Annual Report Swilland St Mary’s Church

# 2024-25

# Electoral Roll

There are 5 names on the electoral roll with approximately 170 inhabitants in the village

# Our Rector.

Mark Cresswell has despite it being a full-time job in my own and many other peoples’ estimation but with only 0.75 of the full-time salary has worked unceasingly on behalf of the benefice and we thank him for his efforts and of that of his wife Sandra our children’s minister. During the year he lost his curate Gail Minter who took up a post in Ipswich making his job harder. The diocese arranged for another local priest, Mark Roberts from Woodbridge to assist, him. Mark took services for but a short while before he resigned unexpectedly for health reasons. The diocese continues to seek for additional help for Mark but at the time of writing a replacement has not appeared. Mark has also had a sad year personally in that his father became ill during the time and Mark spent lots of time travelling long distance to Sheffield to help. Sadly his father died so we offer him our condolences and hope that the coming year will be better for the Cresswell family.

# PCC.

We have five other members on the PCC in addition to the rector. They are Gill Reidy (sec), Ann Kent (treasurer), Margo Barker (CW), Gina Wilden (member) and Brian Williams (CW). As elder of the parish, and the “ancient” CW I would like to thank all the members of the PCC for without all their efforts on the PCC it would have been quite hard work to look after the church. Thank you all.

# Service Attendance

We have a church rota of services with one priest led service per month, on the third Sunday and a lay led service on the first. This year we have had 26 services. We have been running the lay led services every month during the year for the first time and have to report these additional services have gone well.

Last year we had 253attendees at services. This year we have had 363 attendees, a significant increase, but with a special reason for the large turnout, in that Witnesham School held their Christingle Service this year with us. If the children and teachers are subtracted from the total we had the same number of attendees as last year

The visitors book shows we had 50 visitors compared to 39 in the previous year. Several of the entries just named a family so it is likely that there were actually more. It is pleasing to see we are visited in the numbers in the book, and of course others come without signing the book. We know this because on occasion we receive donations to the Church via our new sum up machine’s records.

We took the decision to install the machine at PCC and the cost was funded by an anonymous donation. It is already showing its worth as mentioned above. Besides weekday payments received on an occasional basis, a significant number of congregants use it for church collections.

 Normal daily opening continues with a rota of 5 families key holding and providing the opening service. Last year we only had 4 so we are very grateful the Easton family are participating. Thanks to all those who opened and closed the Church.

# Elder.

Brian Williams one of the CWs is also an elder who takes the morning prayer services on the first Sunday every month Elders don’t give sermons but offer reflections at some point during the service consisting here in Swilland of a discussion about the lesson for the day, and I am pleased to report that those exchanges have been lively and meaningful with all of us going away afterwards with greater knowledge of our chosen religion than before. The important result is of course the Church is being used more after the removal of our previous second priest led service that ceased several years ago. This year we had 9 and would have had more except that some Feast Days occurred on the first Sunday of the month, when the service was taken by our Priest.

# Joint Benefice Council

During the 2022 the Benefice obtained the agreement of all the nine parishes to start a Joint Benefice Council to oversee the administration of our Benefice thus everything can be done at that level, with the information trickling down to all in the Parishes. This has the advantage of reducing the multiple duplication of effort that the incumbent has hitherto had to endure and simplification of such things as parish policies, safeguarding etc. One representative from each parish attends a monthly meeting and our Church warden is our representative.

While we are still on a learning curve in this venture the administration of the JBC is stabilising. We now have budget predictions for the next quarter and the process is ongoing.

Allocation of the Parish Share between the 9 component churches in the benefice has also changed. It was agreed last year to divide each individual parish share, relative to the general income each parish receives, which is very different to the old method. The rationale is considered reasonable asking parishes with more income to contribute more generously. This procedure was reviewed after one year, with each parish able to veto depending on appropriateness by each individual PCC. The decision to continue with this system for this coming year was passed on a majority vote. Swilland PCC voted for change but respect the majority vote. The income and donations that are intended for our proposed kitchen fund are ring fenced and external to the calculation.

# Safeguarding.

Karin Upson has resigned as the Benefice safeguarding officer with Jackie Williams her deputy last year taking over this year. Thanks to them for providing this oversight. There have been no incidents in the parish during the year.

