

# **THE UNITED PARISH OF EAST HARPTREE WITH WEST HARPTREE AND HINTON BLEWETT-ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL FOR 2023**

## **Aims and Purpose**

The PCC and the Vicar have the responsibility of promoting the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical, in the United Ecclesiastical Parish of East Harptree, with West Harptree and Hinton Blewett and the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

The PCC is a charity and was registered with the Charity Commission in 2019. The main activities undertaken by the PCC are those reflected in this report which the PCC consider furthered the PCC's aims for the public benefit. The PCC has had regard to the Charity Commission public benefit guidance, where relevant.

## **Structure, Governance and Management**

The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure and the Church Representation Rules. It is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC membership consists of the Vicar, the Churchwardens of the three churches and other members (who are on the Parish Electoral Roll) elected by the PCC and proposed by the Friends of East Harptree, and the VCCs of West Harptree and Hinton Blewett. There are 54 people on the Parish Electoral Roll at the date of this report (last year it was 52). One person asked to be removed after moving away and three new residents have joined. Anyone wishing to join the roll is invited to contact the electoral roll officer for an application form.

Specific responsibilities of members of the PCC during 2023 are set out in the section below entitled "Administrative Information". That section also sets out the responsibilities of others, not on the PCC, for particular areas. All business of the PCC is conducted at its meetings referred to below. There is no separate standing committee.

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our churches and to become part of our Parish community. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the Parish and considers how our services can involve the different groups that live within our Parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament. We try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our Parish community through Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel; and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus and by the provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.

To facilitate this work it is also important that the PCC maintain the fabric of the three churches in our Parish. The PCC has the legal responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the three churches in the Parish although for all practical purposes the activities involved have been delegated to the Friends of St Laurence and to the VCCs of West Harptree and Hinton Blewett. They report to the PCC, who deal with Faculty and Grant applications and all formal matters, and the PCC generally oversee and ensure that the PCC's obligations are satisfactorily discharged by the Friends and VCCs.

The PCC meets 5 times a year with an extraordinary meeting after the APCM to elect

officers. There is an agreed and set list of issues which are dealt with at particular PCCs throughout the year to ensure that the key issues for the PCC are not overlooked and this is managed by the PCC secretary. In addition there are reports at each PCC meeting from the Friends and VCCs.

### **Administrative Information**

The correspondence address for the Parish is now Church Farm, Church Lane, East Harptree, Bristol BS40 6BD.

### **Membership of the PCC in 2023**

<b>Chair</b>	Mary Cookson
<b>Vicar</b>	None in 2023 – We had been in a vacancy since October 2020 when Rev Karen Spray retired, although we are now part of a new benefice Chew Valley South with a new Rector Rev Katrina Dykes
<b>Secretary</b>	Elaine Avery (Elected representative from West Harptree)
<b>Deanery Synod Representatives</b>	Mary Cookson
<b>Electoral Roll Officer</b>	Elaine Avery
<b>Treasurer</b>	Guy Stobart (Churchwarden East Harptree)
<b>Other Members</b>	Hazel Rider and Gill Stobart (Elected Representatives from East Harptree). Graham Sage (Point of contact at Hinton Blewett) is copied into PCC papers

### **Others Supporting the PCC**

<b>Safeguarding Officer</b>	Gill Stobart
<b>Parish News Editor</b>	Gill Stobart
<b>Parish Administrator</b>	Joanna Brown
<b>House Group</b>	Richard Martin
<b>Open the Book</b>	Murray Bennett
<b>Messy Church</b>	Mary Cookson, Tilly Joskey, Hazel

Rider, Guy and Gill Stobart, Jenny  
Cruse, Diana Martin

### **Overview from Mary Cookson**

“ Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus, to live.”

1 Thessalonians. 18.

“ Dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.”

1 Corinthians 58.

2023 was a year of immense effort and prayer by so many people with many causes for joy and thanksgiving. In retrospect it was a pivotal year for our parish.

