independent Examiner for 2025.

The meeting approved the proposal unanimously.

5 Miscellaneous Business

5.1 The Rector thanked everyone for their contribution to the life of St Mary's. During the National Volunteers' Week (2 – 8 June) she was planning a drinks function in church for all volunteers to express the church's appreciation.

5.2 Shellagh Bennett wished to thank Janet Coldstream for her PCR work.

5.3 Jo Adams on behalf of the parish expressed appreciation to Chris for all her hard work, spiritual direction and leadership during the past year. This was endorsed with applause.

6 The meeting ended with the Grace at 12.37.

3 The annual meeting shall receive from the PCC and be free to discuss:

3.1 A report on changes to the Electoral Roll since the last meeting

	2026	2025
Electors at the APCM	85	85

The Electoral Roll is the ecclesiastical parish's register of electors. It lists all who are qualified to attend and vote at this APCM. By enrolling you become a voting member of the Church of England and you are entitled to raise any question of parochial or general church interest at this meeting. Becoming a voting member of the Church of England ensures that synodical government of the Church (the PCC, the deanery synod, the diocesan synod and the General Synod) are fully representative of its members.

The next complete revision will be in 2031.

3.2 A report on the proceedings of the PCC and the activities of the parish generally, which must include a statement as to whether the PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults).

Nine meetings were held in the calendar year 2025. Unfortunately, the PCC had three vacancies for elected members at the start of the year, but this was reduced to two following the annual meeting in May. The average attendance at a meeting has been 73%.

As always, a variety of topics have been discussed and naturally some continue into 2026 as "work in progress". Four topics however, Safeguarding, the condition of the building in the Church and Parish Room, Finance and the Mission Action Plan are regular items on the agenda. These are covered in greater detail in their respective sections which follow.

After twenty years association with St Mary's Church, Iain Frearson, the architect, resigned. In November, the PCC appointed Katherine Robinson, BA(Hons), MArch(Hons), RIBA-CA, PGCPP an architect with rhp (R H Partnership) Architects in Cambridge, as our professional Advisor and Architect for Quinquennial Inspections.

In January the Wellbeing Hub was launched, followed by the installation of the new choir furniture and LED lights in the tower. The members started talking about benches in the churchyard and the one in the north side has been kindly donated by Mr & Mrs Biddle. The Holm oaks in the churchyard have been inspected and the new tenancy laws (Renters' Rights Act) explained in relation to 8 Swan Street. A few policies were approved covering CCTV, the Churchyard and Social Media. Again, all these subjects are enlarged under separate reports which can be read in the following pages. In June the parish received a Bronze Eco Church Award. We were advised that the Listed Places of Worship (LPW) Grant Scheme for 2025/2026 will be closing. The Places of Worship Renewal Fund will be open for 2026/2027, details to be published by the DCMS.

January is the month when data is collected to make the annual statistical return to the Diocese. Now that 2025 has run its course, we can reflect over the past four years of attendance since the COVID pandemic in 2019. In person attendance at the main Sunday service has nearly matched the 2019 figures, the difference being accounted by the number of funerals and people leaving the worshipping community. However, if we look at the major festivals only, Lent through to Easter then Christmas including the Carol service, Midnight Mass and Christmas Day, we show an increase of 13% over 2019 attendance.

Safeguarding Statement

At St Mary's we take safeguarding seriously and are concerned with the wholeness and wellbeing of each individual. We want everyone to feel valued, welcome and safe in our church buildings and at all of our activities.

The PCC has complied with the duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to the House of Bishop's guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). The PCC has adopted all of the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance, the Code of Safer Working Practice and the Domestic Abuse statement. Links to these documents can be found on our website.

All issues of safeguarding concern reported during 2025 were discussed by the Parish Safeguarding Officer and the Rector, with advice sought from the Diocese if needed, according to our safeguarding policies. There have been no serious safeguarding incidents and no incidents to report to the Diocesan Safeguarding team.

3.3 Safeguarding report

Message from the Bishop of St Albans: "The Diocese of St Albans is committed to offering a warm and safe welcome to everyone who attends our churches, especially to children and vulnerable adults."

At St Mary's we take our safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and work hard to remain up to date with and implement all relevant guidance and policies to keep people safe and protect them from harm.

Safeguarding is reviewed regularly by the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) and the Rector; it also appears on the agenda at every PCC meeting.

During 2025 the following actions were taken:

DBS checks were undertaken for all new PCC members or others working with vulnerable people. They were also updated/renewed for any certificates that were 3 years old. Safeguarding training was undertaken / renewed for all PCC members or others working with vulnerable people. This was either conducted online via the Church of England training portal, or face to face with the Rector and/or the PSO

The Parish Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy Statement was approved by the PCC on 21st October 2025, this is displayed on noticeboards and will be available on the St Mary's website.

In 2025, National Safeguarding Standards were introduced by the Church of England to demonstrate what good practice looks like. This is an optional QA process. A St Mary's safeguarding sub group was set up in October 2025 to review the first standard: Culture leadership and capacity, with recommendations presented to the PCC in January 2026. This process will continue in 2026 when we will also look at the second standard: Prevention.

The annual review of our safeguarding action plan was considered and approved by the PCC on 13th January 2026. This was the result of ongoing monitoring via the parish dashboard.

The PCC statement to the APCM was approved by the PCC on 17th March 2026.

Jo Adams, Parish Safeguarding Officer

3.4 Reports of Activities within the Parish generally:

3.4.1 Ashwell Food Pantry

Thank you so much to all the people who have donated regularly, or occasionally, to the food pantry this year.

It continues to be a practical way for the whole community to support people within it who are going through difficult financial times by providing free food and toiletries.

There's no registration and its use is totally anonymous. If you are in need or know someone who is please make use of it. There is a limit of 6 items a day to make sure we can help as many people as possible and the pantry team monitor and refill daily.

Over the few years that the pantry has been open we have occasionally been left notes by users thanking people who support the pantry and letting us know that it has really helped them when things were difficult. This makes it all worthwhile.

If you would like to donate, please drop items off at the village store or in St Mary's Church. If you're in doubt of what to buy, the following things are always appreciated:

Tinned meals, baked beans, coffee, desserts, cereal, biscuits, tinned veg (not beans, lentils or chickpeas) pasta sauce.

Many thanks

Julia Mitchell and the pantry team

3.4.2 Ashwell Music Festival

This year was a big year for the Ashwell Music Festival, as it was our 70th. The first took place in 1953, but we missed a couple due to COVID. From its beginnings (which were originally a largely choral affair) the Music Festival has continued to celebrate music.

The Festival opened on Sunday 4th May with Festal Evensong. We were delighted to welcome as guest preacher Rev'd Matthew Catterick, who is the Vicar of St Saviour's, Pimlico. Father Matthew is the grandson of Rev'd Jack Catterick, erstwhile Rector of St Mary's and the original instigator of the Festival, and so it was really fitting to invite him to be with us.

The choir prepared a feast of music for us, and during the service we also blessed the wonderful new choir stalls.

This was followed on Tuesday with the Young Persons Concert, where the sheer quality and musical ability of the young people never fails to amaze the audience. The Dave Rance Rockin' Chair Band returned on the Wednesday afternoon, although sadly without Dave Rance, who had passed away at the beginning of the year. As I am sure he would have wished there was the usual fun and laughter for all, including the performers, despite his absence.

