

Diocese of Durham: The Riverside Parishes



The Parochial Church Council of Sockburn

Annual Report and Financial Statements

for the year ended 31 December 2025

Annual Report

In Brief...

MSG. Two significant developments in 2025 have been the change in regular Sunday service times from 10am to 9.15am, and the long-awaited demolition of the vestry at St George's Church! The church marked the retirement of Ruth Sansom from her ministry as a Lay Reader, and welcomed three new members to the preaching team. Georgie's Coffee Stop has continued to grow, and significant services have included the Harvest service, with contributions from the school, and the Remembrance Sunday service.

Hurworth. 2025 has been quite a busy year, and a time of consolidation without too many significant changes. Regular Sunday services have continued and developed, with frequent visitors and several new people. The half-term holiday clubs have continued, following their launch in 2024. The Christingle service was a particular highlight, once again, and links with the community have continued to be strong.

Girsby. Regular monthly services have continued, with the welcome addition of two new members to the congregation. There was an Easter Day Songs of Praise service, for the first time in many years, in addition to the Harvest and Christmas Eve services. The bells were brought back into action, and the church was redecorated and brightened up, in time for the first wedding in several years, which took place in August.

Dinsdale. The church has continued to remain open and active for another year, with a morning and an evening service each month, and the festival services (four per year) continue to be very popular. After some time without any weddings, there was a wedding for the second consecutive year, with two more booked for 2026. The Parish Giving Scheme was launched, and the church now has a reasonable regular income, in response to an appeal, which is a welcome step towards sustainability.

Introduction

Our four churches have been at the heart of their communities for many centuries. We are seeking to know God's love in Jesus Christ, and to share God's love with those around us, in word and deed.

The **Riverside Parishes** of Middleton St George (**MSG**), **Hurworth**, Sockburn (**Girsby**) and **Dinsdale**, in the Diocese of Durham, lie just outside Darlington, on the banks of the River Tees. At the time of the 2021 census, the population was 8959 (**MSG**: 5207, **Hurworth**: 3570, **Girsby**: 150, **Dinsdale**: 32). The two large villages are growing and relatively prosperous communities, with professionals, families and retirees, surrounded by rural communities and farmland, but with small pockets of poverty.

Each parish has a parish church: the churches of St George in **MSG** (Low Middleton), All Saints in **Hurworth**, All Saints in **Girsby**, and St John the Baptist in Low **Dinsdale**. In **MSG**, since 2008, when St Laurence's Church was closed for public worship, Sunday worship has been held primarily in the village primary school (St George's Church of England Academy), which is licensed for public worship, with St George's Church used on various occasions. The church as a worshipping community in **MSG** is known as 'St George & St Laurence's Church'.

'The Riverside Parishes' is an informal name for four parishes spread over three benefices. Towards the end of 2025, some initial steps were taken to create a united benefice of the four parishes. This would serve as a more permanent bond between the parishes, while maintaining their independence as separate parishes. The parishes of **Girsby** and **Dinsdale** have formed a united benefice since the 1930s, and this benefice has been held 'in plurality' with the single-parish benefice of **Hurworth** since the 1960s. Since 2017, these parishes together with the parish (and benefice) of **MSG** have shared a priest in charge, with the current priest in charge (or 'vicar'), Revd Anthony Smith, licensed on 6 August 2023.

Each PCC (Parochial Church Council) is a charity in its own right, and has approved this report as its own, making any changes as appropriate. (The financial statements are different for each parish.)

Objectives and Activities

The PCCs are responsible for overseeing the life of the church, for parish finances, and for the care and maintenance of the church buildings and churchyards. As a charity, each PCC is legally obliged to make use of its resources for the public benefit, in support of its charitable purpose: 'promoting in the ecclesiastical parish the whole mission of the Church', which is 'pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical'. The 'whole mission of the Church' focuses on the advancement of religion, which is recognised by the Charity Commission as a charitable purpose having public benefit. In the case of the Church of England, this means the advancement of 'the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness'. 'Mission' also includes providing public benefit in the relief of poverty and need.

The main activities of the PCC are as follows:

1. **Worship, prayer and discipleship**
2. **Pastoral care** for people living in the parish
3. **Mission and outreach**, as described above

Achievements and Performance

'when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD!' — Judges 5:2b, NIV

Most of the work undertaken by the churches has been done by volunteers, and we are immensely grateful to God for the willing service of so many people. This has included the work undertaken by the parishes' lay ministers:

- Lay Readers: Paul Mallett (on leave during 2025), Ruth Sansom (retired on 30 August 2025) and Peter Snowden
- Lay Pastoral Minister: Jill Bramwell
- Lay Children's Minister: Karen Wesson

Ruth Sansom's retirement was marked by a tea on Sunday 7 September, where those who gathered gave expressed thanks for her ministry as Lay Reader since 21 September 2013, which has included numerous areas of ministry within the church and the local community.

1. Worship, Prayer and Discipleship

One of the key roles of the PCCs is to enable worship and prayer to take place within the parish, both within church services and more widely. This gives people an opportunity to explore, express and develop their faith, and to be equipped to serve God within the community in their everyday lives, enabling worshippers to play their part in the mission of the Diocese of Durham, to 'bless our communities in Jesus' name for the transformation of us all'.

Services and groups have been held in the individual parishes, as described below, with some mixing across the parishes for special services.