### **The future of the United Parish**

Following the discontent across the Deanery, after the publication of the first deployment plan, we were engaged in numerous meetings with people from Stowey, Bishop Sutton, Compton Martin and All Saints (North Mendip). The second deployment plan was better received across the Deanery as it was apparent that the concerns so widely expressed had been acknowledged. This plan was also shared with the congregation. Further conversations took place and from those it became clear that our future direction should be to resume discussion with BCMU (Blagdon, Compton Martin and Ubley). Consequently, during July and also in September, Guy and Mary had frank conversations with representatives from those parishes, to ascertain whether or not the past disagreements between them had been resolved, and to explore their willingness to work with us to form a new benefice. It was clear that we were now agreed that we would work together to develop a new benefice which would be called Chew Valley South.

We also discussed this situation with the Archdeacon Adrian Youings. In a separate development it emerged that a new priest had been appointed in Saltford. In an unusual initiative Bishop Michael, the Archdeacon, the Area Dean and the Lay Dean suggested that we might like to meet another priest who could well have been appointed in Saltford. We were under no obligation to ask to appoint his priest. The Lay Dean had individual discussions with representatives from each of the parishes, and as a result, we unanimously agreed that we would like to meet this priest. So, in September we had a searching, friendly conversation with Rev Katrina Dykes on Zoom, having previously sent her a 'mini profile' of all our parishes and a statement of what we hoped a future full time stipendiary priest might be able to offer us.

Rev. Katrina indicated that she would like to come and see us all, face to face, so on October 4th Katrina visited all our churches and was able to meet all the CWs and the PCCs and other key people. She also saw the rectories in Blagdon and Hinton Blewett, following agreement that she and her husband should choose where they would want to make their home. On October 5th a chosen group of representatives from each parish with the Archdeacon, Area and Lay Deans met with Katrina who gave a short homily following a bible reading she had chosen. A lively conversation followed, during which we were able to ask her questions we had previously discussed and agreed and Katrina was able to ask us

questions too. This was deliberately not designed as a formal interview but as a process through which we could learn more about each other and discern what the outcome might be. There was unanimous agreement that we would be blessed to have Katrina as our priest and we were delighted, when after discussion with her husband, Katrina confirmed that she would like to make her home in Blagdon and to work across all our parishes as our priest.

So after a long period in the wilderness on November 5th a joint declaration was made across the new Benefice that the Revd Katrina Dykes would be inducted at a service in St Laurence East Harptree on February 8th 2024 and we joyfully began planning for Katrina's arrival.

### Worship in the UP throughout 2023.

Weekly worship continued in the UP, wonderfully supported by Rev Tony Wilds and Rev Trevor Stubbs and Lay Led services also contributed to our pattern of worship as well as monthly Choral Evensongs. The use of the Common Cup at Communion was reintroduced and congregation numbers began to increase.

We were able to use St Margaret's at Hinton Blewett for some services, hosted by Graham Sage and Robbie Drewett and throughout the time that the building works continued at St Laurence, we were immensely grateful to Elaine Avery, Maggie Brain and Lesley Zurburg for hosting services at St Mary's West Harptree.

Tricia and the choir continued to enrich our worship with their joyful music. A wonderful service, led by Rev Tony Wilds, was held at St Laurence on May 7th to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III and the reopening of St Laurence, followed by refreshments including a Coronation Cake.

On September 24th we held a Somerset Service at St Laurence attended by the High Sheriff of Somerset, Robbie Drewett. Tricia Rees Jones had researched Somerset hymns and hymn tunes, children read Somerset poems and skipping rhymes and afterwards we enjoyed Somerset themed refreshments and then Clog Dancing and folk dancing in the Theatre. We were also delighted that the school returned enthusiastically to church for regular Collective Worship, Award Assemblies and special services.

