

THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

For the Drinkstone Annual Parish Meeting, 11 June 2025.

A Year of Change

Our Rector, the Reverend Margaret Ruth Farrell, retired on 14th July 2024. Ruth was responsible, with the PCC, for promoting the ministry of the Church, as well as for the building of All Saints'. All Saints' Drinkstone and St Mary's Woolpit are a united benefice. During the 'Vacancy' from 15th July 2024, the Churchwardens and the PCC held these responsibilities under the direction of the Archdeacon or the Rural Dean.

PCC Membership

During the year, the following served as members of the PCC:

Rector: Ruth Farrell (chairperson) until 14th July 2024. During the Vacancy, David Medcalf chaired the PCC, handing over to Mark Campbell in November 2024.

Churchwardens: David Medcalf (vice-chairperson) and Mark Campbell (from June 2024).

Elected Representatives: Tony Schmitt (treasurer), Lynne Woodward (secretary), Dave Woodward (fabric), Jo Stark (fundraising), and Christine Lambert (flowers).

The following served as officers (not being members of the PCC): Safeguarding Officer: Astrid Gale; and Joint Fabric Officer: David Ford.

The full PCC met seven times, plus a special resolution meeting. Astrid Gale, in her Benefice Safeguarding role attended six meetings. The average attendance at PCC was 89%.

Services of Worship, Church attendance and the Electoral Roll

The pattern of services was as follows:

2nd and 4th Sundays: Holy Communion, with attendance averaging 17 adults; *3rd Sundays,* the informal Breakfast service continued, with discussion, worship, prayer and singing; average attendance of 7/8. *5th Sundays,* a Benefice-wide Holy Communion at All Saints'.

On *Wednesdays*, Morning Prayer was frequently conducted by the Rector until her retirement.

Home Communion was provided by the Rector and, subsequently, by Paul Clarke.

One wedding was celebrated; no funerals took place.

The Easter Sunday Communion service was attended by 16 people.

The Parish celebrated Ruth's retiring ministry with a final service on 30th June 2024; the Drinkstone Community Choir took part and 82 people attended. The Benefice then celebrated with a Benefice service at St Mary's Woolpit on 14th July 2024, followed by a Benefice party in Woolpit Village Hall. The Drinkstone Remembrance Sunday service took place with a recorded Last Post and Reveille; attendance was 58.

The Carol service was a modified five lessons and carols, in which the Drinkstone Community Choir took part, with 165 attending; 13 people attended Family Communion on Christmas Day.

As of 2025, there are 28 members on the Church's new Electoral Roll.

The Vital and Valued Support for All Saints' Church

After Ruth's departure, in the last 6 months of 2024 retired priests Adrian Copping, Frank Gimson and Brin Singleton led our services. We thank them and other visiting priests for ensuring that the standard of rewarding and inspiring services has been maintained.

All Saints' Church provides a warm welcome to all who attend. Communion services always close with refreshments, providing valuable time for fellowship and friendship.

The rebuilding of the organ was substantially completed, enabling it to be played during services (the outstanding work was completed in 2025). The organ builder, Peter Bumstead, gave a demonstration concert and we are indebted to him for saving this important instrument.

Peter Tryon continued to play the organ until ill-health made this impossible for him; his contribution has been much appreciated. During the Vacancy, we have been greatly helped by Ray Brown and Anne Clarke from St Mary's playing at one service per month each. Roslyn Poole has also assisted by playing the organ on several occasions.

The Community Choir continued to play a role, singing at Ruth Farrell's final service and in the Carol service. Our thanks to Jo Brown for taking Peter Tryon's place as Choir Leader.

A rota of cleaners, organised by Astrid Gale, ensured the church looked fresh for all services, while Sue Medcalf and her team of flower arrangers provided beautiful flowers. Sue retired in December, with Christine Lambert taking her place.

Sue Cousins, with Tony Schmitt's assistance, continued to work tirelessly to get advertising for the Parish Magazine, which the Church provides as a secular service to Drinkstone. Our great thanks to Sharon Schofield, who stood down from her post as the editor. We are very fortunate that Lindi Belfield has taken on the role. A group of volunteers delivers the magazine, which continues to be an essential source of church income.

We welcomed The Arts Society's West Suffolk & Bury St Edmunds Church Recorders as they began work to prepare a record of all the items and the internal fabric of the church. The Church Record will be presented in 2025.

All Saints' Church depends upon the valuable contributions of so many people, some named above, many not. To all, we are immensely grateful, thank you.

Christian Activity

Members of the Church community provide care within the Parish and the Rector's discretionary fund exists for those in need. We supported Bury Town Pastors, Bury Christian Youth, the Royal British Legion and contributed to Bury Women's Refuge, Water Aid and Gatehouse Food Bank. The Drinkstone Educational Charity has donated to specific people who have applied for funds.