Another death, this time of our dear friend Simon Marlow, meant changes to the programme on the Thursday night, when he was due to play. In his place five hugely talented friends of his (Shulah Olver-Smith, Kelly McCusker, Clare Gardiner, Toby Turton and Clare Hawkes) put together an emotional and evocative evening, which included a dazzling performance of Vaughan William's *The Lark Ascending*. On Friday, the Hitchin Band gave us a light-hearted evening, full of energy and swing, that had all our feet tapping and we started Saturday with family workshops with steelpans and the music of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Festival was closed by Temple, an amazingly talented band who played us hits from the last 70 years of pop music – everything from the Beatles and Abba, through to Walk the Moon and Britney Spears, with possibly the best singing along of the night being to Wheatus' *Teenage Dirtbag!*

Many thanks to all who helped to put the Festival together this year, not only during the festival week, but also over the whole year.

This year our attendance figures were down, which meant that we only just broke even, and didn't manage to make much for the St Mary's Restoration Fund. Because of this, in 2026 we're having a slightly pared back Festival as follows:

- Sunday 3 May – Festal Evensong
- Thursday 7 May – Young Persons Concert
- Friday 8 May – Megson
- Saturday 9 May – Abba's Angels

If you'd like to get involved, please do get in touch, and please do support this year's Festival, to ensure it continues in the future.

Chris Campbell
on behalf of the Music Festival Committee 2025

3.4.3 Ashwell Wellbeing Hub

The Ashwell and surrounding villages wellbeing hub has been up and running since January 2025. We have delivered 54 sessions, and get very positive feedback from community members. Hosted in the URC Hall, from 2-4pm, the hub is run weekly by volunteers trained as Compassionate Neighbours. On average twenty community members attend. This hub aims to promote independence, wellbeing and connection so that individuals can feel more in control and able to live life to its fullest potential. Community members attending the hub:

- Participate in a restorative and strength building exercise group
- Have refreshments and a chat with our team and other community members
- Gain information about local support services

There have also been regular visits from a digital champion, who demystifies all things digital, the GP surgery, pharmacy, CAB and Herts Care line. At the beginning of 2026, we will start an intergenerational project with Ashwell Primary school.

This has a local collaborative project. This initiative is led and organised by Ashwell Churches (St Mary's and the URC), Garden House Hospice, Ashwell Parish Council and Ashwell and Bassingbourn General Practice. We were also supported by the North Herts Community Wellbeing team and the North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau.

Going forward, some of the arrangements for the hub will be under review, as the GHH has closed its Compassionate Neighbourhood scheme.

Ruth ten Hove

3.4.4 Bellringing

Over the course of 2025 all our ringers have continued to make good progress, especially our youngest who has reached the standard needed to ring for services. Our other ringers have improved their change ringing skills, helped in part by ringing regularly at Hinxworth as well.

During the year we ran for four weddings as well as a funeral and a memorial service, all with ringers from our band. In May we rang regularly for Sunday services throughout the year, including ringing half muffled for Remembrance Sunday.

We rang for the village carol concert and for services over Christmas.

We are always happy to welcome new ringers to the tower, whether you are a beginner or past ringer who would like to start again. We practice on Thursday evenings from 8pm, come along to the tower where you will be made most welcome.

Steve White, Tower Captain
Ian Chandler, Secretary

3.4.5 Churchyard

As I sat on one of the new picnic tables, cup of tea in hand, on a sunny spring afternoon recently I reflected on what a lovely place our churchyard is and how glad I am to help look after it.

2025 was a very positive year of problem solving and decision making. Our first official churchyard policy was passed by the PCC in June 2025. We have continued and

developed our partnership with the Community Payback scheme, whose participants now reliably visit the churchyard monthly. It has allowed us to stop using herbicides without being taken over by the ever-emergent weeds or needing to pay for professional gardeners. It also allows us to offer a welcome to the church to people who may not usually visit.

The area adjacent to Hodwell and Church Path was problematic in 2025 as the planned twice-yearly cuts hadn't happened and the grass was too long for people to visit family graves and the commonwealth war graves. It has now been agreed with the Parish Council contractor that this area will be cut short and kept short in 2026, as soon as the primroses (which have appeared for the first time, I believe) have died back.

The new 'meadow area' will be to the south of the tower, where the picnic tables and birdfeeders are. These, along with wildflower plug plants to be planted in the spring, have been paid for by the Sustainable Communities Grant from North Herts District Council, awarded in 2025. The panel was impressed by our plans for increasing biodiversity and for providing the opportunity for locals and visitors to enjoy their time in nature. Anthony and Jill Biddle kindly donated the bench which is on the North side of the church and is another lovely place to sit for a quiet few minutes.

The flowerbeds leading up to the South Door from the Lychgate are currently a blaze of colour thanks to the bulbs planted in memory of Fergus Moynihan. In the Spring of 2025 we also planted sweet box and lavender which are gradually getting established along with some self-set flowers such as forget-me-not. It will be a few years until they reach a good size but sometimes things do take a bit of time!

In June we took part in our first Churches Count on Nature survey, and were delighted that people came to help, including young children. The data was very helpful for our grant application and we will be repeating it again this coming June so please look out for that if you would like to join in. There is always work to be done in the Churchyard so if there is anything you would like to help with please speak to me.

Julia Mitchell, Churchwarden

3.4.6 Communications, inc. Ashwell Village News

The communications group, ably assisted by Guy, the Parish Administrator, has been doing its best to keep people informed about services and other events throughout the year, through posters, cards through letterboxes, social media and of course the Ashwell Village News.

Christa Bosch took over the reins of the AVN in January 2025 and has steered it expertly through its first year under her editorship. With both a respect for its past and lots of new ideas alongside it feels in a very good place and the communications committee is extremely grateful to Christa and Ed for all their wonderful work. Thanks also to all the contributors and advertisers for their support.

The work on improving access to the church is still in the planning stage but the communications committee took a small 'mitigating step', recommended by the Diocesan Advisory committee, of adding an accessibility document to the website. This has information and photos about access for disabled people who may be interested in visiting our church but need to know in advance about what obstacles to expect and what is there to help them.

We have also produced the Social Media policy to provide guidance on expectations for its safe and responsible use by church staff, PCC members and volunteers. If you would like to see a copy please let me know.

St Mary's again had a stall at the Ashwell Show, this year with an ecological theme which tied in with our work on eco church and the Nature Count. If you would like to be involved with the stall in 2026 please speak to Rev Chris, Jo Adams or me as all help is very welcome.

Julia Mitchell
Churchwarden and chair of Communications sub committee

3.4.7 Discoverers', Fridays@5 and other Children's activities

"Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from Him."

Psalms 127

St Mary's Church warmly welcomes all visitors to our services and activities, or just to enjoy our beautiful, spiritual, historic building. Not least of these are the children and young people who bring joy and a sense of fun to the varied activities we have to offer.

As we compete with sporting fixtures, family commitments and other distractions, our numbers have fluctuated, but we continue to offer our Discoverers sessions for children aged 3 to 11 during the 10.45 service on 3 Sundays out of 4. We link our activities to seasonal themes and Bible readings to tie in with what the adults are contemplating. As we pause during the service to share the peace of God with each other, the children also share what they have been learning about with the congregation. Hearing thoughts and ideas from the perspective of children is a highlight and teaches us that we can learn much from each other.

Our 'Thank God It's Sunday' all age service on the first Sunday of every month provides another opportunity for children and young people to take part. With a more flexible, interactive style, there are lots of ways to get involved. We have been pleased to have children leading prayers, taking part in dramatic readings, holding props and participating in Q&A sessions.

In addition to our Sunday services, there are regular seasonal activities such as our, Easter egg hunt in the churchyard on Easter Saturday, and 'Holiday drop-in' sessions in August with crafts, toys and stories. As I write, we look forward to hosting a Christmas craft event in December, helping us to prepare for the crib service and our Advent window display as well as items to take home.

Ashwell Primary School children, teachers and parents filled the church at Harvest festival and Christingle services, and also joined their friends from the Scouts, Cubs & Beavers on Remembrance Sunday.

