

**THE ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
OF ST PETER'S CHURCH, ASHBURNHAM
for the year ended 31 December 2024**



Website: ashburnhamandpenhurstchurches.org.uk

Rector: Revd Gary Cregeen,
Agmerhurst Granary, Kitchenham Road, Ashburnham, Battle TN33 9NA



St Peter's Parish Church, Ashburnham
Trustees Annual Report 2024

Our aims and purposes as a charity

St Peter's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent, the Reverend Gary Cregeen, in:

- The promotion of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England;
- Promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church - pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.
- The PCC is also specifically responsible for the maintenance of St Peter's Church and the Church Hall, both situated in the grounds of Ashburnham Place, a Christian prayer and conference centre.

Our objectives

When planning our activities for the year, our incumbent and the PCC have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the specific guidance on 'charities for the advancement of religion'.

The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016, fully recognising its duty to have due regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

During 2024 we planned to follow these objectives and activities to fulfil our aims:

- Enable as many people as possible to worship at our church and to become part of our church family, providing a variety of service formats, in person.
- Consider how services can involve those who live within the parish and hold services outside the church building in the community during the year.
- Maintain strong ecumenical links with other Christian centres in our parish.
- Teach and nurture new and existing believers.
- Offer worship, teaching, prayer and fellowship in small group situations.
- Providing pastoral care for people whether part of St Peter's church family or not.
- Reach out to the unchurched via Prayer Cards for any to complete; and produce a free Parish Magazine.
- Maintain the fabric of the historic church building for people to enjoy and enable an appreciation of it within its setting.
- Consider the needs of people served by other charities by giving grants to wider Christian charities and missionary organisations – both locally, in the UK and overseas.

What we achieved and how we affected beneficiaries' lives

MORE OPEN

Worship

St Peter's is a gathered church with members coming from around the area to enjoy an open evangelical approach to worship and fellowship. In 2024 our pattern of services consisted of Morning Prayer on the first, third and fifth Sundays of the month, Holy Communion on the second and fourth Sunday. The Sunday Service is normally at 11 am and includes a time of open sharing where the congregation can share prayer needs and encouragement where they have seen God's work in their lives. This contributes to our strong sense of pastoral commitment to each other. The average regular weekly attendance, counted during October 2024 was 40 adults and 3 children.

Various services were held at village locations outside the church during 2024, such as Plough Sunday, Rogation, the Country Fair weekend, Harvest Supper and other special occasions such as Remembrance Sunday.

During 2024, we held a **Plough Service** in the village hall, followed by lunch, in aid of R.A.B.I. and FCN. We had several contributions from people in the village, covering the themes of sowing, ploughing, seeds, soil, growing flowers and celebrating the diversity of creation. About 70 attended and we raised £321 for the farming charities. *As we are a rural parish based on agriculture we value the opportunity to pray for and with our farmers, and many are involved in readings or prayers on these occasions, and we include representatives of farming charities (RABI and FCN).*

On Easter Morning ACT and St Peter's joined together, along with others from the village, for an early **Easter Service** of Bible readings and prayers at various points around the lower lake at Ashburnham Place.

In May, we were kindly invited to Kitchenham Farm for a **Rogation Service**, when we were blessed with a fine day as we walked to selected locations to view various areas of our community and surrounding countryside. We had readings and prayers, asking for God's blessing on farms, businesses, the environment, livestock and individuals in our villages. Refreshments were provided by Amanda and Monty Worssam. About 65 people joined us.

A **Summer Service**, in a marquee, with a crèche, was held on the Sunday after the Country Fair at the end of July. This was Morning Prayer, with refreshments in the sports pavilion afterwards.

During 2024 St Peter's was the venue for three **Weddings** – all joyful occasions. While on a gloriously warm sunny Sunday in September, it was a delight to baptise Kirsty McIntosh in the lower lake at Ashburnham Place and to enjoy a church family picnic afterwards.

Harvest was celebrated with a supper in the village hall, aided by village friends and church members from both Ashburnham and Penhurst churches, with community singing afterwards. About 50 people joined us for the evening. A **Harvest Thanksgiving Service** was held in church the following day. While towards the end of October, we hosted an **All Souls Service** at St Peter's, which welcomed those who had been bereaved during the previous year and beyond.