### Project Newton

We had hoped that the capital works might have been completed by Christmas 2022 or early in 2023 but there were inevitable delays, due mainly to archeological finds and delays with some of the exterior work and particularly with the return of the bells. We continued to meet regularly with the builders and had supportive meetings with the NHLF team.

On March 1st 2023 the bells were returned and rehung much to the delight of many folk who came to witness this historic event. New kneelers for the main altar and the Lady Chapel were delivered in April 2023; the organ was unwrapped and tuned in April 2023 and some further remedial work was done later. In June Truespeed provided St Laurence with free broadband and new matting was laid in the main aisles, making the church warmer and more welcoming.

The builders had left in early April so we had a first professional clean to remove most of the dust, plaster, cobwebs and debris that inevitably had resulted from the amount of interior work undertaken. Then it was clear that a massive effort would be needed to wash the floors, polish the pews and clean the brass.

So we designed a plan whereby the church was divided into sections and then we appealed to the congregation and the village to volunteer to take responsibility for one section. We were overwhelmed by the ensuing positive response and it was a joy to find so many people happily moving furniture, polishing, dusting and cleaning every available surface to make the church absolutely sparkle in time for the reopening.

With St Laurence reopened we turned our minds to the Interpretation and Activities part of Project Newton. These are expected to continue into 2026.

### Thanks

Reflecting on 2023 it's clear that we are blessed with people who are ready to 'throw themselves into the work of the Master'. So, our thanks are due to our PCC  
to Elaine for her dedicated efficiency as our secretary  
to Gill for her safeguarding diligence as well as her work as Foundation Governor and editor of Parish News.  
to Guy for his assiduous attention to finances, his outstanding leadership on Project Newton and his dedication as Churchwarden.  
to Hazel for her willing support and her wonderful organisation of Lunch Club and 30 years running Adventurers with Barry.  
to Maggie for keeping our Health and Safety policy and Risk Assessments up to date,  
to Tricia and the choir for their dedication and the wonderful music they give us  
to Jo for 11 years of dedicated service as our Parish Administrator, always carried out with grace and efficiency.  
to Adrian for his faithfulness as our server and willing 'techie'  
to Kevin as Gift Aid Officer and for his wise advice on interpretation elements of Project Newton.  
to Jenny for keeping us abreast of comings and goings  
to those who read and lead our intercessions  
to Murray for organising OTB  
to our Messy Church group  
to Richard and Diana for hosting prayer meetings and house group.  
to EHEG for their ongoing work and maintenance of our churchyard.  
to our flower teams and those who clean our churches  
and to all the congregation for their continued faithfulness and attendance at services .

### Activities

#### *Worship Planning*

During 2023 Mary Cookson has been able to organise our service schedule, agreeing with Trevor and Tony and lay leaders which services they would lead so that we offered a variety of worship. The service schedule was carefully considered and approved by the PCC. Jo Brown, our Administrator, has been an invaluable help, producing Pew News every week and ensuring we had the appropriate Orders of Service each Sunday. Tricia has cheerfully

selected appropriate hymns and anthems, leading the choir and ensuring that wonderful music has enriched our worship.

### *House Group*

We had an interesting summer studying Revelation. Many years ago I was told Revelation was a simple book. More than 25 years later we have found it to be a complicated book with a simple message.

We now have a shared leadership which is proving to be successful. We hope that the coming Alpha Course will add to our membership

Richard Martin

### *Prayer Group*

The Prayer Group meets fortnightly and although with few participants we give thanks to God for the many blessings we have experienced in this parish over the past year. We continue in prayer for the year ahead in our benefice, as well as praying for our country and the wider world.

Richard and Diana Martin

### *Messy Church*

Messy Church has continued on Monday afternoons in school following OTB in church. Attendance has been consistently good. We have had fun doing various activities linked to the school's chosen values of perseverance, justice, truthfulness, community and joy. We are blessed by the participation Guy and Gill Stobart, Jenny Cruse, Tilly Joskey, Hazel Rider, Diana Martin and Mary Cookson.