On 31st October we offered hot drinks and soul cakes to passers-by at the Lytch gate. On a damp dark evening, this was appreciated by approximately 100 people who stopped for a chat. For many this was a welcome break from trick or treating!

Looking ahead, we are planning to commence running 'Little Fishes' baby & toddler group at the URC hall from January 2026, following the closure of the existing group in September.

If you would like to find out more about our children's activities, please go to our website www.stmarysashwell.org.uk or contact our Rector Chris on 01462 742277 or Jo Adams on 07756 921199 or email adams561j@gmail.com

Fridays @ 5 – St Mary's Youth Group

Our Fridays@5 youth group was provided for boys and girls in school year 4 and above in the Spring & Summer terms. We met from 5.00 to 6.30pm on Friday afternoons during term time in St Mary's church.

It has been great to welcome young people for friendship, fun, lively games and quieter crafts. The children have been involved in helping to choose the activities which have taken place both in our wonderful church building and the green space outside. We have worked hard to offer the young people plenty of choice and ownership of the various activities while ensuring the sessions are safe and enjoyable for all, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Creative activities this year have included:

Making pitta bread pizza, toasted sandwiches, chocolate nests and paper flowers for Easter. We also painted stones and decorated a giant heart as we discussed love, friendship and kindness. Fun with shaving foam, a crisp tasting competition and collaborative, free-flow painting were also very popular.

Outdoor activities such as frisbee, football, a skipping competition and playing tag have been a great way for the children to expend some energy after a busy week at school. Indoor games have included a quiz, giant jenga, lego building, table tennis, a selection of board games as well as some games invented by the children themselves.

It has been a great pleasure getting to know our young Fridays@5 members, but sadly we have had to temporarily suspend these youth sessions since September due to a shortage of available youth leaders. In the meantime, we encourage our young people and their families to join us for some of the other activities available at St Mary's.

I would like to thank Chris, Sarah & Paulet for leading the Fridays@5 sessions and Emily, Sheelagh and Kayley for supporting the youth leaders.

If you would be interested in joining the children & youth leadership team, please contact Rev'd Chris on 01462 742277 or Jo Adams on 07756 921199 or email adams561j@gmail.com

3.4.8 Eco Church



St Mary's Church officially completes A Rocha's Bronze Eco Church Award.

In 2025 it was fantastic that, after lots of effort and support from the church, PCC and wider community, we achieved our Eco Church Bronze Award.

A few of the highlights of becoming an Eco Church have included:

- The introduction of regular eco tips, shared on the weekly emails to the congregation
- The church (and church room) switching to eco-friendly and sustainable gas and electricity tariffs
- Planting more bee and pollinator-friendly plants in new beds in the churchyard.
- New bird-feeders and benches in the churchyard (funded by North Herts Sustainable Communities Fund)

As part of the project, in June we took part in 'Churches count on nature week'. This allowed the beautiful and wild side of the churchyard to be displayed and explored, through the many activities put together to showcase the wide diversity of flora and fauna in the churchyard. During three sessions members of the community were invited to 'search hard in the churchyard' to see what lies in the long grass, or up the trees that scatter the yard. A few early birds even set out at 4.15am on the Saturday to listen to the dawn chorus, which resulted in a brilliant viewing of one of the peregrines perching on the north side of the tower. In the week prior a bat survey was also held by the Herts and Middlesex Bat group. We hope these will happen again in 2026.

The project doesn't stop here, as we would like to go for the Silver Award next! As part of this, the Rector and I did a one-day course December to become certified Carbon Literate! If you would like to get involved more in Eco Church, do get in touch.

Emily Campbell
Eco Lead

3.4.9 Flower Arrangers

2025 has been a very busy and exciting year for the Church Flower Team. We have enjoyed many new challenges together and more importantly the camaraderie this has brought with it.

This year we provided flowers for four weddings in the Church, three of which were daughters of the Flower Team, all very different but beautiful in their own ways. These weddings allowed us to be more creative than ever before and fill the Church with stunning displays for everyone to enjoy.

Sadly, there have been several memorial services this year for members of our congregation but it is always a privilege to be involved with the families and to help by making the Church look beautiful for their loved ones.

We are always most grateful for the kind donations we receive throughout the year for the flower fund and this year we have been able to purchase some new containers which will benefit our flower arranging techniques hugely. If anyone would like to make a donation in memory of a loved one, particularly around a special date, please get in touch and we can discuss specific flowers and the wording notice to go with the arrangement.

If you would like to discuss the flowers for any occasion or would like to be involved in our team, please contact one of the following:

Caroline Feast: 07703 321088; Suzanne Humbert: 07941 529849;
Michelle Notley: 07967 444591

3.4.10 Mission, Worship & Discipleship Mission Action Plan 2025 -28



A welcoming community,
sharing God's love

Exploring Faith Following Jesus
Respecting Difference Including Everyone

Mission action planning is a way to help our church grow spiritually and numerically, increasing its presence and witness in the community. We have a wonderful team who work with the Rector in taking this forward.

In summer 2025 we spent some time reviewing how our previous mission action plan had gone, and we particularly celebrated the ways the depth of our welcome had grown, so that we felt we were warmer and more inclusive to all who we met. We talked about the new banners and leaflets that had been developed, and the growing awareness in the congregation that welcome was something we should all be doing. We were also pleased to see our faith and discipleship deepen over the last few years, though a variety of courses and services. We noticed there were also areas of mission that we hadn't planned to do, but which just happened, as we allowed ourselves to be nudged by God's Holy Spirit – these included work on both the Wellbeing Hub and Eco Church. Amongst all the positives, we were also real about the challenges we faced and the things we hadn't yet managed to do, including the need for more volunteers, a desire to engage more with young people and their families, and the difficulties with access around our church building.

Looking ahead to the next three years, we decided on the following priorities in our mission:

In 2025-28 we want to evaluate and renew our engagement with children, young people and their families, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to grow as disciples of Christ.

Initial Goal: To set up a new Toddler Group in Ashwell by January 2026

1. Deepening engagement and collaboration with the wider community

In 2025-28 we want to join in with God's mission in Ashwell, by strengthening our welcome and deepening engagement and collaboration with the wider community

Initial Goal: By January 2026, to gauge interest and organise an inaugural meeting of an 'Ashwell Community Forum' for leaders of not-for-profit organisations in the village.

2. Sharing God's love through our Pastoral Outreach

In 2025-2028 we want to continue sharing God's love in both our church congregation and the wider community, through welcome, connection and strengthening our pastoral outreach.

Initial Goal: By February 2026, investigate the viability of a monthly community lunch, including prayerfully discerning who might be able to lead in this area.

Long-term Goal: To improve access to the church via the South Porch for all, including walking frail, wheelchair users and parents/ carers with pushchairs and prams. (date for this goal subject to appointment of new church architect)

As we write in March 2026, these goals are now all well underway, and we look forward to reporting back on them in due course. If you feel inspired to get more involved in mission or in any of the upcoming initiatives, do speak to the Rector.

3.4.11 Music & Choir

The choir remains a great strength at St Mary's. We have welcomed new members in 2025 and look forward to attracting more singers (especially bass and tenor) in 2026. We have performed new music and are supported by our highly accomplished director Bene't and organist Pete.

The choir has been busy throughout the year, supporting a significant number of weddings and funerals. It is a privilege for us to be part of a service which marks such significant life events for people in our village. The highlight for many of us in the choir was singing in the chorus for a performance on Handel's Messiah in mid-May, this was a truly uplifting and wonderful performance.