We are grateful to the visiting clergy who have taken Sunday services during 2025 while the vicar has been on holiday, or to enable clergy-led services to take place simultaneously in **MSG** and **Hurworth**:

- **MSG**: Revd Jeff Astley, Revd Lynda Gough
- **Hurworth**: Revd Jeff Astley, Revd Ian Crofts
- **Girsby**: Revd Sue Chew

The Sunday morning service times were changed during the year, following a process of consultation that had started towards the end of 2024. The monthly pattern up to April was as follows, with the vicar alternating between **Hurworth** (1st and 3rd Sundays) and **MSG** (2nd and 4th Sundays):

	<u>Early Communion</u>	<u>10am MSG</u>	<u>10.30am Hurworth</u>
1.	9am Girsby	Service of the Word	Holy Communion
2.	8am Hurworth	Service of the Word	Morning Worship
3.	9am Dinsdale	All Age/Café Church	All Age Worship
4.	8am Hurworth	Holy Communion	Morning Worship
5.	8am Hurworth	Service of the Word	Morning Worship

From May onwards, the 8am communion service in Hurworth was discontinued, and the times of the other services were changed, in order to enable the vicar to be present at **MSG** and **Hurworth** for all but one of the Sundays in a month, and to enable more sharing of lay ministry. The monthly pattern adopted in May was as follows:

	<u>9.15am MSG</u>	<u>9.30am Dinsdale</u>	<u>11am Hurworth</u>	<u>11.15am Girsby</u>
1.	Service of the Word		Holy Communion	
2.	All Age Worship		Morning Worship	Holy Communion
3.	Service of the Word	Holy Communion	All Age Worship	
4.	Holy Communion		Morning Worship	
5.	Café Church		Morning Worship	

The new service times have been well received, largely, although with the loss of one regular member of the **Hurworth** 8am congregation. The earlier start in **MSG** has been somewhat challenging, and is likely to have contributed to less frequent attendance for some people.

In addition, there has been a 4pm service of Evensong in **Dinsdale** on the fourth Sunday of the month (except when there has been a special service).

Electoral Roll

Every six years, a new electoral roll is prepared from scratch, and this happened in 2025, with a significant number of names removed for people who were no longer connected with the churches. At the time of the annual meetings in March and April 2025 (compared with the figures from 2024), the number of names on each electoral roll was: **MSG** 40 (59), **Hurworth** 73 (83), **Girsby** 17 (18), and **Dinsdale** 9 (17). This gives a total of 139 (177), with one person listed on two electoral rolls.

Weekly services in MSG and Hurworth

Weekly services have been held on Sundays in both **MSG** and **Hurworth**, with the vicar sharing the leading and preaching with lay people (**MSG**: Hazel Bullock, Gill McKittrick, Julie Mathieson, Rodger Sansom, Ruth Sansom; **Hurworth**: Jill Bramwell, Julia Clarke, John De Martino, Peter Snowden). In **MSG**, Hazel Bullock and Julie Mathieson have begun to preach regularly, and Peter Snowden has been able to join the preaching rota regularly, as a result of the changes to the service times. Preaching has been based on the lectionary readings, including a series on New Testament letters June to October. Liturgy has been drawn from Common Worship, along with congregational hymns and songs. Singing in **MSG** has generally been accompanied by pre-recorded tracks (Apple Music). In **Hurworth**, music is led by the choir, organist and music group (see below). Each church has a monthly communion service. There is a monthly 'all age' service in **Hurworth**, and a similar pattern in **MSG**, with 'all age' most months, and 'café church' on occasion. In **Hurworth**, children from the half-term holiday club contributed to the Sunday service on 1 June and 2 November, with the June service being a more informal 'all age holy communion'.

Typical attendance has been similar to 2024:

- around 20–30 in **MSG**, with one or two children from time to time, and
- around 40–50 in **Hurworth**, typically with two or three children. Except in the 'all age' weeks, 'Children's Church' has been available for any primary school aged children who might be present, led by Karen Wesson in the north transept.

The main services in **Hurworth** have continued to be made available on Zoom, with several people joining from home most weeks.

A small service of morning prayer has taken place weekly in **Hurworth** (8.15am on Tuesdays), typically attended by around 4–8 people, and in the Rectory in **MSG** on Wednesdays (8.30am), typically attended by around 3–6 people.

Regular services in Girsby and Dinsdale, and 8am in Hurworth

At the start of 2025, there was a weekly 'Riverside Early Communion' from the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), with a monthly pattern as follows:

- 8am in **Hurworth** on the 2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays
- 9am in **Girsby** on the 1st Sunday
- 9am in **Dinsdale** on the 3rd Sunday

The 8am service in Hurworth was discontinued in May, with new service times as follows:

- 11.15am in **Girsby** on the 2nd Sunday
- 9.30am in **Dinsdale** on the 3rd Sunday

Attendance (including the vicar) was 5–8 at the 8am service in **Hurworth**, 8–11 in **Girsby**, and 3–11 in **Dinsdale** (with more on Easter Day: see below). Communion services in **Girsby** were not held in January (due to snow), July (due to redecoration) and August (following long-standing custom).

All communion and BCP evening services have been led by the vicar or a visiting minister. The 8am service in **Hurworth** has been a said service. The communion services at the other churches have typically begun and ended with a hymn, using CDs in **Girsby**, and with the vicar playing the organ in **Dinsdale**. Starting in October, the communion service in **Dinsdale** was taken from Common Worship Order Two (Contemporary Language), which is effectively a contemporary version of the BCP service.

A service of Evensong was held in **Dinsdale** on the 4th Sunday in January, February, April, May, July, August, October and November (all BCP except for an informal service in April led by Peter Snowden). These have been attended by 4–14, sometimes including 2 children, sometimes with some congregation members from **Hurworth**, and usually one or two who have some connection with the church, or who stumbled across it by chance and saw the notices advertising the service.

Special services in **Girsby** and **Dinsdale** have been well attended: see below.

Special services

Numerous special services have been held during the year. These were often publicised across the Riverside parishes and often supported by a few congregation members from the other churches.