On **Remembrance Sunday** the church congregation joined a good number from the parish for a service at the War Memorial led by Revd Gary, followed by refreshments provided by Penhurst and Ashburnham churches.

In December, following the coming together of Ashburnham & Penhurst Churches, a traditional Christmas “**Carols by Candlelight**” was held at both Penhurst and Ashburnham – it was both poignant and a pleasure to include contributions from a Ukrainian Choir during the Ashburnham Carol Service. On Christmas Eve a ‘Carols Around The Crib’ service took place at St Peter’s and included a choir from the Ashburnham Place community, as well as various members of the church and community reading lessons. Around 120 people of all-ages attended this service. During December church members also joined the village carol singing group for a chilly trailer ride around Penhurst, with refreshments afterwards kindly provided by the Hoad family at Hill Farm. The **Community Carolling in the Ash Tree Inn**, Ashburnham, was also very popular again this year.

These community events have proved to be a great opportunity to meet those living in the Parish who may have little or no contact with the church, and Revd Gary has helped to further good relationships with many people.

In a previous APCM Report prayers were requested that as the parishes of **Penhurst and Ashburnham** we may be good witnesses to our neighbours and help to show God’s love in our community. A significant highlight in 2023 was the ‘recovery’ of a closer working and worshipping partnership between the two churches, which is enabling this shared witness to continue to grow during 2024.

Throughout 2024 a termly **Programme Card** has continued to be produced detailing the themes of our worship Sunday by Sunday, as well as details of other events. In 2024 the sermon series included: Transformed – growing in Christ-likeness; ‘I am... claims of Jesus; the Joy of Giving (as part of our annual giving review); Let My People Go! – the life of Moses and God’s faithfulness; Ephesians – The Church as God sees it; and ‘Advent-ually’ – a story of hope, promise and expectation (Advent).

We are grateful to all those who provide music, technical input, read lessons, lead intercessions, provide prayer ministry, teach in Sunday Club, lead and/or preach, give practical support, tend to the collection, decorate the church for major festivals, and offer welcome or hospitality each Sunday. This is a real team effort, reflected in the Rota kindly prepared by Catherine Duggleby each month. In our worship we seek to keep Jesus at the centre, undergirding all that we do with prayer and in the power of the Holy Spirit, recognising the unique nature and needs of the church and rural parish. St Peter’s joins regularly in worship and prayer with Penhurst Church, the non-denominational Ashburnham Chapel, and works closely with the Ashburnham Christian Trust and the Penhurst Retreat Centre where, during 2024, Revd Gary led two Study/Quiet Days on The Conversion of St Paul, and Jonah.

The Post

The Post, a weekly Newsletter for Ashburnham and Penhurst churches, provides a vital means of communication, not least in sharing details of activities, news and prayer requests, as well as a host of other information. Tina French, who has faithfully produced The Post latterly, relinquished this responsibility at the end of 2024. We are grateful to Tina; also, to Rachel Bickersteth who has kindly assumed responsibility for The Post in early 2025. We are grateful to David Amos who continues to distribute The Post, to over 130 recipients.

MORE CONVERTED TO JESUS CHRIST

A ‘**Christianity Explained**’ Course took place in June/July 2024 – the course was aimed at those wishing to explore what it means to be a Christian or at those seeking a ‘refresher’. Based on Mark’s Gospel the course helps us to consider: Who is Jesus? Why He died and what His death achieved; the significance of His resurrection; and what it means to ‘repent and believe’. Afterwards, a fortnightly women’s Bible study emerged which included some of those who had completed the CE course; this small group is led by Julie Cregeen and Pat Tindall on alternate Wednesday mornings.

In **Lent 2024 mid-week meetings** took place on Thursday evenings (in the Prayer Centre); it was a delight to be joined by folk from Wartling & Herstmonceux churches, as together we focused on 'The Cross of Christ'.

Prayer Ministry – Pat Tindall

Personal PRAYER MINISTRY is available in the side chapel each Sunday. Two people are always available to pray when leaving the communion rail or at the end of every service.

Those ministering have either completed the online Chichester Diocese Basic Awareness training on Safeguarding or partnered with a person who has. Some refresher or additional prayer ministry training is being considered during 2025.