Shortly after Easter last year, our new choir stalls arrived. This was the culmination of a year of work – consultation, fundraising, research and engagement with the choir and the congregation. We organised two Hymnathons, in 2023 and 2025, to raise funds and were delighted and extremely grateful to also receive a very generous anonymous donation, which meant we were able to purchase benches and a beautiful conductor stand. The new stalls quickly became “part of the furniture”, they are stunning in design, easier to move about, more accessible and enable a much more open view of the chancel. At the end of the year, we received a small grant from the “Bats in Churches” charity, so we will be able to cover the choir furniture and prevent damage from bats.

Ruth ten Hove

3.4.12 Parish Room Stall

Amount taken - £625.85 which is £50 down on the previous year.

The continuing cost of living crisis is suspected in lowering our cash totals, and other closures of the CPR also have had an impact. (Post Office closed for one week in February, also one week in August, and over ten days at the end of December. For two weeks in May I closed the stall for an essential break for Caroline and myself).

We started combing two months cash to Mark in March 2025 which works very well. Records of accounts are kept by myself, and my full acting helpers are Caroline Leyland and John Chilton, who make efforts to monitor the tables.

Going forward we hope to continue, as socially and otherwise it is a worthwhile enterprise for villagers and visitors to the venue. Since it is not manned daily as such, sometimes “gifts” to the stall are haphazard in nature! Some people actually just place their own donation on the tables, which is occasionally a drawback, but I endeavor to give them at least a short airing or if totally unsuitable, remove them. Other people’s rubbish does not always sell, but I have learnt, and sifting through it is a constant challenge! However, though I would not give room to obvious jumble items, most things are given a fair chance and I hope my standards are acceptable to everyone.

Marjorie, Caroline & John

3.4.13 Sunday Afternoon Teas

Parish Teas is a firmly established as a year-round event. Run at the Parish Room, it was originally set up by St Mary’s Church to offer Sunday afternoon teas during the summer months. Now the venture runs all year thanks to the inclusion of Ashwell Museum, who have taken on the organisation and running during the winter. It provides a year round Sunday afternoon tea shop serving hot and cold drinks together with homemade cakes, scones and biscuits.

We seek to provide all with a warm, welcoming tea shop. A place to meet with others, enjoy a chat if so inclined and indulge in a cuppa and cake. Many people have enjoyed this service over the past year, both locals and visitors to the village.

Such a venture does not run on its own. So far this year around 40 volunteers have been involved in either baking or serving for St Mary’s, and 30 volunteers have provided the service for the Museum. Very many thanks to all of you, we couldn’t do it without your help. Over the past year, St Mary’s has been able to raise £2,872 for the Fabric Fund, and between October 2024 and April 2025, £1,739.36 was raised for the Museum.

We are constantly on the lookout for willing volunteers for both Parish and Museum Teas. Should you be interested in assisting please feel free to contact us.

Judy Banham (Parish Teas): judy.banham@btinternet.com

Karewn Mills (Museum Teas): karenmillsuk@yahoo.co.uk

3.4.14 The Social committee

Christians have always enjoyed sharing a meal because of the rich Biblical symbolism. It is a tangible expression of service, love, and unity; it affords the opportunity for true fellowship and genuine community – a sentiment from the Christian publication “Tabletalk,” and a sentiment which pervades all we try and do as a Social Committee at St. Mary’s.

As well as always being ready to help with refreshments whenever asked, the Social Committee caters for our congregation and the wider community on specific dates.

Our Harvest Lunch on September 21st 2025 was in aid of the Bishop’s Harvest Appeal “Rewrite their Future”. Our Diocese was again working with Mission Direct in their work in Uganda and Zambia focusing on building schools and improving access to education in some of the world’s most under resourced communities. Our Harvest Lunch consisted of a Ploughman’s grazing box which contained many of those items normally found in a Ploughman’s lunch along with a vegetarian option, followed as always by excellent ice cream from Maynards. The grazing boxes proved to be very popular, containing many delicious treats.

Mince pies and mulled wine were served at the service of Lessons and Carols in December (with huge thanks to Judy Banham, Gaye Rowlands and Jean Taylor) to the delight of many in the congregation.

The solemnity of Maundy Thursday (2nd April 2026) will once again be marked with a simple meal of soup (a Palestinian soup of butternut squash and red lentils), bread and cheese. This will be served before the service where we remember the last meal Jesus eat with his disciples: the institution of the Eucharist.

The most exciting venture of the year has however been the establishment of the Community Lunch which will run on the third Friday of each month in the Parish Church Room, and by the time of the APCM we will have held our first community lunch on Friday 17th April. Part of St. Mary's Mission Action Plan was to consider whether a community lunch in the style of the much-appreciated soup lunches would be /could be viable. It has been something of a voyage of discovery, for Paulet and myself, to appreciate and understand all that is/has been required to make this a reality, for example, meeting with the Environmental Health Officer, digesting all the Food Safety regulations, completing online training and registering the Community Lunch with North Herts District Council. The Community Lunch will/has been publicised in Ashwell News, the regular notice boards, the GP's surgery and the Well Being Hub.

I am hugely grateful for the enthusiasm and support of all those people who have signed up to cook and serve soup as well as those who have offered to supply the teams with additional quantities of soup. None of this would be possible without the kindness and commitment of so many, you know who you are; so thank you.

Feeding people is such a powerful way of showing love, care and commitment, embodying mission at its very heart.

Melanie Dawson-Dew.

3.4.15 The Friends of St Mary's Ashwell, Reg. Charity no. 1051078

The Friends is a registered charity which was founded in 1995. The Friends' sole purpose is to raise money to help maintain both the fabric and the contents of Ashwell's glorious parish church, St Mary's.

We are fortunate to have such a large, striking and beautiful church at the centre of our village. We are all the beneficiaries of the hard work, craftsmanship and skills of past generations, who were considerably poorer than us, and who first built St Mary's and then maintained her over many centuries. The friends exist to help continue the work of these past generations.

The Friends is not part of the Church or the Church of England but is an independent charity which acts on its initiative and which raises its funds by holding events throughout the year and by receiving donations from its generous donors. Many of our donors are not otherwise involved in the life of the Church but are concerned that St Mary's is preserved, and indeed enhanced, for the enjoyment and use of future generations. We are very grateful to them all.

We have been fortunate in the last year to welcome a number of new trustees to the Friends whose skills and hard work have enabled us to hold a number of events throughout the year, including a performance in May of Handel's Messiah conducted by Bene't Coldstream with a professional orchestra and soloists and a record-breaking Book Fair in October. We already have several events planned for 2026.

There is always more work to be done to St Mary's fabric and we anticipate being called on to assist with the costs of further repairs and maintenance in the very near future.

If you are interested in joining the Friends and becoming a regular donor to preserve our lovely parish Church, please let us know by contacting me or Karen Rogers. We look forward to hearing from you and to welcoming you to our events in 2026.

Stephen ten Hove: stephenthove@icloud.com

Karen Rogers: karen@wsrllp.com

3.4.16 The Mothers' Union, Reg. Charity no. 240531

Mothers' Union continues to meet on the second Thursday of the month in the Parish Room at 10.30am. We have had an interesting and rather experimental year without a planned programme. However, that doesn't mean to say we've been idle. Lots of opportunities have occurred and we haven't had any trouble filling our year with activities. an best support very different types of families today.

We have had fewer speakers but embraced a more hands-on approach with members taking a more active role in meetings which has been most enjoyable. We do love to chat over a cup of coffee and some of our meetings have been based on discussions around our ethos of "Christian Care for Families". In February, we celebrated National Marriage Week by thinking about how marriage has changed since Mothers' Union began 150 years ago and how we can best support very different types of families today.