The Diocese sends out invitations to PCC members via the safeguarding officer from time to time to ask them to revalidate their training which is due for renewal every 3 years. PCC members will know when they attended training last, and Jackie will be progressing this necessary aspect of Church procedure as the year progresses.

# Treasurer Report

The Parish Accounts have been signed off with the Auditor prior to presentation and discussion at the APCM in May (late this year due to logistical problems).

# Fabric Report

### Churchyard

### Trees

The trees that were “probably dead” in 2022, according to a tree surgeon have leafed up fine yet again this year and hence remain. Previously, we obtained the advice of the diocesan tree expert by video conference who pronounced them reasonable but to watch for dieback. Certainly this year the trees have leafed up well again. Our community is relieved and hope they will survive for many years. Our magnificent copper beech tree continues to please us; such a wonderful tree dominating the site. The new oak tree donated by William Barraclough is thriving

### **Churchyard maintenance**

This last year our churchyard grass and mowing has been tended by John Lord again who gave his services free, and we are very grateful to him for his continuing efforts. We are also grateful to Gina Wilden, who has diligently strimmered around the graves.

We held another working morning in November before the Remembrance Day service and various willing volunteers set to and sorted out the usual problems with suckers, ivy, leaves. Thanks to all who participated and for the coffee time convivial chat. There are some gravestones that have either broken, tipped or been invaded by shrubs. The most notable one is at the north side of the second graveyard where a holly bush continues to make its presence known every year. All the headstones even when tipped appear firm.

Despite requests last year to clear up after dog fouling we are still experiencing some occasional fouling mainly in the old church yard so it may be free roaming dogs that get into the area without owners.

### Registers

During the year the registers were inspected and the logbook kept up to date. The log records various events of significance and is reproduced below for perusal

# Church Warden’s Log.

Entries for the calendar year follow on from last year where Jan-Mar for this year was included last year so omitted this year

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| 13/5/24 | Work party | Weeded around graves, cleaned out gutters, trimmed shrubs, checked graves inspected trees for damage. Robert Stennett still to remove dead bough from last year. Contacted him; it is in hand. Inspected exterior for new damage. Hole in soffit/barge board NE corner still there no bigger. |  |
| 20/8/24 | Bat Survey | Done by Odette Robson who reported verbally and email with full report to follow in due course. Victorian boiler house had negligible potential to support roosting bats. evidence of roosting bats using the Tower – droppings from at least three species of bats, some of which were accumulated, suggesting regular and recent roosting | 850ex vat |
| 4/9/24 | Organ tuning  | Boggis | Awaiting invoice |
| 16/9/24 | Walk around | Looks as though Robert Stennett has cut off the dead bough, but some other trees seem to overhang the nearest graves to an extent so may need pruning subject to PCC approval. Hedges been trimmed. No obvious grave damage anywhere. New oak tree thriving and grown a bit. No obvious new damage to exterior of building. Still have hole in barge board at northeast corner needing to be repaired. |  |
| 16/9/24 | Fire inspection  | New CO2 cylinder installed by altar. Several fire drills at beginning of services during past year by BW |  |
| 9/11/24 | Churchyard clearance | Pathway re-edged, gravel turned, graves inspected, trees on N side of GY2 pruned. Brass cleaned. One grave tipping (Michael Lankester) | Needs attention. Try to contact relatives. Ask Ann Kent for contact ?? |
| 11/11/24  | 5year EICR testing  | Completed. Stokes and Cahill ltd Henley | £185 ex vat |
| 12/11/24 | Scheme of investigation .Archaeologist | David Gill Archaeologist has done this.WSI needs amendment apparently | Asked Architect for assistance |
| ditto | Church Origin | Asked David Gill to comment on proposed Saxon origin |  |
| 13/11/24 | Exchange between Stephen Jeffrey and Vincent Monahan at SCC Archaeological service | VM explained alterations needed to WSI document |  |
| Ditto  | Further on WSI  | Stephen Jeffrey organising amendments for the planning so we can start by 1/3/25 |  |
| 20/11/24 | Potential asbestos  | Advised by Architect need to have asbestos survey. Asked Ipswich Insulations to complete |  |
| 29/11/24  | Discharge planning application submission | Architect submitted to East Suffolk Council Planning |  |
| 10/12/24 | Ditto | Warned may take to 27/1/25 to get discharge |  |
| 23/12/24 | Tenders  | Tender analysis and costs received Cheapest is £167k and architect fees are £38k both ex vat which is not going to be reclaimable after March 26 and is capped at £25k for year 25-26 |  |
| Ditto | Asbestos report | Done by Ipswich Insulations 18/12/24 no asbestos detected. |  |

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# Organ

We are exceedingly grateful to Helen Jay for playing for us during the year at a considerable number of our services.