Cards, pens and two locked postboxes are available for anyone to write a request in confidence. The cards are gathered each Sunday and prayed over the same morning by the two people on ministry duty after any personal ministry. The boxes are located just through the door inside the church and at the foot of the path to the front door.

This facility began in June 2014. Almost eleven years later, we have received at the date of writing, 1,344 requests. These are all from visitors to the church and grounds. Over the past year, there have been 213, averaging 4 or 5 per week. The boxes are rarely empty (except during very bad weather). Only once have we found a card which has told us of answered prayer. Many are from visitors from far afield. Not all show evidence of a living faith. However, Jesus said that anyone who came to Him He would never turn away (John 6:38). Despite not being able to see God's answers, it is a real privilege to be able to provide this ministry and part of our prayer is that the person should be assured that He has heard and knows them.

For Christmas 2024 the tree in church was adorned with doves, which had prayers requests added to them. These were 'prayed in' by members of the Prayer Ministry Team. The Christmas tree will be made into a cross for use during Lent 2025, when labels will be available for anyone to attach a prayer.

Pastoral Care

Revd Gary Cregeen oversees pastoral support to all in the Benefice of Ashburnham with Penhurst, though many in the church family are involved in village groups and organisations. Revd Gary sees this as a 'team effort' believing that we should not underestimate the often 'unseen' pastoral care and support which exists among the church family and the wider community. '*See how they love one another*' – living out our faith and demonstrating something of God's infinite care for each of us is intrinsic to our DNA.

Revd Gary 'beat the boundaries' of the Benefice again this year, during Holy Week. Besides walking and praying for the community, he also visits every home he passes to say 'hello' and to offer an invitation to the Easter Services.

Monthly Mid-week Service – Hazel Lodge Residential Care Home, Battle

In February 2024, following a request from Hazel Lodge, Revd Gary along with a team of folk from Ashburnham and Penhurst Churches, has provided a short service on the third Thursday of each month for residents. These have been well received and this outreach provides an opportunity to get alongside residents and staff and to offer something of the love and care of God to all involved.

Men's Breakfast – John & Tina French

(April 2024 - March 2025)

There have been four Men's Breakfasts, organised by John French, and Revd Gary, with help from the bookings & catering team at Ashburnham Christian Trust, and members of our congregation.

Three of the breakfasts were held at Ashburnham Place, and one at Ashburnham Church Hall, all starting at 8.30am with a full-English breakfast, followed by a talk from a guest speaker, until approx 10am.

April 20th - 39 attendees (3 apologies)

The speaker was Reverend Dr Stephen Need, who offered 'A view on the Israel-Gaza conflict'. Stephen lived and worked in Jerusalem for a number of years and, as the current conflict rages, Stephen provided an informative, yet heartfelt view of this part of the world, with insight and sensitivity.

September 7th - 41 attendees (4 apologies)

Richard Bickersteth spoke on the theme of “**In service of The King**” - telling us about his year as *High Sheriff of East Sussex*. The talk was very much enjoyed.

November 30th - 32 attendees (3 apologies)

Jacky Youldon explained how her “Running Space” initiative has developed since she spoke at a previous breakfast in January, and the issue of suicide awareness prevention was highlighted by one of the group who had met Jacky at that breakfast and helped to set up the RunningSpaces in Ashburnham. Several men spoke to Jacky afterwards with issues relating to suicide in their family and community.

January 8th - 28 attendees (2 apologies)

Paula Goubert spoke about “Homelessness Unity Group” (HUG) a charity that she founded for those who are facing homelessness in Bexhill and surrounding areas. Everyone was very moved by her quiet humility and determined efforts to help others.

We are grateful to God that this men’s group continues to be a means of fellowship and encouragement, and a place where others can feel comfortable and invite their friends.

We have three (3) more breakfasts booked for 2025.

We pray for those who are uncertain about their faith, that the Men's Breakfast may help them to understand more of God's love and grace, and that they may learn to trust in him and be helped by those they meet along the way.

NB Special thanks to John AND Tina who do so much to make the Men’s Breakfast happen – Revd Gary

Sunday Club – Julie Cregeen

The children and helpers have continued to meet during the church service. We regularly had 3 children aged 5 to 11 plus occasional visiting children. Since September the children have been less regular in attending and have now transferred to St. Mary’s Battle where there are more children of their age. We are sad to lose the Gulliver family but know that they are continuing their faith journey in a different setting which, we pray, will be really positive for them. The leaders will be meeting soon to discuss future provision for any visiting children. Please pray for wisdom in how we do this.