- **MSG**
 - Good Friday Meditation, St George's, 12pm, attended by 19 adults, including several from the village community
 - Easter Day Dawn Service, St George's, 5.45am, attended by 21 adults, including several from **Hurworth** and from the village community
 - Easter Day Communion Service, 10am, attended by 21 adults and 4 children
 - Memorial Service, St George's, Sunday 14 July, 4pm, attended by 18 adults (significantly lower than in 2024)
 - Harvest Service, Sunday 12 October, 9.15am, attended by 46 adults and 18 children, including sung and spoken contributions from a group of children from the school
 - Remembrance Sunday, led by Rodger Sansom, attended by around 39 adults and 15 children for a service in the school, followed by around 140 adults and 40 children for the act of remembrance at the war memorial (St Laurence's), including uniformed organisations
 - Village Carol Service, St George's, Sunday 21 December, 3pm, followed by refreshments, attended by around 97 adults and 17 children (more than in 2024)
 - Christmas Eve 'instant nativity', 2pm, as a new initiative, with around 18 adults and 8 children, including 5 adults and 7 children who were not from the regular congregation.
 - Christmas Day Morning Worship, 10am, attended by around 19 adults and 1 child
- **Hurworth**
 - Ash Wednesday Communion Service, 7.30pm, attended by 26 adults, including 3 from **MSG**
 - Maundy Thursday Communion Service, 7.30pm, attended 23 adults (12 in the choir)
 - Good Friday Walk of Witness 2pm (14 adults, 1 child), followed by a service at 3pm (19 adults)
 - Easter Day Communion Service, 10.30am, attended by 71 adults and 3 children

- Durham Cathedral Choir visited to sing Choral Evensong on Sunday 11 May, 3.30pm, with around 80 adults and 4 children in the congregation, and a plentiful buffet afterwards
- Ascension Day Communion Service, 7.30pm, attended by 15 adults (10 in the choir)
- Memorial Service, Sunday 3 November, 4pm, attended by 28 adults
- Remembrance Sunday, led by the vicar, with Revd Gavin Hume preaching (Hurworth Methodist Church), attended by around 200 adults and around 60 children, followed by a faith lunch
- Carol Service, Sunday 21 December, 11am, attended by 67 adults and 10 children
- Christingle Service, Christmas Eve, 4pm, with a full church (estimated to be similar to last year: around 260 adults and 70 children), and with the choir singing for the first time
- Christmas Midnight Service, 11.30pm, attended by 35 adults, including 21 who were not regular members of the congregation (no choir)
- Christmas Day Communion Service, 10am, attended by 31 adults and 5 children, including several visitors (no choir)
- **Girsby**
 - Easter Day Songs of Praise, 4pm, attended by 19 adults (a 'new' service)
 - Harvest Thanksgiving, Thursday 3 October, 7pm, followed by refreshments, attended by 24 adults and 1 child, mostly from the local farming community, with 1 from **Dinsdale** and 5 from **MSG**
 - Christmas Eve Carol Service, 7pm, followed by refreshments, attended by 30 adults, including 1 from **Dinsdale** and 7 villagers from Neasham
- **Dinsdale**
 - Daffodil Service, Sunday 23 March, 4pm, followed by refreshments, attended by around 55 adults and 10 children (slightly down on 2024), including a significant number of people from the wider area who come every year to this service, and the choir and organist and several congregation members from **Hurworth**
 - Easter Day Communion Service, 9am, attended by 16 adults and 4 children (including a large family group)
 - Songs of Praise Patronal Festival, Sunday 23 June, 4pm, followed by refreshments, attended by 31 adults and 2 children, including the choir and organist and several congregation members from **Hurworth**
 - Harvest Thanksgiving, Sunday 22 September, 4pm, followed by refreshments, attended by 38 adults and 7 children, including the choir and organist and several congregation members from **Hurworth**
 - Carol and Christingle Service, Sunday 15 December, 4pm, followed by refreshments, attended by around 50 adults and 10 children, including various visitors and the choir and organist and several congregation members from **Hurworth**

Music in Hurworth

All Saints' Church is blessed with a fine pipe organ from 1870 and a committed choir and music group. Led by the organist Paul Austin-Martin, the choir typically has around 2–4 sopranos, 2–4 altos, 3 tenors and 1 bass, with occasional extras. The choir rehearses most weeks on Friday evenings at 6.30pm and sings on Sunday mornings and for special services, leading the congregation in their singing, and occasionally singing an anthem. One new development, begun towards the end of 2024 and continued during 2025, has been the singing of metrical versions of the psalm, at least once a month, in place of the said psalm. Highlights of the year have included services at Easter, the carol service on the Sunday morning before Christmas, and singing at Rockcliffe Hall on several Sunday afternoons in December and on Christmas Eve. Most of the choir members are also

members of the 'Rhapsody' choir (mentioned below). The music group leads our sung worship at the monthly 'all age' service, and typically includes piano, violin, recorder, clarinet, bass clarinet, horn and glockenspiel. New members for all groups are always welcome!

Lent Course

The vicar led a Lent Course on five Wednesday evenings in Lent at Dinsdale Court in **MSG** (kindly provided free of charge), with a morning session also held in a house in **Hurworth**. This took the form of the '321 Course', providing a fresh look at the message of Jesus, with videos featuring Glen Scrivener. This was open to all the Riverside Parishes, and was attended by the vicar along 6–9 in the mornings (all from **Hurworth**) and 6–8 in the evenings (all from **MSG**).

Home groups

The established home group in **MSG** had been low in numbers and stopped meeting once the Lent Course began. However, it is hoped that a group will begin again in 2026.

A new daytime home group was launched in **Hurworth**, continuing from the daytime Lent Course. This continued to meet most weeks from that time onwards, on Wednesdays from 10.30am to 12pm. The group has been led by the vicar and hosted by Jill Bramwell, and has been attended by around 10 people, most of whom are present most weeks. The group has generally been built around a Bible study, looking at the passage for the following Sunday's sermon.

Growing Churches: Maturity

Congregation members from **MSG** and **Hurworth**, along with the vicar, have taken part in a vision day and six focus groups in Darlington on the topic of 'maturity' (discipleship). These have been run by a team from the diocese, with groups from various church in the Darlington deanery taking part in the sessions. The focus has been on how our churches can help us to grow in discipleship, which involves being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and living the mission of Jesus. Subsequent 'modules' are planned for 2026 on the topics of 'mission' and 'multiplication'.