As our movement is very much based on our Christian faith, in November we were led in discussions about "how Scripture has influenced my life". Members were very happy to talk about their own experiences based around quotations from Scripture we had been given, as well as those that we felt had helped us personally.

We have also enjoyed lots of practical activities. We cut out pictures to be made into a "memory book" which will support dementia patients in a care home. Those of us who like sewing had a go at stitching a "cross in my pocket" which comes with its own case and a poem which talks about why we are Christians. One of these went to someone recovering from a serious accident who much appreciated it and has since made an excellent recovery. More recently we have made and filled 40 Christmas stockings for the neonatal and children's wards in Lister Hospital and also provided them with emergency wash bags, thanks to people's kind donations in our box at the back of the Church.

In July we held a cream tea in Church as it was too hot outside, and raised £80 for our Summer of Hope appeal and in August we went on a lovely walk around the village stopping to reflect on the life of our founder, Mary Sumner, ending in the Parish Room with prayers, coffee and cake.

In 2026 we will be celebrating 150 years of the Mothers' Union with lots of exciting activities planned. We always welcome new members so do join up and join in.

Viv Hollow: viv_and_ken@yahoo.co.uk

3.5 The Financial Statements of the Parochial Church Council for the year ending 31 December 2025, independently examined

In the year ending 31st December 2025, on restricted and designated funds there was a surplus of £28,504. This surplus was due largely to the receipt of a generous legacy of £40,000 from the estate of the late Judy Catterick.

Compared to last year, other income was stable. The large proportion of our incoming resources was from our regular donors, to whom we are very grateful and who together contributed over £80,000 to the church, including tax recovered under Gift Aid. We also benefited from a range of fundraising events such as the Music Festival, Ashwell at Home, the Flea Market, and the Christmas Fair. As well as this, the Gift and Card stall run by Marjorie Fitt and Sheelagh Bennett brought in some very useful incremental income as did the Sale of Ashwell Mugs and Bags (organised by Julia Mitchell) and Christmas Cards (organised by Mark Eaton).

In 2025 we completed the replacement of the choir stall using the anonymous donation of £27,500 received in 2024 and other funds raised by the Music Committee.

Sadly, we lost a number of long-standing members of the congregation and community, which resulted in a rise in funeral fees and Special Collections from their services (the majority of which was passed, at the relatives' request, to other charities).

Rental income from 8 Swan Street was fully restored to its full level, following the refurbishment completed last year.

The Parish Share remains the church's most significant item of expenditure. This pays for our priest, and all employment, housing and training costs, including training costs for new priests and Readers. It pays for the support the church receives from the Diocese and helps to support those parishes in the Diocese in need. The Diocesan Board of Finance is conscious of the financial pressures on parishes and working to contain costs and minimise increased in Parish Share. We are commended by the Diocese for the fact that all three parishes in the benefice have regularly paid their Share in full.

Other expenditure was well contained and despite some increases in tariffs for electricity and gas both for the church and the Parish Room. Efforts continue to contain utility costs, shopping around for the best deals on gas and electricity, and during 2025 we committed to choosing greener Energy Tariffs, as part of our Eco Church initiative.

Aside from the purchase of the new choir stalls (£20,080 in 2025), a total of £30,789 was spent on repairs and restoration work in the church. Much of this was the defrassing of the stonework on the tower (removing loose material) for which we received a Repair Grant of £5,655 from the Diocese.

Because of the ongoing pressures on the General Fund, the PCC continues to focus donations to external charities on *funds specially collected for such purposes, for example by the "Charity of the Month" approach*. The PCC continues to keep its approach to external giving under review.

We continue to consider our own fundraising strategy for how we maintain this medieval building and having been advised that the criteria for applications for large projects has changed, the PCC will focus now on a smaller application for up to £250,000 where the criteria are more straightforward. The Quinquennial Inspection in 2024 indicated that there is urgent work required to re-roof the tower and the north side aisle. In early 2026 we are undertaking urgent remedial work on the roofs but the need for substantial expenditure remains. We still hope to commence work in 2026 on improving accessibility to the church, funded by a generous donation we received in 2022. Work on this has been slightly delayed, due to both the urgent remedial repairs to the roof and the resignation of our Church Architect, thus needing to recruit a new one before we could progress the Access Project.

In 2025 the PCC, in partnerships with the Garden House Hospice and Ashwell Surgery established a Wellbeing Hub for older people in the area. This meets weekly providing an exercise class, focused on balance and mobility, and a time for refreshments and fellowship. The church agreed to manage the finances for this and £1,254 was collected in donations and contributions from the participants and some grants were received from the local authority, paying to the fitness instructor directly. Training for volunteers and Safeguarding clearance was undertaken by the Garden House Hospice. Sadly for 2026 the Garden House Hospice has had to pull out of this venture because of their funding crisis and the PCC has agreed to sustain the venture by taking total responsibility for it for the coming year.

The Parish Church Room (PCR) is set up as a separate trust with members of the PCC as the managing trustees. It is considered as a separate restricted fund, with the PCC retaining responsibility it's financial operation. In 2024 we undertook a significant refurbishment project, redecorating the room and replacing the carpet tiles with a much more practical wood effect floor. This has been much appreciated by users. In 2025 we replaced the chairs, using an anonymous of £1,500 received in 2024. In 2025 we were grateful to receive a grant of £3,500 from the Ashwell Show Committee which will be used to refurbish the toilets early in 2026.

On its current account the PCR continued to operate at a deficit. We hope the refurbishment might attract more hirers. As a service to the local community, the PCC continues to provide accommodation for the mobile post office in the Parish Room. Regrettably Post Office Ltd has decided to restrict the hours it will subsidise for the mobile post office service and as a result this will be reduced from three sessions per week to two.

Taking the above into account the available (unrestricted) funds at 31 December 2025 have increased to £133,541 compared with £78,877 at the close of 2024, due in the main to the Catterick bequest. We are considering how to make use of this on a project or projects which would be close to Judy's heart.

The church remains heavily dependent on the services of the many people who offer their time voluntarily to support and facilitate its mission and activities. Likewise, with annual costs averaging £105,000 we know we could not operate without the very generous support of all our donors, to whom we are very grateful and the PCC would like to thank all those who offer their service and time in so many ways.

The PCC has a safeguarding officer (Jo Adams) and maintains a safeguarding policy in line with the recommendation of the Church of England and the guidelines issued by the House of Bishops. No incidents were reported in 2025. All church Officers and PCC members have a DBS check as required by the Church of England, and complete Basic and Foundation Safeguarding Training.

Signed on behalf of the PCC

Chris Campbell (Chair)

**PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN,
ASHWELL, HERTS.**

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2025

		Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total Funds 2025	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total Funds 2024
	Note	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
INCOMING RESOURCES									
Incoming resources from donors	2(a)	86,579	4,726		91,305	83,258	1,786		85,044
Other voluntary incoming resources	2(b)	52,545	14,166		66,711	7,708	34,103		41,812
Income from operating activities to generate funds	2(c)	21,275	9,247		30,522	17,691	12,515		30,206
Other ordinary incoming resources	2(d)	12,394			12,394	7,751			7,751
Income from investments	2(e)	3,866	61		3,927	4,254	42		4,296
TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES		176,660	28,199		204,859	120,662	48,446		169,108
RESOURCES EXPENDED									
Grants	3(a)	2,391			2,391	4,062			4,062
Activities directly relating to the work of the Church	3(b)	90,955	56,943	2,564	150,462	85,740	41,074		126,815
Costs of generating funds	3(c)	8,244			8,244	53,678			53,678
Church management and administration	3(d)	14,521	102		14,623	14,398	97		14,495
TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED		116,111	57,045	2,564	175,720	157,878	41,171		199,049
NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCES		60,548	(28,846)	(2,564)	29,139	(37,216)	7,274		(29,942)
GAINS AND LOSSES ON INVESTMENTS									
Realised	4(a)								
Unrealised	4(a)			(635)	(635)			397	397
		60,548	(28,846)	(3,199)	28,504	(37,216)	7,274	397	(29,544)
TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS		(5,884)	5,884			(26)	26		
NET MOVEMENTS IN FUNDS		54,664	(22,961)	(3,199)	28,504	(37,243)	7,301	397	(29,544)
BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD AT 1st JANUARY		273,312	265,260	22,992	561,563	310,554	257,959	22,595	591,107
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD AT 31st DECEMBER		327,975	242,299	19,793	590,067	273,311	265,260	22,992	561,563

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, ASHWELL, HERTS.