 Last year we had several instances of keys sticking but this has not recurred this year which is pleasing

# Kitchen Toilet Project.

We have had significant movement on the project this year. We have continued to receive donations during the year from various donors locally and from local and national Charitable Trusts. In 2020 the Architect had estimated cost of the project at about £120k ex vat but including architect fees, which we thought was an unbelievably expensive extension consisting of a kitchen and toilet, but now with us starting the demolition of the Victorian Coal house in February 2025, we are entering the construction phase which has to be completed by 31/3/26 to recoup as much VAT as possible (capped at £25k). After that date there will be no more recovery it would appear. So it’s all hands to the pumps. Anticipating this state of affairs we pressed the Architect to progress with tenders and on 23/12/24 we received the results of 4 tenders the cheapest one being £204k ex vat including architect fees. Truly depressing for us the members of the PCC when we thought we were nearly there only to find we need another £80k or so and then significant short fall in VAT recovery to add on as well

Since 2020 when we started requesting financial assistance we have approached or written to many charitable trusts or individuals including the whole village in an appeal. The CWs have written 25 long often convoluted applications involving significant amounts of time, and garnered or received pledges in total £147000 (to 10/4/25),) including £20000 of parish reserves, which we do have in the coffers mostly in the fabric fund with minimal emergency reserve in excess of this for any future urgent repairs.

There are still 7 current applications awaiting consideration with Trustees. Alarmingly despite good advice from the Diocesan fund-raising team some charities after initial approach are telling organisations such as ours that they are not accepting grant applications from churches. The pub has continued to support us with financial donations from the Quiz they have held during the year, but it seems like a long haul particularly with the cessation of normality we experienced during Covid.

Time runs on. We have had a bat survey, an archaeological survey, and an asbestos survey. The architect will liaise with the archaeological survey, logistically to dovetail with planning regs etc, but the problems touched on in this part of the report makes one realise that the jobs of church supporters and volunteers is unnecessarily complicated in this morass of regulations and red tape

We are active in terms of attempting to solve the problem of shortfall. We sought a couple of extra tenders of our own and have received both with one showing significant saving. We are also exploring “value engineering” and may be able to also make some significant savings in reclamation of bricks from demolition of the coal house, and use of donated oak panels for the exterior of the extension.

In terms of shortfall with this report being prepared for the APCM to be held in May25 we now seem to be short of our target financially by approximately £40k, so if anyone has a spare legacy they don’t know what to do with please come and see me.

Thank you for everyone who is helping with these endeavours.

# Church Damage

We have been lucky this past year not to have suffered any further mishaps to the Church. There are items outstanding from the last Quinquennial but not any category A problems so we are soft pedalling in an effort to save money for the project

### Health & Safety

Safety Officer; Church Warden.

Items since last year

1. The accident book: in the vestry cupboard records no accidents in 2024-5
2. The first aid kit is held, due to the dampness of the Church, at 2 Church Lane, 50m away. There is also an automatic cardiac defibrillator there. The Church Warden periodically checks the battery. New pads were fitted in March 23. There is also a public defibrillator at the school gate of Witnesham School.
3. The Exit and No Exit labels to existing doors were inspected. These notices are in accordance with Health and Safety advice; people are aware of the fact that there is only one exit.
4. We reported last year that it is advisable that the door at the base of the tower is repaired to fit again and locked to prevent unauthorised access but report this function is achieved by locking the vestry door at present so the advice of PCC was requested. The advice of the PCC is that the vestry door should be kept locked whilst the church is empty during the day to deter unauthorised entry. There is also a notice warning the tower is unsafe to deter possible interlopers if perchance someone reaches the ill-fitting tower door.
5. The Fire Safety procedure document is displayed in the vestry for church officials to study and implement. We have to hold fire drills periodically, and there have been at least 2 during the reporting period.
6. At present toilet facilities are available in both 1 and 2 Church Lane for needy worshippers
7. Trees have already been mentioned above. CW inspected the churchyard trees visually during the year after the leaves dropped.

12/4/25