Home Groups

The Home Group that met at Pam Ives’ flat in Battle ceased during 2024 – we are grateful to Catherine Duggleby who facilitated what was a friendly and supportive gathering over a long time. In 2024 Catherine co-ordinated a questionnaire to determine interest in Home Groups more widely across the

Church Family. As a result, in February 2025 two new Home Groups emerged – one in Ashburnham and one in Penhurst, both at capacity. More on these Home Groups will feature in the 2025 APCM Report!

The Parish Magazine – Jay Ashworth

The Parish magazine has continued to be produced over ten months of the year throughout 2024 and delivered by hand to all houses in the villages of Ashburnham and Penhurst. It has certainly grown since its launch in December 2006 when it was just 6 pages, each edition now numbers 32 pages of news, club and event information and advertising as well as contributions from villagers.

While I continue to edit each edition, thanks go to Fay Merrick for co-ordinating the deliveries each month and the team of 14 people who hand deliver them throughout the villages.

Thanks to go to Fay Ramsden for administering the advertising side of things. During 2024 adverts brought in £2956 of income which set against printing costs of approximately £1350 means that £1606 was available for church funds.

My hope is that the magazine continues to be an important communication from the churches to everyone in Ashburnham and Penhurst, even in this digital age!

Safeguarding – Sandy Tattersall (Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator)

A Safeguarding board has been established in the church porch. Contact details for Chichester's Safeguarding team are clearly displayed. The Clewer Initiative forms part of the Church of England's approach to eradicating modern day slavery; resources from this charity have been explored and some of their posters are arranged on the board. NSPCC and Childline information is also included on posters and these will be renewed and refreshed when these charities release new materials.

I have attended the diocese's safeguarding leadership training. It is their intention to offer 'drop in' zoom sessions on a regular basis to which I shall subscribe.

Bespoke lanyards have been made for church members who undertake various roles ; names and roles may need updating from time to time. These are intended to identify ' who's who' to new people coming to our church and to demonstrate that St. Peter's, Ashburnham, takes safeguarding seriously.

When the Sunday club operated, a safeguarding folder contained a checklist on how to keep young people safe whilst they were in our care. This list was talked through with the children each week and was dated and signed. The safeguarding measures applied from the time the children left the church until they were reunited with their appropriate adult following a service.

If there is a ' visceral feeling' or a ' professional curiosity' about a safeguarding issue, there should be no doubt about which church member to contact.

I am thankful to report that no safeguarding concerns have been raised or brought to Gary's attention, or mine.

Thank you for the privilege of inviting me to serve St Peter's in this role.

MORE GENEROUS

God is the most generous Giver and our giving provides an opportunity for us to express our thanks to God for His generous provision for all our needs, not least of a Saviour in Jesus Christ. Christian giving involves service, time and resources, as well as money. Such giving sustains **mission** both here in

Ashburnham and the surrounding area, as well as further afield - in the UK and overseas for people we may never meet but to whom we are able to share God's Good News and give practical support through our ministry of giving. As a local Church St Peter's relies on the giving of its members to ensure God's work prospers locally and further afield. As part of our teaching programme there is a Giving Review each year.

The anticipated £10K shortfall in 2024 was significantly reduced by the end of the year (please see accompanying Accounts for 2024). We thank God for His generous provision, for Fay Ramsden who is doing a sterling job as PCC Treasurer, and for the generosity of God's people.

Charitable and Mission Support

The PCC allocates at least 10% of annual income for giving and in 2024 the PCC voted to support the following Christian charities and individuals:

LAMA House, Philippines
FSW (Family Support Work), Sussex
Penhurst Retreat Centre, Bursary Fund
Christians Against Poverty (CAP)
Battle & Bexhill Foodbank
The Pelham Community Hub
Joel & Amie Kendall, Istanbul

And during the year we had collections during services for the following -

Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and Farming Community Network
The Battle & Bexhill Food Bank
The Hub supporting Ukrainian refugees in Bexhill.
HUG (Homeless Unity Group, Bexhill)
Samaritan's Purse Shoe Box appeal in November.
Tearfund's Harvest Appeal

Financial Review & Reserves Policy

Please see separate accounts for the financial review.