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st DECEMBER

	Note	£	2025 £	£	2024 £
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible fixed assets	4(a)(i)		85,000		85,000
Tangible fixed assets - investment	4(a)(ii)		194,434		194,434
Investments	4(b)		14,564		17,763
			<u>293,998</u>		<u>297,197</u>
CURRENT ASSETS					
Short term deposits		1,117		1,056	
Cash at bank and in hand		294,953		263,311	
CURRENT ASSETS			<u>296,070</u>		<u>264,367</u>
NET ASSETS (see page 18)			<u>590,067</u>		<u>561,563</u>
FUNDS					
	5				
Unrestricted			327,975		273,312
Restricted			242,299		265,260
Endowment			19,793		22,992
			<u>590,067</u>		<u>561,563</u>

Approved by the Parochial Church Council on 17 March 2026 and signed on its behalf by:

TREASURER

M W Eaton

CHAIR

The notes on pages 7 to 15 form part of these accounts

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2025**

2. INCOMING RESOURCES	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total 2025	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total 2024
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
2(a) Incoming resources from donors								
<i>Planned giving</i>								
Gift Aid donations	64,168			64,168	59,366			59,366
Tax recovered	16,989	4,726		21,715	15,603	1,786		17,389
Specific Donations	2,171			2,171	4,694			4,694
Collections (open plate) at all services	3,251			3,251	3,595			3,595
	<u>86,579</u>	<u>4,726</u>		<u>91,305</u>	<u>83,258</u>	<u>1,786</u>		<u>85,044</u>
2(b) Other voluntary incoming resources								
Grants		5,655		5,655				
Donations and appeals for charity	11,306	8,511		19,816	7,708	34,103		41,812
Legacies	40,000			40,000				
Sundry	1,239			1,239				
	<u>52,545</u>	<u>14,166</u>		<u>66,711</u>	<u>7,708</u>	<u>34,103</u>		<u>41,812</u>
2(c) Income from operating activities to generate funds								
Magazines (net of costs)	4,402			4,402	3,657			3,657
Bookstall, cards and mugs (net of costs)	770	606		1,376	806	49		854
Fund-raising events	5,427	6,861		12,288	4,568	8,982		13,550
Church and room lettings etc.	1,665	1,780		3,446	255	3,485		3,740
Fees	9,010			9,010	8,405			8,405
	<u>21,275</u>	<u>9,247</u>		<u>30,522</u>	<u>17,691</u>	<u>12,515</u>		<u>30,206</u>
2(d) Other ordinary incoming resources								
Rent on 8 Swan Street	12,394			12,394	7,751			7,751
	<u>12,394</u>			<u>12,394</u>	<u>7,751</u>			<u>7,751</u>
2(e) Income from investments								
Dividends and interest including any reclaimed tax	3,866	61		3,927	4,254	42		4,296
	<u>3,866</u>	<u>61</u>		<u>3,927</u>	<u>4,254</u>	<u>42</u>		<u>4,296</u>
TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES	<u>176,660</u>	<u>28,199</u>		<u>204,859</u>	<u>120,662</u>	<u>48,446</u>		<u>169,108</u>

3. RESOURCES EXPENDED	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total Funds 2025	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total Funds 2024
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
3(a) Grants								
Missionary and charitable giving:	142			142				
Church overseas:								
- missionary societies								
Specific Donations	2,249			2,249	4,062			4,062
Home missions and donations from collections								
	<u>2,391</u>			<u>2,391</u>	<u>4,062</u>			<u>4,062</u>
3(b) Activities directly relating to the work of the Church								
Ministry: parish share	63,759			63,759	63,218			63,218
clergy expenses								
Church running expenses	6,995			6,995	6,666			6,666
Church maintenance, restoration, refurbis	4,596	50,570	2,564	57,730	3,709	32,563		36,272
Books					358			358
Mission and Outreach	811			811				
Worship resources	1,727			1,727	1,772			1,772
Choir and music	6,506			6,506	4,882			4,882
Church Hall running costs		5,588		5,588		7,775		7,775
Insurance	5,247	784		6,032	4,929	737		5,666
Sundry	1,314			1,314	205			205
	<u>90,955</u>	<u>56,943</u>	<u>2,564</u>	<u>150,462</u>	<u>85,740</u>	<u>41,074</u>		<u>126,815</u>
3(c) Costs of generating funds								
Fees paid	6,084			6,084	5,175			5,175
Purchase of candles	490			490	515			515
Swan Street expenses	431			431	1,467			1,467
Swan Street Refurbishment	1,239			1,239	46,521			46,521
Purchase of goods for resale								
	<u>8,244</u>			<u>8,244</u>	<u>53,678</u>			<u>53,678</u>
3(d) Church management and administration								
Secretarial & office expenses	14,521	102		14,623	14,398	97		14,495
Web site								
Accountancy								
	<u>14,521</u>	<u>102</u>		<u>14,623</u>	<u>14,398</u>	<u>97</u>		<u>14,495</u>
TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED	<u>116,111</u>	<u>57,045</u>	<u>2,564</u>	<u>175,720</u>	<u>157,878</u>	<u>41,171</u>		<u>199,049</u>

Donations to Missions and Charities

	Collections etc.	Donations from PCC	TOTAL 2025	TOTAL 2024
	£	£	£	£
HOME				
Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust		42	42	25
Brave Trust				240
Children Society	272		272	218
Salvation Army (note 1)	40		40	218
Ashwell URC (note 2)	222		222	
Moggerhanger Hospice (note 2)	145		145	
Wellbing Hub	29		29	
Mothers Union (note 2)	113		113	
Life Boats (note 2)				243
Alzheimer's Society ((note 2)				170
Alzheimer's Research UK ((note 2)				263
Garden House Hospice (note 2)				683
Royal British Legion (Ashwell Branch)				611
Sepsis (note 2)				38
Cats Protection League (note 2)				61
Dementia UK (note 2)				255
British Heart Foundation (note 2)				58
Hertfordshire Air Ambulance (note 2)				58
Jimmy's				327
	821	42	863	3,250
OVERSEAS				
Diapalante	120		120	75
Embrace the Middle East	203		203	0
Amnesty International (note 2)	315		315	0
Bishops Harvest Appeal	791		791	737
Christian Aid (note 3)		100	100	0
	1,429	100	1,529	812
TOTAL	2,250	142	2,392	4,062

Note 1 In addition to the above figures, as part of the Charity of the Month initiative the PCC also collects donations in the Charity's own Gift Aid Envelopes for these charities.

Note 2 Donation from collection at funeral and memorial services made at the request of the relatives of the deceased

Note 3 Donations from the income from the Christmas Cards and Tea Towels.

3.6 The annual Fabric report on St Mary's Church buildings under section 5 of The Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 2018

2025 was another eventful year in the life of our beautiful church with the appearance in December of an impressive scaffolding structure giving access to the both the tower and side-aisle roofs for long-awaited repairs to the lead covering. It took some time to plan and erect the structures for work expected to be completed before the Peregrin Falcon nesting time in the early part of the new year.