Finance and Fundraising Activities

The Church needs to generate income yearly, to meet its running costs and Parish Share contribution without resorting to its reserves and legacies. Fundraising therefore continued to be vital, both to balance All Saints' books and by involving those who would not normally come to church but love to help. Two of the Fundraising group retired, but we gained two new members. We are most grateful to all those involved in fundraising and other events during 2024.

Activities included a Plant Sale and Coffee Morning in May, the highly successful 'Water, Water Everywhere' Flower Festival in June, Harvest Supper in September, Christmas Coffee Morning in the Village Hall, as well as the Community Christmas Card.

We encourage the public use of the Church as a venue for other events; an enjoyable concert of choral and instrument music was held in 2024.

The Fabric of the Church

Dave Woodward and David Ford continued to ensure that the fabric of All Saints' was very well maintained. The Quinquennial (the five-yearly inspection) had been undertaken in 2022 by Nick Jacob, architect; the report was received in 2023. Meetings took place in 2024 to pursue this. (Work is now expected to take place in the latter half of 2025 - early 2026.)

Lighting: Following the failure of a metal-halide lamp in the nave, it was decided to replace all the Church lamps with LEDs. Planning decisions have been complex and should be resolved in 2025.

Churchyard: In 2024 the Top Garden team mowed the churchyard twice monthly. Many thanks are due to Peter Holborn, who, with David Ford and Dave Woodward, organised working parties to ensure the churchyard is well maintained and an increasingly environmentally friendly habitat.

Bat Licence: A Preliminary Roost assessment in November 2023 had revealed bats inside the church and therefore the need for a bat licence. This required a Bat Emergence survey, but surveys can only

be carried out between May-August. The results - plus droppings found in the church - showed that a day roost used by three bat species existed. A bat licence was therefore required by law and granted in November, allowing us to capture and move bats to new bat boxes in the churchyard, block bat entrances to the church and carry on with the project. All Saints' is now bat free.

The Tower Bells

2024 began with the Drinkstone Bell Restoration project committee, led by Nigel Gale, focusing on fundraising the predicted £130k needed. Generous individual donations were received, some from a Sponsorship scheme, plus further donations from local grant-giving bodies and trusts and the Suffolk Guild of Ringers (SGR).

An application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), written by Astrid Gale, was well worth the 10 weeks it took to prepare. The scope had to be widened at this stage (increasing the budget to £140k) as the Lottery required additional conditions to be met, e.g. protection of heritage, benefit to nature, community involvement and ongoing sustainability. The committee decided that swift boxes should be installed in the tower, with the advice of Peter Holborn and Colin Field, as swifts are a red-listed species and church towers are ideally suited to their nests. (This took place in 2025.)

The successful NLHF application and grant of £62k made the project viable and the funding target was reached at the end of June, allowing the PCC to sign the contract with John Taylor & Co, Bellfounders of Loughborough, to supply a new peal of six bells with a tenor bell of approximately 8cwt weight, hung in a new steel frame with sound controls.

This great success was principally due to the exceptional work of Nigel and Astrid Gale, with Alan Mould (Diocesan Consultant). Under Alan Mould's guidance, members of the SGR began dismantling the old fittings, and within days the bells and frame were removed from the tower (some of the bells had rung for over 300 years) and taken to Loughborough, ready to be recast.

In August, two groups of donors and supporters travelled to Taylor's, to see the six new bells being cast: a fascinating experience. A first group of learner ringers also started in Woolpit tower. The project was paused in July whilst the PCC sought the bat licence that was granted in November. Active fundraising ceased at the end of June, but donations and grants continued to arrive, such that the final total income was just in excess of £150k. This meant any extra expenditure could be met comfortably. It is hoped that the bells will be ready to ring for Easter 2025. (This was achieved.)

Safeguarding

Under Astrid Gale, Benefice Safeguarding officer, Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults has remained a high priority and become fully embedded. She has ensured that the Parish Dashboard has been maintained and that everyone has been supported in their training requirements. She also organised a well-attended session of Basic Safeguarding Training in the Village Hall.

Vacancy

Following Ruth's retirement, the process of finding her successor began. The churchwardens were tasked with creating a Benefice Profile that would attract the right applicants. The advertisement went to press in December 2024; no candidates applied, however. (This process continues into 2025.)

Looking forward to 2025

We look forward to many things in 2025 including:

- welcoming a Rector to the Benefice to inspire our worship
- growing the Church's mission in the Parish, finding new activities and ways to reach out to those living in Drinkstone and ensuring the well-being of the vulnerable and those in need
- continuing an excellent programme of social and fundraising activities
- the completion of the Tower Bells' project; the completion of the organ restoration; *and*
- the benefits of a harmonious Benefice.