Reserves Policy: The policy of the Ashburnham St Peter's PCC regarding financial reserves is in line with Charity Commission recommendations in that we keep between 3 and 6 months working capital (in our case up to £20,000) for day to day expenses, plus monies to fund known essential building repairs and renovation.

Risk Management

The PCC considers that the principal risks and uncertainties are:

- The need to fund unexpected costs associated with the church's listed buildings (eg: those arising from the failure of the heating system)
- An unexpected fall in income, particularly given the dependence on the church of a limited number of major regular donors
- The requirement to find volunteers with the appropriate skills, time and commitment to support the ministry

The PCC maintains its properties to a high standard and carries out the priority items of a quinquennial review in a timely manner.

Structure, Governance and Management

Membership of the PCC is determined under the Church Representation Rules and consists of ex-officio members (the Priest in Charge, the Churchwardens and members of the Deanery Synod) and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the church. All church members are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC in order to achieve a good balance of representation and sharing of skills and experience.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding how the funds of the PCC are to be spent.

After a period of transition **Fay Ramsden** assumed full responsibility as PCC Treasurer in early 2024, succeeding **Clive Mills**. We are grateful to Fay for her diligence, commitment and care in overseeing the church's finances.

The PCC has continued to ensure the parish is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations introduced in May 2018.

MORE ENGAGED

Battle & Bexhill Deanery Synod – Rachel Bickersteth

The Battle & Bexhill Deanery, comprising of 11 local churches, has a synod made up of clergy and lay members and meets four times a year. I was only able to make two meetings in 2024 due to being appointed in April.

The meeting on 17th July at St Barnabas' Bexhill included a talk from Ven Philip Jones about the Friends of Chichester Cathedral, a group which is focussed on preserving and facilitating the mission of the Cathedral. They run projects to maintain the fabric and encourage engagement with schools, fund an annual scholarship for choristers, and manage the bi-annual Festival of Flowers.

There was also a talk from Pauline Goubert, from HUG "Homeless Unity Group" which works to help the homeless in Bexhill. This is based from St Barnabas and provides 2 breakfasts and 1 dinner per week, laundry and shower facilities, regularly hosting 20-40 people. HUG cannot house people but work to give advice and help alongside CAP, the Foodbank and statutory agencies. They encourage their guests to attend courses or undertake voluntary work, and they lobby the local Council and MPs. The group share their faith and pray with guests as well. They are looking for volunteers to help. St Peter's has since supported their work.

Diocesan Synod elections took place this year and there are 4 lay members and 4 clergy members from our Deanery.

The meeting in October at St Stephens, Bexhill focussed on using technology in churches. Several churches shared how they use technology (screens, PA, livestreaming, music videos) and the benefits and challenges involved, and there was a wide ranging discussion about the constraints relating to eg: internet access, people with the skills, music licences, but also how it helps with worship, particularly livestream or video for the housebound.

We had a report from a member of General Synod on the proceedings in York in July 2024, and the Deanery Finance meetings were held in October to help parishes decide their contribution based on average ministry costs.

*Prior to Rachel's election, the Deanery Synod had met in January and April 2024. In January **Michelle Pannell (Manager, Bexhill Foodbank)** spoke about 'Feeding the hungry' – Michelle thanked volunteers for their work and churches for their gifts in food and money. In December 2023 the Battle Centre gave*

out 50 food parcels, feeding 80 adults and 49 children, while the Bexhill Centre gave out 256 parcels for 425 adults and 282 children. A CAB-seconded Financial Capability Officer is now located at the Foodbank, assisting with applications for benefits; fuel poverty is also a serious issue currently. Then the **Revd Dr Stephen Need** gave a very helpful and informed talk: 'A view on the Israel-Gaza conflict' - The Holy Land has layers of history, with those arriving in tension with those already there. One hundred years ago, the soldiers on the street were British. The British Mandate lasted from the end of World War One as the Jewish 'return to the homeland' continued. After Israel declared them-selves a nation in 1948, Arab nations attacked but were defeated. The West Bank was originally part of Jordan (where many Palestinians live), but Israel occupied the West Bank from the Six-Day War in 1967. Israel withdrew settlers from Gaza in 2005 but still ran the border crossings. The situation deteriorated and Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) has been there feeding off the bitterness. A better future will require a new set of political leaders on every side.