2025 was also a time for saying thank you and farewell to two people who have contributed much to the ongoing care and preservation of the church; John Chilton has stood down from leadership of the team who plan for the building and maintenance works and Iain Frearson, our architect has also reduced his work commitments. We owe much to both John and Iain for their commitment and hard work.

We are delighted however to have appointed Katherine Robinson from RHP in Cambridge as our new architect; Katherine brings significant experience of working with churches such as ours and the challenges clunch brings! We look forward to working with her in the years ahead, and specifically on the project to significantly improve access for pedestrians, vehicles and, those with mobility issues.

Our aim is to make it possible for people of all abilities to access the church from the south side by changing both the levels of the ground from the pavement, through the lychgate, and into the church itself. At the same time we will be reinforcing the grass area beside the south porch to make it easier for those arriving by car to unload wheelchairs and move easily inside. It is intended to have a hard surface, such as bonded gravel (like Baldock High Street) which will make use of prams, buggies, wheelchairs and other mobility aids so much easier.

Finally a huge thank you to all those who contribute so much time and energy to looking after St Mary's, not least to the Community Payback Team who, under the supervision of Julia Mitchell, Churchwarden have been working on the churchyard.

David Richards

3.7 A report on the proceedings of the Buntingford Deanery Synod

Deanery synod meetings are held 4 times a year and are attended by clergy and PCC representatives from the churches in our deanery. They are chaired by the Rural Dean, Rev'd James Sawyer. Rev'd Chris Campbell is the Deputy Rural Dean and Mark Eaton is the Lay Vice Chair.

Each meeting starts with prayer. They routinely include an update from the Diocesan Synod, including the financial situation and an update on parish share payments. Updates on key points from General Synod meetings are also shared. Opportunities for parishes to update the group on their current status are provided at the meetings, with details of upcoming events and activities also circulated via regular newsletters.

In addition, each meeting had a particular focus as follows:-

February 2025 - held in Royston

Worship and music –

Rev'd Steven Sivyer led a short time of worship, followed by a presentation on the role of music in our churches. His view is that engaging in music education in schools is how the church could best serve the local community. Singing in a choir is a good way for people to learn about the Christian faith. With this aim in view, Royston had successfully applied for a grant from the Diocese towards the appointment of someone combining the roles of minister of music and director of music outreach.

Retirement of Bishop Alan –

The vacancy was likely to last for at least twelve months following his retirement in May. Most of his responsibilities would be carried out by the Bishop of Bedford and others by the Bishop of Hertford and retired bishops living in the Diocese.

May 2025 - held in Cottered

Vision for the future of our Deanery.

James Sawyer explained that the clergy had been working together for some time on developing a vision for the Deanery with a project to assist in the implementation of that vision. The purpose of this meeting was to reflect on what God might be saying to us all about the future of the Deanery and for lay members of Deanery Synod in particular to contribute to the development of that vision and project. The Reverend Kate Lomax, Diocesan Flourishing Churches Team Leader and Church Growth Officer for Hertfordshire joined the meeting to help facilitate discussion.

September 2025 - held in Hornead

Presentation on the work of Christian Aid by Phil Evans, Church Engagement and Fundraising Officer.

He gave details of recent appeals in Gaza, Sudan & Afghanistan. He explained that Christian Aid generally works through local partner organizations, particularly in countries where Christianity is not welcomed. As well as direct practical help, Christian Aid also gives money to its partners for other local projects.

December 2025 - held in Baldock

Corporate spiritual discernment –

An interactive session led by the Reverend Mark Rodel, Diocesan Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry. He led the meeting in a series of exercises, focused on listening to God and to one another. A number of common themes were identified, including the importance of encouragement, recognizing that everyone has a part to play, making relationships, and creating opportunities for service.

Jo Adams & Mark Eaton

3.8 The Rector's report

St Mary's vision is to be a welcoming and inclusive church, in the heart of Ashwell, and 2025 has been another busy year in which we have tried to be just that, as you will see from the various reports in this APCM pack. Despite living in a fairly small village, we are a vibrant church community, with a lot happening – whether that's during acts of worship on a Sunday, various 'social' activities, managing our church building, fundraising for the upkeep of the church or thinking about our mission to the wider community. Amongst all the busyness of our life together, as your Rector, I try to serve you (and the other churches in our benefice) as faithfully as possible, and it is good to be able to reflect back on a few of the highlights of the past year.

As a worshipping community, we have regular Sunday and midweek Services. During the course of the month, we try to offer a variety of different services, some of which are more participatory (like Thank God it's Sunday), some more reflective (like our Sacred Space services) and some more traditional. Alongside these regular services, there have been a number of special services during the year and particular highlights for me have included: our Palm Sunday Passion Play, Maundy Thursday, Dawn Communion on Easter Day, Festal Evensong (with Father Matthew Catterick as our guest preacher), the Pet Service, the All Soul's Requiem Mass and Midnight Mass. We have also welcomed the school for special Harvest and Christingle Services, and it's always lovely to see the church full with parents and pupils!

But church services are just one part of life at St Mary's. Over the course of the year we have also enjoyed eating together on Maundy Thursday, Harvest and through a number of Bring and Share Lunches, and growing in faith together through our Home Groups,

Advent Courses and screenings of *The Chosen*. The church has also hosted some amazing events, including the Music Festival, the Flea Market, the Christmas Fair, the Book Fair and the wonderful performance of Handel's *Messiah*, which was organised by the Friends of St Mary's.

As well as our regular and special services during the church year, St Mary's is a place for the whole community, to celebrate life's joys and to come together during times of sadness. 2025 has been a busy one for 'life events' - we have celebrated 5 weddings, baptised 11 babies, children and adults, and, more sadly, said goodbye to a number of much-loved villagers at funerals.

As a community, we are always looking for ways in which we can live lives with deeper integrity and greater service, supporting both our world and our local community. This year we challenged ourselves to become a more environmentally conscious church and were rewarded with our Bronze Eco Church Award. We also supported the foundation of the new Wellbeing Hub, and were thrilled to see how well that has flourished. During the summer, we reviewed our Mission Action Plan, and we have a number of new initiatives coming in 2026, which will hopefully include launching a new Baby & Toddler Group, something which is now missing from our villages (see the separate MAP report). And for the first time this year, we offered Hot Chocolate on All Hallows Eve (Halloween), to all the trick and treaters around the village – this was very warmly received and was a great opportunity for conversations.

Of course, nothing at St Mary's can happen without the commitment of a huge collective of volunteers, who give their time, expertise, and money to support both the church building and the activities within it. Although there are far too many people to list here, I would like to attempt to thank some of you for all you have done in 2025.

To start with, a huge thank you to our churchwarden Julia Mitchell, and to John Chilton who was a churchwarden until the Autumn. Churchwardens are vital to the health and wellbeing of our church communities, and their role description covers most things to do with church life – buildings, churchyards, governance and, of course, being a huge source of support for the Rector. As John was our lead on church building (fabric) related projects, I am also very grateful to David Richards for stepping into the Fabric Lead role, when John stepped down.

In terms of governance, the Churchwardens, in turn, are part of a bigger team, and I am also thankful for the whole of our PCC, each of whom puts in a great deal of time and effort to ensuring the church runs well - we couldn't be church together without them. The PCC is ably supported by Bernard, our PCC Secretary and a big thank you to him too and also to those non-PCC members who have joined various sub-committees this year. A number of PCC (and non-PCC) members have also helped to set up new initiatives this year – so thanks must go also to Ruth, for all her work setting up the new Wellbeing Hub, facilitating the new choir stalls (which arrived in April 2025) and her involvement in the new Community Leader's Forum; to Melanie for being inspired to lead our new Community Lunch Project, and to Emily for all her work on the Eco Church Project. I'm also thankful to Jo and Sarah, who have continued to lead much of our ministry with Children and Young People, including championing the setting up of our new Baby & Toddler Group.