Mary Cookson

### *St Laurence, East Harptree*

Following the builders' departure in March 2023 an intensive clean and polish was carried out at St Laurence to ensure the church was in wonderful condition for our reopening on May 7th 2023 with a special service of celebration for the Coronation of King Charles III and the completion of the capital works at the church. Since then snagging work has continued and we are confident that our next Quinquennial, due in 2024, will not spring any surprises on us though we expect there will still be issues to address to ensure that St Laurence remains in a good state of repair for many years to come.

Regular worship, including Communion, Lay Led services and Choral Evensong have continued and services have generally been well attended. Since reopening we know, from our people counter, that footfall into the church has greatly increased. Many people have commented on the transformative work undertaken and the vastly improved access, particularly for disabled people, and the everchanging landscape in the churchyard. We still have long term issues to address, including the installation of a new heating system, as our

boiler is definitely aging! But we rejoice that the church is now a much more welcoming place and is being used far more by our school and other visiting groups.

A footnote – we continue to operate The School House Trust, whose trustees are all the churchwardens and the incumbent and which continues to support EH School financially and is also providing some support to Project Newton.

Mary Cookson and Guy Stobart

### *St Mary's West Harptree*

St Mary's was pleased to continue hosting additional services until almost the end of April 2023 when a fall of ceiling plaster necessitated its temporary closure on safety grounds. However, the coincidental reopening of St Laurence following major works fortunately saved the day. St Mary's reopened in early October once repairs were completed.

All annual testing and servicing was carried out during the year and the Health & Safety Policy and associated documents were reviewed and updated.

The gate and north door were refurbished and woodworm treatment carried out to the main altar and a number of pews. Unfortunately during the Autumn the boiler failed several times, necessitating increasingly frequent repairs, and it was subsequently condemned. In the light of the Church of England's policy of reaching Net Zero by 2030, enquiries were needed to establish what can affordably be done to heat the church in future and these are ongoing.

In the absence of a Church Warden we rely heavily on a small group of people for day to day upkeep, service cover and fund raising and we warmly thank them for their support. We acknowledge also the volunteers who provide flowers, help at services, act as stewards for events, open and close the church, sweep the path & pavement, undertake occasional maintenance and help with fund-raising. Villagers from throughout the United Parish generously support our various social & fundraising events, which not only assist St Mary's financially, but help to boost community and parish life. Finally, we thank the East Harptree Wardens, who in the absence of a regular priest organized regular and life-event services, the clergy who took them and the musicians who graced them; and the Parish Administrator who until her retirement was a huge support in myriad ways. Thank you all.

The current members of our small Village Church Committee are all over 70 and would be delighted to welcome anyone interested in keeping the building in good repair and functioning in the years ahead. In particular we are urgently in need of a Treasurer to replace Adrian Phillips who wishes to retire. If sufficient new volunteers do not come forward, then we have to be seriously concerned for the future of St Mary's.

Elaine Avery on behalf of St Mary's VCC

### *St Margaret's Hinton Blewett*

This was one of the quietest years probably in the history of the church. There was one wedding and one interment of ashes. The Crib and Candle Christmas Service Eve was as always very well supported with the Last Hour at the Cross as moving as always. The

mowing teams kept the churchyard in excellent order with new members joining. The church was always cleaned and flowers in situ all the year. We held the first fete on the village green for some years raising a magnificent £2000.

Graham Sage

### *Music*

The choir continued to thrive post-covid with major services for the re-opening of St Laurence's, the Coronation, a celebration of Somerset, and the Advent and Christmas carols.