2. Pastoral Care

Most pastoral care is provided informally, as church members follow Jesus' command to 'love one another'.

Baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals

All services were taken by the vicar, except that two funerals were taken by Revd Sue Chew, one by Revd Caroline Ferguson, and one by Andrew Young (Reader from All Saints, Blackwell). It should be noted that the number of Church of England baptisms, weddings and funerals has been decreasing significantly in recent years across the whole Church of England.

Baptism visits in recent years have been done by Ruth Sansom (**MSG**) and Jill Bramwell (**Hurworth**), both of whom stepped down from those roles in 2024 or 2025. The vicar has taken on this area of ministry, and has been seeking to encourage families to begin to get into the habit of regularly attending church on Sundays prior to having a baptism.

The vicar and a couple of others represented the Riverside Parishes at a wedding fayre at the Middleton St George Cricket Club on 24 May. This was not well attended, but provided some useful contacts.

- There were 5 baptisms (13 in 2024): 3 in **MSG** (St George's; 3 in 2024) and 2 in **Hurworth** (10 in 2024).
- There were two confirmations in 2025 of candidates from **Hurworth** (one adult, one young person; none in 2024).
- There were 5 weddings (7 in 2024): 3 in **Hurworth** (6 in 2024), 1 in **Dinsdale** (1 in 2024) and 1 in **Girsby** (none in 2024).
- There were 12 funerals (20 in 2024):
 - 8 for **MSG** (9 in 2024): 3 in St George's Church (no burials)—2 of which were for former members of the congregation—and 5 in Darlington Crematorium or West Cemetery only;
 - 3 for **Hurworth** (10 in 2024): 2 in All Saints' Church and 1 in Darlington Crematorium only; and
 - 1 for **Girsby**, at Darlington Crematorium (none in 2024).
 - There were no funerals in **Dinsdale** (1 in 2024)
 - In addition, the vicar took a service at Maple Park Crematorium, near Thirsk, for a relative of a congregation member in **Girsby**

Safeguarding

Considerable efforts are made to make sure that our churches are safe places for everyone. Those who work closely with children or vulnerable adults have undertaken DBS checks and safeguarding training. We receive a lot of support from the diocese safeguarding team, led by Beth Miller, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

A training session was held in **Hurworth** on 17 February, run by two people from the diocese, covering Basic Awareness and Foundation training, which was attended by 5 from **MSG**, 5 from **Hurworth**, 3 from **Girsby**, and 6 from other churches in Darlington.

Safeguarding has been a standing item on the agenda for all PCC meetings. The 'Dashboard' and 'Hub' have been used in **MSG** and **Hurworth** to monitor safeguarding procedures. PCC members are repeatedly reminded of their responsibility to have DBS checks taken, and to undertake safeguarding training. Significant progress was made in 2025, with the result that all PCC members in the four parishes were up to date with their DBS checks and training requirements by the end of the year (with the exception of Leadership training for one in **Girsby**) Safeguarding policies were renewed in the autumn. The PCC in **MSG** has worked through all of the 'National Safeguarding Standards' over the course of the year, and they have been introduced to the PCC in **Hurworth**.

3. Mission and Outreach

The churches have had numerous points of contact with the wider community during 2025, providing opportunities to build relationships and point people to Christ.

The Bereavement Journey, which was run twice in 2024, was not run in 2025, though it is hoped that it will be held in 2026.

In **Hurworth**, the church was pleased to host the start of a lantern parade to the Village Green, which was organised by the Village Hall, for the second consecutive year, and proved to be very popular.

St George's Church of England Academy, MSG

Connections with the school have continued to be healthy during 2025. The vicar meets frequently with the head teacher, and became a regular leader of collective worship, along with class visits

(twice to Reception, and to Year 1, Year 2 and Year 4). The vicar accompanied the Year 6 children to Durham Cathedral for their leavers' service, where Ruth Sansom welcomed them as part of the team. Copies of the *Action Bible* were presented to every child in Year 6 at their leavers' service in the school. The PCC made a donation towards travel costs, to enable the Year 2 children to take part in the *Christmas Journey* at St Matthew at St Luke's Church in Darlington. Two members of the regular congregation in MSG have continued as members of the Academy Council during 2025, and the vicar is on the Academy Council, ex officio, also as vice-chair. Children from the school took part in the church's harvest service in October, and school children were involved in the Remembrance Sunday service and act of remembrance.

Hurworth Primary School (Open the Book/Open the Bible)

Since 2013 a group from All Saints' Church have been going into Hurworth Primary School to take assemblies. Until July 2024 this was under the auspices of Bible Society as 'Open the Book'. From September 2024 it became independent, as 'Open the Bible'.

Pat De Martino led the team from its inception until July 2025 when she handed over to Karen Wesson. The team meets every Monday morning during term time, either to rehearse the script or to be in school, four or five times a term, taking that day's assembly. There are 11 in the team, all very enthusiastic. Each story takes 10–15 minutes, with an introduction and conclusion, a song, a time of quiet reflection, and a prayer, carefully worded to respect the different backgrounds of all the children present. Every story involves participation from the children, which they thoroughly enjoy.

Over two hundred children hear the stories. The strength of 'Open the Bible' is that we see the children on a regular basis and get to know each other. It gives an opportunity for the church and school to work together. The success of this is summed up by a comment from one of the children. On returning to school after lockdown, the children were asked what they had missed most. The reply from one pupil was, 'The people from church who come to tell us stories about Jesus'.

Open the Bible is part of a wider relationship the church has with the school. The Year 5 class visited the churchyard in June as part of their 'enrichment curriculum', to help tidy the churchyard (with support from Darlington Borough Council) and to study the wildlife present (with the help of local naturalist Fal Sarker). The children made Link to Hope boxes once again (see below), and the school's carol service was held again in All Saints' Church, with over 200 children and over 200 adults present, and with the vicar giving a short reflection at the end of the service.