On the matter of finances, a big thank you to Mark Eaton, our Church Treasurer, who works tirelessly to keep our finances in order; both day to day and in preparation for these annual accounts. He is also assisted by two non PCC members; John Rowlands who supports with financial oversight of the accounts and John Paramour, who prepares the gift-aid return. Thank you too to Jackie Pritchard, who independently examined the accounts, and to everyone who gives financially to the church.

I'm sure most of those reading this, will have noted the increasing importance the Church of England places on Safeguarding and a huge thanks also goes to Jo Adams, our Safeguarding Officer, whose role is key in ensuring that we continue to develop a good culture of safeguarding and stay compliant with various diocesan guidance.

Looking to other areas of church life, I am enormously grateful to ministry team, made up of our curate (Paulet), our Retired Clergy (Ian and Lindsay), our Lay Reader (Mark) and our Lay Leaders of Worship (Sarah and Margaret G). Together they assist me, with wisdom and creativity, to lead our services and worship, and it is fantastic to have such a supportive team. Thank you also to the other members of the TGis team; both those who lead those services so creatively, and those who provide the music for them.

Of course, our services require more than just our ministry team and service leaders. So thank you also to our Duty Wardens who make sure everything runs smoothly, to Bernard who serves faithfully, to Frances, who as Sacristan always ensures everything is perfectly prepared, and to those young people who have acted as acolytes/ service helpers during the year. Thank you to our organist, Pete, our musical director, Bene't, and all our church choir; together your musical gifts enrich our worship and give it so much life. Thanks also to John, who continues to play the organ more occasionally. Thank you to those who contribute to services by reading or leading the intercessions – there is always more room on the rota if anyone would like to join that team! I am also so thankful to our dedicated 'tech team' who ensure we can hear what is being said and who have enabled Zoom worship to continue. Thank you to our Welcome Team (Sides people) who have risen to the challenge of making our welcome even warmer, and to those on the Coffee Rota, who have enabled us to warm up our hands over a cup of coffee; it makes such a difference to the way we share fellowship with each other.

There are many other people who have served the church over the last year; those who have helped keep the church looking beautiful and welcoming (including Sheelagh as our cleaner, others on the cleaning team, our church flower team, gardening volunteers, and Rose, who creates beautiful displays); those who open and close the church each day, our bell ringers, led by Steve, our Tower Captain; those who have assisted at weddings & funerals; the Friends of St Mary's; those who have run various events – particularly Karen in her leadership of the Book Fair and Flea Market; those who have contributed to Sunday Afternoon Teas (including Louise, Judy and Caroline who lead on this), those who buy from the Parish Room Stall (and Marjorie who facilitates it) and those who have written, edited and published Ashwell Village News, including the new editor Christa. I am also incredibly grateful to Guy, for all his support as Parish Administrator.

Finally, on top of all those I have named, and all I have forgotten to name (sorry if that includes you!), I am grateful to everyone in this congregation, for the love you share, for your examples of faith and for your prayerful witness in our community.

May we all continue to live together, in God's love, in 2026.

Chris

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Rector	The Rev'd Chris Campbell
Curate	The Rev'd Dr Paulet Brown-Wilshire
Rectory	109 High Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, SG7 5PQ
Correspondence address	The Parish Church Room, 9 Swan Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, S7 5NX
Church	St Mary the Virgin, Mill Street, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, SG7 5LY
Other buildings	8 Swan Street Ashwell, Hertfordshire, SG7 5NX
Bankers	Barclays Bank Plc Market Place, Town Centre, Leicester, Leicestershire, LE87 2BB
Independent Examiner	Mrs J Pritchard, B.Comm, ACMA, CGMA
Church Architect for Quinquennial Inspection	Katherine Robinson, BA(Hons), MArch(Hons), RIBA-CA, PGCPP from rhp (R H Partnership Architects, Cambridge)
Date of last Quinquennial Inspection	2024

Membership of the Parochial Church Council (PCC)

PCC members who have served at any time during 2025

Ex-officio members:

	Name	Term
Rector	The Rev'd Chris Campbell	
Churchwardens	Julia Mitchell	2026
	John Chilton	2026
Reader	Dr Mark Eaton, Treasurer	
Buntingford Deanery Synod	Jo Adams	2026
	Dr Mark Eaton	2026
Elected Members:	John Hare	2026
	Ruth ten Hove, Vice-Chair	2026
	Stephen ten Hove	2026
	Melanie Dawson-Dew	2027
	Gaye Rowlands	2027
	Vacancy – 1	2027
	Jonathan Fisher	2028

David Richards 2028
Vacancy – 1 2028

In attendance: Bernard Allen, Secretary 2026

Parish Officers:

Ashwell News Editor	Christa Bosch
Electoral Roll Officer	Guy Mackenzie
Gift Aid Coordinator	John Paramour
Health and Safety Officer	Graham Chandler
Parish Church Administrator	Guy Mackenzie
Pariah Church Room	Bookings through the Administrator
Parish Safeguarding Officers	Rector and Jo Adams
Stewardship Officer	John Paramour
Website Administrator	Guy Mackenzie

Committees

The PCC operates through committees, which meet regularly and report to the next council meeting. The rector and churchwardens are ex-officio members of all committees.

The PCC has a standing committee constituted in accordance with Rule M31 of the Church Representation Rules 2025. Membership consists of the incumbent and the churchwardens (ex-officio), the lay vice-chair and the Safeguarding Officer. The committee may not discharge a duty of the PCC and may not exercise a power of the PCC which is subject to the passing of a resolution by the PCC. If the PCC gives the committee any directions as to the exercise of its power, the committee must exercise the power in accordance with those directions. The committee has no spending limit.

Status

In March 2010 the parish became a registered charity with the Charity Commission. The charity number is 1134776 and our name is “The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Mary, Ashwell”, using a working name of “PCC, St Mary’s Church, Ashwell”.

The Governing Documents of the Parochial Church

The Church of England have agreed with the Charity Commission that for the purposes of agreeing “governing documents”, Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) are governed by two pieces of legislation. They are:

- The Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 as amended.
This defines the principal function or purpose, of the PCC as “promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical”,
and,
- The Church Representation Rules (contained in Schedule 3 to the Synodical Government Measure 1969 as amended).
The full text is available in the Church Representation Rules 2025.

Parochial Church Council

Membership of the PCC is detailed in the Church Representation Rules 2025, section B.

The PCC (Powers) Measure 1956 states the PCC “is to co-operate with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical”.

In law the PCC is a body corporate. This means that it is a separate body from the people who serve on it, and that no member is individually liable for its debts. A change in the membership of the PCC does not affect the PCC’s liability for its debts, and consequently each new PCC should honour the contracts and pledges undertaken by the previous PCC.

The composition and procedure of the PCC is regulated by the Church Representation Rules as contained in the Synodical Government Measure 1969 (as amended). The functions and powers of the PCC are contained in the Parochial Church Council (Powers) Measure 1956, as amended by the 1969 Measure.

The PCC members are responsible for preparing financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the PCC as at the end of the financial year and of the surplus or deficit of the PCC for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the PCC members are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- Comply with applicable Accounting Standards, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the PCC will continue in business.

The PCC members are responsible for maintaining proper accounting records that with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the trust and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the PCC and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Elections to the PCC are held annually and all members of the church electoral roll are entitled to vote and stand for election. There is provision to co-opt members to the PCC, and the Rector is ex-officio a member and the chair.