There have been a number of first performances: in the Coronation thanksgiving service we joined choirs throughout the country in singing *The Mountains Shall Bring Peace* by Joanna Forbes l'Estrange, commissioned by the RSCM and July's evensong included first performances of the Harptree *Preces and Responses* and the anthem *Praise the Lord* by Julian McNamara. Perhaps the most unusual new work was *The Crystal Spring* by Hywel Davies, sung as part of the wonderful Somerset service in September. For the first time in many, many decades, this service dispensed with the organ and was accompanied by the Somerset Russets, an instrumental folk group modelled on the old village bands which were common until the end of the 19th century. Oakhill-based composer Hywel Davies was commissioned to make an arrangement of the local folk ballad, *The Crystal Spring* for choir and band. All the music in the service from the hymn tunes to the instrumental pieces before and after the service were from Somerset and the theme continued into the refreshments (apples featuring strongly!) and the post-service dancing demonstrations by local folk groups. It was a joyous celebration of all things Somerset.

Away from these special services the choir continues to serve with joy at regular Sunday morning services and monthly evensongs. We sang twice at Stowey and continue to value the musical friendship between our churches. With the re-opening of St Laurence's enabling the reestablishment of the normal pattern of services again, I would once again like to thank Elaine Avery and St Mary's for being such generous hosts to the choir while St Laurence's was out of action. Indeed, thanks are due to all the choristers who continue to give of their time and talents to enable choral music in the parish to thrive and "serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.

Tricia Rees-Jones

### **Safeguarding**

The diocese has fairly recently introduced safeguarding "dashboards" for parishes and benefices. It is a national online system which helps PSOs and PCCs to keep track of the work which is being done in a parish around safeguarding and tasks which need to be undertaken or reviewed. Some helpful reports can be generated, including the PCC's safeguarding action plan.

The Parish Safeguarding Policy is reviewed and updated as required by the PCC on an annual basis. This was done in July 2023 and is due to be reviewed at the meeting in September 2024.



It is diocesan policy that all those working directly with children or young people or vulnerable adults, church wardens and others such as the parish safeguarding officer and organist and choir leader should have DBS checks done. At the time of writing all checks are up to date, with a handful due to be renewed in the autumn of 2024. Until the end of 2022 the Church's guidance was that checks should be done every 5 years. From January 2023 that is now every 3 years.

Training is now mandatory for almost everyone who has any sort of role within the church. Over the last year I have contacted all those who need to do some training, most of whom have done so. There are still a few refuseniks and some of those who have done the training have not exactly embraced doing so, a culture we need to change. The importance of safeguarding was preached on last year and will be again this year when we mark Safeguarding Sunday.

We are required to follow the National Church's guidelines when recruiting any volunteer who will be working with children or young people (or, indeed, vulnerable adults). I have now started following these guidelines when recruiting new volunteers. It will not be retrospective.

It is also good practice for those in voluntary roles in the church to have role descriptions. We do not do so at the moment. As a benefice, we intend, over a period of time, to give our volunteers such role descriptions.

We are required to put certain information on our church noticeboards (the "*Promoting a Safer Church*" poster and a copy of the Parish Safeguarding Policy). There should also be appropriate information on any website. This is ongoing work and is in hand.

Gill Stobart

### *Parish News*

Parish news continues to be an important part of the communication across our communities and is flourishing despite the growth of social media!

Gill Stobart

### *Health and Safety*

In February 2024 the PCC agreed changes which would improve the monitoring and reporting processes. In particular lightning conductor tests will revert to annually, each church will adopt the Ecclesiastical Insurance Office's questionnaire for the 5 yearly fire assessment review and there will be a half yearly follow up of outstanding issues relating to the Health & Safety Risk Assessments including dates for legal requirements. Copies of all documentation to be sent to the PCC.

The Health & Safety Risk Assessments for East Harptree and West Harptree are up to date and all legal inspections and checks have either been carried out or are in hand. Dates for outstanding checks have been identified. Documentation has been sent to the PCC.

Hinton Blewett is in the process of sorting out the documentation but as yet the PCC has not

received any.

As the Parish Office has relocated the PCC is no longer responsible for Health & Safety matters there.

The United Parish Health & Safety Policy needs to be reviewed in the coming year.

M Brain

### **Financial Review**

This is covered in the separate financial statements