Other Hurworth schools

Young people from Hurworth House School visited All Saints' Church on one two occasions during the year, and were given the opportunity to look round and to ask questions of the vicar.

The vicar was pleased once again to accept an invitation to attend the Awards Evening at Hurworth School in October, and also their Christmas Concert in December, while Peter Snowden joined the Local Governing Board of Hurworth School during 2025.

Holiday clubs in Hurworth

To support our mission to grow the church in **Hurworth**, we wanted to find a way to increase the number of children we reach. After much thought and prayer, we discerned that God was prompting us to start a holiday club during the school half-term holidays starting in May 2024. This would

enable us to teach children about God and share his message with them. The children learn about God in a relaxed environment with time for games and crafts. They become familiar with the church building and churchyard and feel welcome there. Each holiday club has a theme; the children rehearse and act out a play on this theme to their families and at the end of the club. This gives us an opportunity to welcome parents and grandparents into the church.

We ran three Church holiday clubs during 2025, under the leadership of Karen Wesson. The club is for primary school age children and is held for two days during the school half-term holidays, from 10am to 4pm (with arrangements for earlier drop-off and later pick-up, if required). Children bring their own packed lunches with additional drinks and snacks provided by the church. Each time, we had five full time adults running the club, with others joining us part time. On average 20 children attend each day.

The themes for clubs in 2025 have been Jesus feeding the 5,000, Pentecost and St Peter. Children and their families are invited to attend our all-age service on the Sunday following the holiday club. This service has the same theme as the holiday club and the children act out their play to the whole congregation.

The finances of the holiday club are healthy. We ask for a minimum payment of £5 each day. This compares favourably with other holiday club provision in the local area of at least £20 a day. The payments cover the running costs of the club, with some surplus available to replace or buy new equipment.

Georgie's Coffee Stop (MSG)

Another year of Georgie's Coffee Stop has taken place during 2025, on the second Saturday of each month, 10am–12pm, in the **MSG** Community Centre. Led by Jess Walters, assisted by Helen Crosby and Ann Williams, the wonderful team of volunteers meet and greet around 50 villagers each month, and offer them bacon butties and sausage butties and an array of inviting home-baked cakes and pastries, plus the usual refreshments, still all offered at very affordable prices with top up drinks free of charge. There is also the option of a takeaway for later, if required. Before the doors open, the team always enjoy a short but encouraging time of prayer.

The coffee mornings are not profit-making events, but we are happy they make more than enough to pay for the hire of the Community Centre and other costs. Our volunteers not only give their time but also their donations to make Georgie's run smoothly with its well-stocked larder. Occasionally there is a fundraiser as part of Georgie's: in 2025 we had Pam's bottle stall and the Christmas tombola for the foodbank.

Positive comments are still received as to how much our customers enjoy the coffee mornings and what it offers the village as a whole. We believe that Georgie's being offered in this way makes people feel cared for, knowing that whether they arrive on their own or in a group, they have somewhere to come that always welcomes them with love and a friendly face and ear. May the Lord continue to bless our time together again in 2026, with us seeing perhaps more younger people. There are always games and a craft for people/children to take part in.

If you haven't sampled refreshments yet at Georgie's, please make time and join the fun. There does seem to be a lot of laughter going on!

A big thank you to our expanding team of helpers. Every one of you is extremely important in making Georgie's the place it is with your love, kindness and dedication. If you feel you would like to be a part of the fun in any way, big or small, please speak to anybody in the team.

Care homes (MSG)

It is a privilege to be able to provide spiritual support to residents in care homes, and this has taken place regularly at two homes in **MSG**.

The monthly communion service in Middleton Hall Retirement Village has continued, on Wednesdays at 3pm, led by the vicar along with Hazel Bullock and Chris Gray. There are typically around 10 residents, along with one or two members of staff and other family members and friends. The service in December was a carol service, with 29 present.

The monthly service in Middleton Manor has continued, led by the vicar with Judi Trewhitt. There have typically been around 10–15 residents present. The home specialises in dementia care, and it is a joy to see the residents respond, particularly to the hymns.

Foodbank (MSG)

MSG Foodbank started in 2020 and sadly six years later there is still a strong need for this service within the riverside parishes.

The team comprises sixteen dedicated members, who over the last year have worked tirelessly to ensure our clients are provided for. Sadly, due to illness, Jess and Barry Walters have had to take a back seat for the time being but continue to support us in prayer.

Thanks must go to Ruth Sansom, one of the founding members and leader over the last five years, who has stepped down as leader, but thankfully continues to take a very active role within the group.

As of the end of 2025, we are supplying food parcels to twelve households in MSG and Hurworth. On top of this, we also supply parcels to those who have sadly been made homeless and are living in temporary accommodation within Middleton St George; this can be up to twenty per week. On a fortnightly basis we also support usually around six family at PACTNE (Parent and Children Together North East), a supported housing charity based in Hurworth Moor.

We can only continue what we believe God has called us to do through the continuing generosity of people, businesses and organisations within our parishes, for which we are very grateful. Contributions have also been made from the PCC's General Fund. On a wider scale, it is great to be supported once again by St George's Church of England Academy; the donations from their harvest festival were truly amazing. The collections from the Village Carol Service in MSG and the Christingle Service in Hurworth were also given to the foodbank, which again shows how generous people are in their contributions.

It is impossible to mention everyone who helps us, but thanks once again must go so Saville's, who supply us with a rent-free unit at Morton Park for the storage of food, and to Catherine, Morrisons Community Champion, who works tirelessly preparing the green food bags available to buy in store that go to ourselves and the foodbank of St Andrew's, Haughton-le-Skerne.

Please continue to pray for our team, the people we support, and for a new leader who feels called to continue this important work within our communities.

Welcome Break (Hurworth)

The 'Welcome Break' day took place in **Hurworth** in the Church Centre at All Saints' Church between 10am and 4pm on Monday 16 June. It was advertised on Facebook and in the parish magazine and was open to everyone in the village.