At the April Synod Ollie Jeffs and a Team from The Pelham spoke about the range of activities taking place there. The Pelham is a Christian Charity and is making a meaningful difference in the lives of so many people through it's youth work, counselling service, RunningSpaces (see note under 'Rural Officer For East Sussex' Report), partnerships with other community stakeholders and through hospitality.

Support For Ukrainians Living Locally

In 2024 St Peter's partnered with ACT to host a Summer BBQ and a Christmas Party for Ukrainians living locally. These occasions offered friendship, fun and respite for living with the consequences of the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Please pray for peace.

Administrative/ Miscellaneous Information

St Peter's Church is situated within the grounds of Ashburnham Place, Ashburnham, Battle TN33 9NF (owned by the Ashburnham Christian Trust). It is part of the Diocese of Chichester within the Church of England. The correspondence address is: Agmerhurst Granary, Kitchenham Road, Ashburnham, Battle, TN33 9NA (the vicarage). The PCC is a charitable corporation (PCC Powers Measure 1956, Church Representation Rules) and is a charity excepted from registration with the Charity Commission within the meaning of the Charities Act 2011.

PCC Members between 1st January 2024 and 31st December 2024

Priest in Charge: Revd Gary Cregeen

Churchwardens: Mrs Catherine Duggleby (from 21st April 2024)
Mr John French (from 21st April 2024)

Deanery Synod Representative: Mr Paul Wenham (Resigned 21st April 2024)
Mrs Rachel Bickersteth (Appointed 21st April 2024)
Vacancy

PCC Members: Mrs Sharon Gulliver
Mrs Carol Kobylka
Mrs Fay Merrick (PCC Secretary)
Mrs Sandy Wheeler / Tattersall
Mrs Fay Ramsden (Appointed 21st April 2024) (PCC Treasurer)

The PCC met 7 times during the year.

The Standing Committee, consisting of the Rector, Churchwardens, PCC Treasurer and PCC Secretary, did not meet during the year.

Electoral Roll 2025 – Fay Ramsden

The Electoral Roll has been completely renewed in 2025 and currently stands at 49 of which 24 are resident in the parish and 25 are from surrounding towns and villages. This balance of resident and non-resident has been a feature of the roll for many years.

Since the last APCM we have been delighted to add; Ms. Yvonne Lovatt, Ruben Merrick, Mr. Peter Neve, all from the village, Mr Nathaniel Xavier, Miss Georgia Eigbe, Mr Robert & Mrs. Christine Costen, Mr Barry & Mrs Susan Noakes, Mrs. Margaret Steven, Mrs. Jessica Stubbings, Ms. Hephzibah Thompson, and Mrs. Margaret Wood. Sadly Mr. Derek White passed away during 2024.

Whilst we have 13 new members, 13 have either moved away or have not seen the Notices about renewing the Electoral Roll this year and I am hopeful that when they realise that they needed to complete a new form they will do so and can be added to the Roll in the future. We also have 2 who will in future be on the Penhurst E.R

An up-to-date copy of the Electoral Roll is on display on the church noticeboard. Any errors or omissions should be reported to the Electoral Roll Officer (Fay Ramsden) as soon as possible.

Churchwarden's Report – General - Catherine Duggleby

2024 has been a really happy year for St Peter's Church, getting to know our brothers and sisters in Penhurst Church and acquiring a Rector! We have continued our tradition to reach out to the communities of Ashburnham and Penhurst in Services held outside Church. And so, Plough Sunday in February saw over 70 in the Village Hall, enjoying fellowship with people from both churches and from the villages, and a delicious lunch put together by a variety of people from each group.

Rogation Sunday in May, found us enjoying the beautiful surroundings of Kitchenham Farm, and the Marquee Service in July saw many people coming to worship together. Harvest supper attracted a good crowd, and Remembrance Sunday once again had members of both churches participating. It has been one of the great joys of last year spending time with members of Penhurst Church and feeling the warmth of genuine friendship.

We have continued our monthly visits to Hazel Lodge, the care home in Battle, and again we are welcomed, and it is a great pleasure to meet the Residents and share time with them.

Many came to the All Souls' Service in October to remember people who have died. From the feedback, we know that people really appreciate this Service and are grateful for the time to reflect and remember.

We have recently put together new House Groups with leaders and venues, one in Ashburnham and one in Penhurst, with a view to them starting in January 2025, and our Prayer Hour is attended regularly every month by a group of faithful prayers. We have also set up a Prayer Request Group for emergency prayers coordinated and distributed by email.

But the highlight of the year was Revd Gary's Induction and Institution Service last November when he became Rector of Ashburnham and Penhurst Churches. We had a wonderful Service, with a full church at St Peters to support Gary, and what a joy it was to have all four Church Wardens at his side.

We finished the year with Carol services at both Churches and very well attended Services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

As a Church Family we feel very blessed to be under the leadership of Gary with Julie, and we look forward to another year of great teaching and fellowship with them.

Churchwarden's Report – Fabric – John French

The Quinquennial Inspection by Mr Tim Wells of J D Clarke Architects took place on 31st October 2024 and the report was received in January 2025.

The Church: The following works were completed in 2024:

Porch lighting - an emergency light (that stays on all the time) has been fitted, as per guidelines.

Lightning Conductor on roof of the tower - this has been checked and has passed the annual inspection

A seized and broken hinge on the exit door to the tower roof has been replaced.

Thank you to Keith and Sandy for organising the church spring cleaning, and to everyone who helped on the day.

A small trip hazard on the bottom of the chancel steps has been resolved.

Weeds and plant growth removed by hand from the stone roof tiles over the vault/crypt door and from a small area on north wall.

Churchyard: a new grass cutting plan was put in place, to keep some grass near the church building short and other areas allowed to grow long, with paths in between the gravestones. This was contracted out and has worked well.

Heating: We continue to investigate different forms of heating to provide a long-term answer to the heating problem in the church building. The present system is only temporary and an extension to the permission for this has been obtained.

Various quotes have been received relating to work in the boiler room including the removal of asbestos in the ceiling. The old oil tank will also need removing as it is no longer compliant and is emitting heating oil fumes.

With help from others in the congregation, over eight different options and suggestions have been investigated and researched, including Cooltouch, ground source, electric, infrared, air source, pew tube heaters and biomass. A new water connection will be required if we are to use the cast iron radiators, involving a trench across the churchyard from a connection with ACT's supply. We have had advice from our church architect and the church buildings team at Church House, but, as yet, cannot see a clear way forward and more work needs to be done.

Prayer is needed for a wise decision, and for the funding and work permissions that will be required in the future.

And finally...

Rural Officer For East Sussex – Revd Gary Cregeen

Alongside his role as Priest-in-Charge (Rector since November 2024) of Ashburnham with Penhurst Revd Gary is also the Rural Officer for East Sussex – this is the result of a partnership between the Diocese of Chichester and the Ashburnham Thanksgiving Trust. Here is an extract from the Rural Officer Report to the Ashburnham Thanksgiving Trust (dated October 2024):

‘During last year I have continued to offer support, encouragement, care and advice to the many rural churches and communities we have in East Sussex. Highlights in 2024 included two Rural Retreat Days at Penhurst Retreat Centre, facilitated by Bishop Will and Archdeacon Martin respectively. The aim of these informal gatherings was to offer encouragement, space and refreshment to clergy serving in rural communities. Likewise, addressing Deanery Synods and Chapters, have enabled me to share good practice and also, hopefully, create greater confidence in our shared vision – ‘to know, love and follow Jesus’. The Chaplaincy at Plumpton Agricultural College, based on building relationships with the Principal Jeremy Kerswell, continues to develop, not least with the launch of a student-led Christian Union now meeting weekly on site. In December I led a Carol Service at Hailsham Livestock Market, in partnership with RABI (Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution) and FCN (Farmer’s Community Network); these links, along with my involvement as a board member for the South of England Agricultural Show, have enabled me to be a ‘conduit’ between the Church and other rural stakeholders.

Rural Elective: In January 2024 a Rural Elective was launched, as part of the Authorised Lay Ministry training programme offered by the Diocese of Chichester. Devised, facilitated and delivered by me, with input from other specialist practitioners across the Diocese, the Elective was made up of eight sessions delivered over four months (two sessions per month), and focused on the following: **Context, Communication, Connection, and Confidence**. The feedback from participants was really positive to the extent that the Rural Elective has been included as part of the ALM Training Programme for 2025.