There were six sessions throughout the day and people were invited to drop in or stay all day. Starting with coffee and a chat and finishing with tea and cake, other activities included a quiz, beetle drive, bingo and a mocktail making demonstration and tasting. A sandwich lunch was provided along with all the other refreshments.

About 20 people attended throughout the day, not all members of our regular congregation.

Bell ringing in Hurworth

All Saints' Church is blessed with a fine set of six bells, cast in 1872 by Taylor's bell foundry in Loughborough. The bells were taken away to be retuned (by Taylors), then rehung with all new fittings and frame by Pembleton Bell Hangers of Glapwell, Chesterfield in 1997. The heaviest (tenor) bell at 858kg weighs about the same as a Fiat 500 car. This is a heavy ring for a village parish church, but they produce a marvellous sound.

Led by Mike Hodgson, the ringers practise regularly on Thursday evenings, with a bell handling training session from 6.30 to 7.30pm most weeks, and the main practice from 7.30 to 9pm. Visitors are very welcome to join us on Thursdays and on Sundays, when the bells are rung from 10:25 to 11am.

We rang the bells for three weddings in 2025 and also 'rang in the New Year' as usual. Don Nichols was given the very important job of ringing the 12 blows on the biggest bell at midnight this year.

We have taught two new ringers since February 2025, but additional new ringers would be made very welcome. Bell ringing is a fascinating and mentally challenging hobby that's well within the capabilities of most people. Once gained, bell ringing is a skill for life that you'll never forget, opening a lifetime of friendships, experiences, and enjoyment.

We are also in the process of installing a bell simulator. The bells are temporarily silenced by tying the clappers then, when we ring, sensors trigger realistic bell sounds to be produced on a computer in the ringing chamber but there will be no sound outside. This will greatly enhance our training activities. We are very grateful for the generous financial support provided by Hurworth Parish Council for this project.

Many thanks also to Trevor Thompson from Shildon and Dorothy Edwards from Northallerton whose regular help on Thursdays and other occasions is very much appreciated.

Link to Hope (Hurworth)

This year we sent 99 shoe boxes plus bags of knitted hats and blankets to Cosnita in Moldova, as part of the Link to Hope Shoebox Appeal. The boxes came from the congregation and from people in the village, including the Scouts and Guides who helped carry the boxes out of church after the service on Remembrance Sunday. All Saints is an Area Collection Centre so boxes also came from outside of the Parish including Sunderland, Bishop Auckland and Barnard Castle.

Events

In **Hurworth**, summer and autumn fairs were held in Hurworth Grange on Saturday 14 June and Saturday 1 November, and were well supported by around 110 adults and 10 children. (There was no choir from Hurworth Primary School on these occasions, and the attendance was lower than last year by around 20 adults and 20 children, but the amount of money raised was still healthy.) A team from the church provided parking and stewarding support for the Hurworth Country Fair, also in Hurworth Grange, on Saturday 6 September.

The church in **MSG** had a stall at the Community Centre Summer Extravaganza on 23 August, in order to engage with the local community.

Communications

All Church of England churches have their own web page on 'A Church Near You' (ACNY), and the pages for the Riverside Parishes have been updated during the year. In addition, **MSG** and **Hurworth** have had their own websites, although the website for **Hurworth** was replaced with a redirection to ACNY in October 2024, in order to provide a simpler website that works well with mobile devices, and the same happened for the **MSG** website in March 2025. The Facebook pages for MSG and Hurworth have continued to be active, publicising services and events.

The **Hurworth** parish newsletter continues to be printed ten times per year, edited by Denis Pinnegar, and distributed to all homes in the parishes of **Hurworth**, **Girsby** and **Dinsdale**. In December, this was distributed along with a Christmas card produced by Hurworth Methodist Church.

In **MSG**, newly-designed Christmas and Easter cards publicising church services were distributed to every home in the parish. A monthly 'What's On' email is produced by the churchwardens, and sent by email to the congregation and others on the distribution list.

Deanery synod and ecumenical relationships

Darlington deanery synod met on three occasions in 2025 (see separate report, where available).

There is one other church in the Riverside Parishes: Hurworth Methodist Church (home to the Mustard Tree café). Their minister, Gavin Hume, arrived in September 2024, and was invited to preach in All Saints' Church at the service for Remembrance Sunday. Many parishioners in **MSG** and **Hurworth** attend churches in Darlington and further afield, and we sometimes see these people at our special services and events. The vicar attended a leaders' lunch for One Voice Darlington at Darlington Vineyard Church in November.

Buildings and Churchyards

Each parish has a Grade II listed building, which is a great asset for mission, but which requires energy and money to maintain. (See separate fabric reports, where available.) We are immensely grateful to all those who give their time and energy to take care of the buildings that have been entrusted to us.

Each parish also has a churchyard, which is regularly maintained and greatly valued by the relatives of those who are buried there, and as a place of peaceful reflection. The churchyards in St George's **MSG**, **Girsby** and **Dinsdale** are open, while the churchyards in St Laurence's **MSG** and **Hurworth** are closed for burials, but have a garden of remembrance for the interment of ashes. The churchyard in **Hurworth** is maintained by Darlington Borough Council.

MSG

St George's Church is greatly valued by the village, and was open to the public on 10 occasions in 2025 (4 special services, 3 baptisms and 3 funerals). In addition, a group of children from Beaumont Hill Academy in Darlington visited the church in October.

A faculty was finally obtained early in 2025 for the demolition of the Victorian vestry, which was subsequently demolished.

The Quinquennial Inspection took place during 2025, raising more concerns about the cracks in the floor and walls of St George's Church. This will be investigated further in 2026.

The PCC began considering a new possibility for a Church Centre, for which the PCC has over £180,000 in restricted funds. It is hoped that further progress might be made in 2026.