Rural Hub for the South East: 2024 saw the launch of a Rural Hub for the South East, based at Ashburnham Place – this is part of a network of similar Hubs overseen by Rural Ministries (www.ruralministries.org.uk) at places such as Launde Abbey, Lee Abbey, and Holy Island. While the local Hub has been organised and delivered by Rural Ministries and ACT, I was included in the preliminary discussions for the two gatherings that have taken place (in February 2024 and June 2024) and the subsequent post review meetings. The feedback from these gatherings has been mixed and so, as Rural Officer, I have been engaging with those involved to clarify the purpose of the gatherings and to ensure the programme is both focused and relevant to mission and ministry in rural communities.

Rural RunningSpaces: In November 2023 Jacky Youldon, the founder of RunningSpaces (www.runningospace.org), based at The Pelham in Bexhill-on-Sea, spoke at the Ashburnham Church Men’s Breakfast. Jacky is a suicide survivor and she spoke about the challenges of feeling isolated, lonely or suicidal, while raising suicide awareness. As a result of the breakfast a Rural RunningSpace was launched in February 2024, in partnership with Ashburnham Church. Combining fitness, social interaction and prayer, these twice monthly gatherings attract between 10-20 people, including folk from St Peter’s and the wider Ashburnham village community. As we know, isolation is a real issue, especially in rural communities, and the aim of RunningSpaces is to ‘*run by faith to champion life and beat suicide one step at a time*’.

Rural Development Programme - How Village Churches Thrive: Building on previous rural resource events I am currently involved in devising a rural development programme, in partnership with Revd Canon Rob Dillingham (Parish Development Officer), aimed initially at clergy. The programme is aimed to enable rural parishes to excel in specific areas of rural mission and ministry. It is hoped this ‘rural resource’ will have an impact on the communities represented in terms of feeling invested in and challenging them about how to thrive and grow, within their context so that more people can come to know, love & follow Jesus.

Annual Rural Conference: The third annual **Conference ‘Rural, Faithful & Flourishing’** took place at Plumpton College in October 2024, and included input from the Rt Revd Richard Jackson (Bishop of Hereford), Jeremy Kerswell (Principal of Plumpton College), and a young person’s perspective on living and learning in a rural context. Around 80 people attended what was a rewarding and enjoyable event.

Miscellaneous: ‘The Sanctuary’ has provided a Christian presence at the South of England Agricultural Show for a number of years. I am currently working with those who organise The Sanctuary, as well as with some members of the SEAS Council, to raise the profile of ‘The Sanctuary’ at the Shows.

Harvest – For the first time there was a Harvest Thanksgiving Service at the South of England Autumn Show in 2024 and I was invited to preach on this occasion, as well as deliver a Blessing. Likewise, I was invited to speak at Plumpton College’s Harvest Thanksgiving Service at St Michael’s Church, which lies at the heart of the Campus. The service was attended by students and staff at the college, as well as members of the local community.

Life as Rural Officer for East Sussex is a busy one, not least when considering the one-to-one conversations, support and encouragement happening ‘behind the scenes’; and on-going training and learning – my L-plates remain in place! The need for a similar post to the West of the Diocese is becoming more acute as I am increasingly being ‘sought out’ by groups and individuals and groups in West Sussex – I courteously decline most of these invitations as my priority is in East Sussex. That said, I am currently working alongside the Diocesan Secretary in formulating a bid for central church funding to ‘**Grow Rural Churches**’ – this has emerged following conversations with a rural practitioner in Winchester Diocese involved in a similar project there. As Rural Officer I also serve on the **Diocesan Pro Ecclesia Board** – looking at mission and missional priorities for the Diocese, which meets twice a year. I also attend meetings of the **Apostolic Life** team occasionally. Wherever possible I seek to ensure my role as Rural Officer is strategic including helping to start initiatives that others can then take ownership of into the future.’

Approved by the PCC on 27th March 2025 and signed on their behalf by

Gary M. Cregeen

Revd Gary M Cregeen (PCC Chairman)



The Ukrainian Choir at the Carol Service; the Rural Conference at Plumpton; Revd Gary’s Induction as Rector of Ashburnham with Penhurst; monthly mid-week service at Hazel Lodge; Christmas Carols at Hailsham Livestock Market; Rogation Service at Kitchenham Fam.