The churchyard remains open for burials, though is nearing capacity. There were no burials in 2025. Two plots had been apparently reserved for full burials in recent years, for a small fee, but without the required faculty. In 2024, the PCC adopted a policy of not supporting applications for burial reservations in the future, but in order to honour the commitments made in good faith in the past, the PCC supported faculty applications for these two reservations, which were granted. Those who had apparently reserved plots for the interment of ashes in the Garden of Remembrance at St George's or St Laurence's were informed in writing that these reservations have no legal status, but that reasonable attempts will be made to honour those reservations, as there is currently plenty of space available.

There were 3 interments of ashes in the Garden of Remembrance at St George's, and 5 interments of ashes in the Garden of Remembrance at St Laurence's.

Hurworth

All Saints' Church is used frequently, and is greatly valued by the local community.

The church is used most weeks by the Hurworth Youth Project on Fridays for activities for children and young people, and by the 'Rhapsody' community choir for rehearsals on Wednesdays during the first part of the year. 'Rhapsody' also gave concerts in All Saints' Church during the year. The local Rock Choir also gave a concert on 7 June.

There were cleaning mornings on 2 April and 7 October, with around a dozen people doing a lot of dusting, polishing and clearing out of cupboards.

There were 3 interments of ashes in the Garden of Remembrance in 2025.

Girsby

All Saints' Church was open to the public on 13 occasions in 2024 (monthly communion services, except in January, July and August, a wedding, and special services for Easter, Harvest and Christmas Eve). The building was also used for 3 PCC meetings. The annual meeting was held in the house of one of the churchwardens, and was attended by 8 people.

The 2024 Quinquennial Inspection highlighted problems with the movement of the building. This was subsequently investigated by a structural engineer, who saw no cause for immediate concern, but recommended ongoing monitoring of the cracks. As a result of this, the PCC felt confident to undertake some internal redecoration, with all walls and ceilings repainted, and new carpets fitted. This was completed in time for the wedding at the end of August.

The churchyard remains open for burials, with no burials taking place in 2025. However, the churchyard plan shows only the locations of the visible memorials, and not the location of unmarked graves. The PCC therefore commissioned a GPR survey of the churchyard, which provided evidence of several unmarked graves. The PCC intends to identify unoccupied plots in the churchyard, in order to be ready for future burials.

Dinsdale

The Church of St John the Baptist was open to the public on 25 occasions in 2024 (24 Sunday services and a wedding). In addition, the church was used for 3 PCC meetings and the annual meeting, which was attended by 7 people.

The 2023 Quinquennial Inspection identified concerns with the structural integrity of the tower. This was investigated in 2024 by a structural engineer, who recommended the reconstruction of the top part of the tower in the near future (with no concerns about its immediate safety). This will be an expensive project, far exceeding the current financial reserves. This information was shared at the Daffodil Service in March, and through leaflets distributed in the parish, and in Over Dinsdale (part of **Girsby** parish). This led to some regular and one-off donations, but a lot more would be required before work can begin. The PCC has continued to consider options.

The churchyard remains open for burials, with no burials taking place in 2025. A new headstone was installed in 2025 for a burial that had taken place in 1970, but which had not been marked at the time or recorded in the burial register or on the churchyard plan. This required a complicated faculty application, and a considerable amount of effort, from family members, and also from the vicar, and is a reminder to all of the importance of keeping careful records of burials.

Financial Review

'All the believers were together and had everything in common.' — Acts 2:44, NIV

We are grateful to God for the generosity of donors past and present. Overall, the financial situation across the Riverside Parishes is healthy, although there is disparity, with a surplus in some parishes (especially **Girsby**), and financial need in others (especially **Dinsdale**).

The diocese is responsible for covering the costs of ministry as well as a whole range of central support, including the training of lay ministers. This money is raised through the ‘parish share’ (with support from the national church for low-income communities within the diocese). Dividing the diocesan budget by the number of clergy stipends leads to a figure of well over £90,000 per clergy person. The breakdown of our parish share contributions is as follows:

	2024	2025	2026 (pledged)
• MSG:	£ 30,000	£ 31,000	£ 22,000
• Hurworth:	£ 28,000	£ 30,000	£ 31,000
• Girsby:	£ 9,000	£ 9,000	£ 10,000
• Dinsdale:	£ nil	£ 500	£ 1,000
• TOTAL:	£ 67,000	£ 70,500	£ 64,000

(The decrease in parish share in MSG was largely necessitated by the death of some members of the congregation.)

By far the bulk of the income for the parishes comes from voluntary contributions of members of the congregations. This is by far the best way for parishes to be sustained financially. We encourage everyone to make it a matter of prayer that we would have a sustainable funding to enable us to grow in the future.

The Parish Giving Scheme has been used increasingly within the parishes during 2025, in order to facilitate giving, and was launched in **Dinsdale** at the Daffodil Service in March. The response to this appeal was encouraging, but the regular income is still below the cost of insurance alone.

The financial statements appended to this report give further details for 2025. The total value of savings and investments across the parishes, in unrestricted and restricted funds, on 31 December 2024 and 31 December 2025, was (in £1000s, to the nearest £1000):

	31 December 2024			31 December 2025		
	Unrestr.	Restr.	Total	Unrestr.	Restr.	Total
• MSG:	61	179	240	59	189	248
• Hurworth:	19	11	30	14	11	25
• Girsby:	246	0	246	224	0	224
• Dinsdale:	5	0	5	8	0	8
• TOTAL:	331	190	521	305	200	506

In **MSG**, **Girsby** and **Dinsdale**, significant work is required on the buildings (especially on the tower in **Dinsdale**), and much of this will be covered by unrestricted funds.

Financial statements have not been examined in **Dinsdale** for the years 2019 to 2024. Draft statements of receipts and payments were produced for 2021, 2022 and 2023 (but with no statements of assets and liabilities). The PCC has begun work in producing these accounts, though it has proven challenging to assemble all the relevant paperwork. Signatories were changed on the bank account, and this took effect on 2 January 2025.

Structure, Governance and Management

PCC members are the trustees of the PCC as a charity. Each parish had an annual meeting (in March or April), following which there was a brief PCC meeting for the election of officers. In addition, the PCCs had a total 18 meetings: 6 (**MSG**), 6 (**Hurworth**), 3 (**Girsby**) and 3 (**Dinsdale**), with an additional brief meeting after a Sunday morning service in **Girsby** and **Dinsdale** to approve the annual reports.

Each PCC has a standing committee, which deals with PCC business between meetings. Each standing committee has consisted of the vicar and churchwardens, along with the PCC vice-chair, treasurer and secretary (with some people fulfilling multiple roles). A combined meeting of the four standing committees was held in October, in order to consider some issues of common concern across the parishes.

The 'ministry structure' of **MSG** and **Hurworth** was reviewed by the PCCs.

During 2025, a total of 32 people served as PCC members (charity trustees).

Administrative Information

The PCCs are governed by the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 as amended, and by the Church Representation Rules (contained in Schedule 3 to the Synodical Government Measure 1969 as amended).

The PCCs are 'excepted' charities (governed by charity law but not registered with the Charity Commission), with the exception of **Girsby** PCC, which registered with the Charity Commission on 26 September 2024. Accordingly, 'The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Sockburn in the Diocese of Durham' is a registered charity, number 1210219.

PCC membership from 1 January 2025 up to the date of this report is as follows:

Name	Membership	Role(s)
All PCCs		
Revd Anthony Smith	Minister	Chair
MSG		
Rodger Sansom	Churchwarden	
Jim Chalmers	Churchwarden	Vice-chair
Hazel Bullock	Deanery Synod	Secretary
Julie Mathieson	Deanery Synod	
Simon Gerner	Elected	
Dave McKittrick	Elected	
Gill McKittrick	Elected	Treasurer
Alistair Mathieson	Elected	
Judi Trehwitt	Elected	Parish Safeguarding Officer

Hurworth

Julia Clarke	Churchwarden Deanery Synod	
Karen Wesson	Churchwarden	
Paul Mallett	Licensed Reader	
Peter Snowden	Deanery Synod Licensed Reader	
Jill Bramwell	Elected	
Adam Clarke	Elected (6/4-)	
John De Martino	Elected	
Andrew Duckworth	Elected (-6/4)	
Denise Finch	Elected	Secretary Electoral Roll Officer (20/1-)
Val Hughes	Elected (-20/1)	
Jerry Norminton	Elected (-20/1)	Electoral Roll Officer (-20/1)
Denis Pinnegar	Elected	Vice-chair
Enid Thompson	Elected	
Fred Thompson	Elected	Treasurer

Girsby

Jane Alderson	Churchwarden	Parish Safeguarding Officer
Allen Harrison	Churchwarden	Vice-chair and Treasurer
Linda Tweddle	Deanery Synod	Secretary Electoral Roll Officer
William Alderson	Elected	
David Deacon	Elected	
Liz Robinson	Elected (-29/4)	

Dinsdale

Reuben Robson	Churchwarden	
Peter Snowden	Churchwarden Licensed Reader	Vice-chair Secretary Electoral Roll Officer
Astrid Christina Blake	Elected	Treasurer

In addition, the following roles have been fulfilled by people who were not PCC members:

MSG

Helen Crosby	Electoral Roll Officer
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Hurworth

Joanne Snowden	Parish Safeguarding Officer
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Dinsdale

Susan Maxey	Parish Safeguarding Officer
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Approved by the PCC of Sockburn on 8 March 2026 and signed on their behalf by the Reverend Anthony Smith (PCC chair):

The Parochial Church Council of Sockburn & Girsby Parish
Income & Expenditure Account
Year Ended 31 December 2025

	2025	2024
Bank Balance	191161.17	143017.37
Deposit Account Cof E CBF	2358.54	2239.67
Balance In Hand as at 1 January 2025	193519.71	145257.04

INCOME

Collections	295	240
Gift Aid	856.25	154.55
Tax Reclaimed on Gift Aid	0	0
Donations	0	0
Legacy	0	62500
Church Fees	778	0
Interest on C of E Deposit Fund	106.74	118.87
Transfer from Deposit	0	0
Income Excl Cof E Funds	2035.99	63013.42

EXPENDITURE

Durham Diocese - Parish Share	9000	11800
Darlington Deanery Quota	100	0
Wedding and Funeral Fees	446	0
Opus Energy - Electricity	1001.33	876.25
Ecclesiastical Insurance Group -Church Insurance	947.89	921.84
Quinquennial Inspection	0	900
Report on Building Condition	576	0
GPR Survey	2394	0
Other Upkeep	417.1	106.2
Building Repairs	6408	0
New Carpets/Furniture	2486.77	0
Hurworth PCC Clergy Expenses	94.42	125.66
Sundry Expenses	0	10
Postage	0	10.8
Bank Interest	0	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	23871.51	14750.75
Income less Expenditure	-21835.52	48262.67

Bank Balance	Current Account	169218.91	191161.17
Deposit Account Cof E CBF	Deposit Fund	2465.28	2358.54
Balance In Hand as at 31 December 2025		171684.19	193519.71

Barclays Bank	Current Account	169218.91	191161.17
Cof E CBF	Deposit Fund	2465.28	2358.54
CofE CBF	Investment Fund	52285.65	52951.43
Total Assets		223969.84	246471.14

Note: Investment Fund gain is not shown in accounts not materialised

Prepared By A Harrison	Date
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Reveiwed By M Hodgson	Date
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Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

**Report to the trustees/
members of**

THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL
PARISH OF SOCKBURN IN THE DIOCESE OF DURHAM

**On accounts for the year
ended**

31st December 2025

**Charity no
(if any)**

1210219

Set out on pages

1

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/12/2025.

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

**Independent
examiner's statement**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:

Date:

08/03/2026

Name:

Michael Hodgson

**Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):**

Address: