

APCM – Sunday 27th April 2025

Present:

Rev'd Stephen Hills (SH)

Elizabeth Hills

Rev'd David Tidswell (DT)

Margaret Tidswell

Richard and Felicity Wheeler (FW)

Felicity Miller

Hilary Clarkson (HC)

Lynda Baxendale

Grace Bone

Andy, Julia and Chris Wallis

Linda (Visiting from Blackham)

Pam (Visiting from Blackham)

Mandy King (from Hartfield)

Rachel Sawyer Jukes

Carol (Rachel's Mum)

1. Welcome and Introduction

The formal part of the meeting was held after the sermon. SH started the meeting by telling the congregation that Rev'd Julie Sear (Hartfield & Colemans Hatch and Priest in Charge at Cowden) had sent SH a message stating how blessed she feels that the 3 Churches are coming together.

2. Meeting of the Parishioners

There was one nomination for Churchwarden. HC was unanimously voted in after being proposed by Lynda Baxendale and seconded by Lynne Horner.

3. Parochial Church Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting 21st April 2024 were included in the APCM pack . Three reports were then received.

1. Associate Vicar's report (Appendix A)

2. Churchwarden's report (Appendix B)

HC's written report covered a range of areas – The Electoral Roll, Fabric, Deanery Synod and events in 2024. She thanked all for getting involved and doing their bit to keep the Church going and at the heart of the community.

HC stated that the Safeguarding Statement had been updated and agreed at the last PCC. She stressed that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and all the congregation have a duty to speak up if they see or hear something abnormal.

3. Treasurer's report (Appendix C).

FW informed the congregation that we finished 2024 with a excess of receipts over payments of £13,832. She thanked all who gave so generously and faithfully. FW took over the role half way through the year and she thanked Tim Jackson (Treasurer Hartfield Church) for his patience as he 'taught her the role' and HC for her support.

It was agreed that Margaret Wakeling would be asked to be Independent Examiner for 2025.

4. Deanery Synod

HC agreed to carry on undertaking the role of Deanery Representative.

5. PCC elections

The following nominations for the PCC were agreed unanimously.

	Proposer	Seconder
Felicity Wheeler	Andy Wallis	Hilary Clarkson
Richard Wheeler	Hilary Clarkson	Andy Wallis
Andy Wallis	Felicity Wheeler	Richard Wheeler
Felicity Miller	Hilary Clarkson	Felicity Wheeler
Dione Corbett	Hilary Clarkson	Felicity Miller

6. Questions

DT asked 2 questions:

- a. At the end of December there was a lot of money in the Current Account – could this be moved to a Deposit Account?. FW replied that this has happened.
- b. In the early 2020's to 2024, plans were made for provision of an outside toilet. Obtaining Planning Permission took many hours of hard work and expense, has the PCC discussed this? SH noted that Planning Permission has been granted for 3 years and only 1 year has passed. The PCC have discussed this and will discuss it again.

DT then informed all that Margaret and him will be moving to Malmsbury, Wiltshire in the summer. They have bought a flat and have already sold their house.

Appendix A

Associate Vicar's Report year-end 2024

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' Acts 2:42-47

I am delighted to be able to report on the life of St Mary Magdalene's Church in 2024, at this my first APCM as Associate Vicar of this parish.

Elizabeth and I joined you half-way through the year, and I was licensed here at the beginning of July. I begin by thanking all those who prepared the way for our arrival, through their prayers and hard work, both locally and with the Diocese. Particular thanks go to Hilary Clarkson and David Tidswell for their perseverance in ensuring that there would once again be an incumbent living in the Rectory, and to the PCC.

I am grateful too to Rev Julie Sear, and to the PCC's of St Mary the Virgin Hartfield and Holy Trinity Coleman's Hatch for their proactive support of Cowden Church.

The early church was characterised by the way that followers of Jesus lived together, gathering in the temple and each others' homes, studying God's word, eating together, praying for one another, supporting one another in practical and pastoral ways. It has been a joy to see all these things happening at St Mary Magdalene's and in the wider community of Cowden among God's people here.

Sunday worship in church is always followed by a time of fellowship over tea and coffee, which many folk stay for an enjoy. We moved the service time from 11.00am to 10.30am to allow more time together before we disperse.

In the autumn a dozen or so folk gathered on Tuesday afternoons to study Pete Greig's 'Prayer Course' together.

In between the times we gather for worship, study and fellowship, I know that many within our church family show God's love in prayerful and practical ways to neighbours and others within Cowden community. Through 2024 this care was also shown in the monthly 'Drop-In' at the village hall, and in 2025 this will be extended to a fortnightly Café.

It has been good to meet some young families, and we try to have something available each week for children that join us on a Sunday. Building on the Messy Church services of the past couple of years, we shall launch a monthly afternoon Forest Church on Sunday afternoons in 2025.

It has been a joy to meet and greet the wider community to special events – Remembrance Day and our Christmas services in particular, and it was encouraging to see so many on these occasions.

I look forward to continuing to meet folk from our community, through our church services, and involvement in the life of the village hall, and to forging opportunities to welcome people to this special place a the heart of our community.

My thanks to all who share in our ministry here, serving both up front and behind the scenes, and to all who support the work of Cowden Church, both financially and in many other ways.

Rev Stephen Hills – Associate Vicar April 2025

Appendix B

Report by Hilary Clarkson, Church Warden

Electoral Roll Numbers

There are 35 on the new Electoral Roll. Last year there were 39 and in 2022, 27.

Fabric, Good and Ornaments

Maintaining a Grade 1 listed building is a constant challenge and there always seems to be work to be done. In 2024, spend was primarily on maintenance of the building, including, servicing of the boiler, the fire extinguishers & the organ, filling up the heating oil tank and the annual roof / gutter inspection. The majority of the Quinquennial inspection by an architect registered with the Diocese has been completed and when the final report is completed it will provide a comprehensive report of the state of the building along with a number of recommendations.

Getting the Rectory up to standard for Stephen and Elizabeth took up a lot of May and June. It was a privilege to do this and the Church is now responsible for some utility bills and the Council Tax.

We are one of the few rural churches in the area that is open during the day and many who drop in find peace and solace in the Church. Long may that continue. We get some very positive comments in our Visitors Book about how pleased they are to find a Church open and so clean. It can only continue though if we have a band of people prepared to come and clean the church. Thank you to all who come in clean and tidy up. I know many of you do this service quietly without fuss. Thank you.

We had some amazing flower arrangements in 2024 for Easter, Stephen's Induction, Harvest and Christmas. Thank you to all who have done their bit especially Felicity, Jennifer, Georgina, Beat, Helen, Paula and Dione. We had one Churchyard tidy up in the autumn when many from the village came and joined in. Willingness & enthusiasm to get on with the job key characteristics for this job.

Deanery Synod attendance - I have attended 4 Rotherfield Deanery Synod meetings in 2024, and the annual finance meeting with Felicity Wheeler, our Treasurer.

Safeguarding Statement

Safeguarding is on the agenda at each PCC meeting. It is treated very seriously by the PCC and do remember it is not just about children. It is about a culture where we make all welcome and speak up if we see any unusual behavior.

The Bellringers and PCC members all do Safeguarding Training.

Church Warden report of events in 2024 - Highlights

- Praise God our prayers were answered and on 3rd July 2024, Rev'd Stephen Hills was licenced as our Associate Vicar. What a night, such a special service, so well supported and what a team effort it was to get the service and reception after in the village hall organised. Thank you again to all involved. How wonderful it has been to welcome Stephen and Elizabeth to the Parish and to introduce them to Cowden life. We thanked God for the commitment and dedication of Rev'd David Tidswell and Margaret during the Interregnum.

- We have started working more closely with Hartfield and Coleman's Hatch Churches and have enjoyed pulpit swaps when Rev'd Julie Sear has taken our service and Rev'd Stephen Hills has gone to Hartfield / CH.
- Messy Church continued during 2024 and we had lots of fun learning Bible stories on a Sunday morning before the main service. Messy has now evolved into Forest Church and we thank God that new children and families are coming to that.
- The PCC met 5 times during 2024 to oversee the work of the church. 2 of these meetings were chaired by Rev'd David Tidswell and 3 by Rev'd Stephen Hills. It was marvellous to welcome Andy Wallis and Felicity Wheeler onto the PCC with both getting stuck in straightaway. Felicity took on the role of Treasurer and we thank Tim Jackson from Hartfield Church for standing in for a couple of years while we found someone who worshipped at Cowden.
- Well attended services on Palm Sunday, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance & Christmas (Traditional Carols and 9 Lessons, Carols around the tree on Christmas eve with a very large gathering at the Christmas morning Service).
- At the Harvest service, we collected for Edenbridge Food Bank who were as always very grateful. A few of us went to the Hartfield Church Harvest Supper.
- To decorate the Church at Christmas, we repeated what we did last year and gave small real Christmas Trees to over 25 households in the parish and asked them to decorate them. The result was a stunningly beautiful arrangement of trees in the choir stalls which were all lit up for the Christmas services.
- Drop In, our monthly coffee morning has been rebranded as the Community Coffee Morning & folk from the Village Hall Committee assist.
- Thank to our team of Bellringers, led by Caroline. It has been lovely to hear them ring us into Church. During the year there has been a number of visiting bellringers. Thanks to Roger Hulbert who plays the organ for us on the first Sunday of each month and for weddings and funerals.
- We were responsible for the Cake Stall at the Village Fete and raised a good sum of money. We'll be running the cake stall again this year (Sat June 14th so get baking!!)

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTE TO KEEPING OUR CHURCH GOING. Whether it be making the coffee at the end of the service, sweeping up. More help is needed – there are many tasks that need doing - please consider if you have some time to help out – Updating the Electoral roll, taking PCC minutes, operating the computer for our hymns on a Sunday morning. Please do speak up if you have any feedback on the services, any likes / dislikes or ideas for improvement. Stephen and the PCC would really appreciate that.

St Mary Magdalene, Cowden

SAFEGUARDING STATEMENT

As members of this PCC we are committed to the safeguarding, care and nurture of all our members.

We recognise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

We are committed to:

- Creating and promoting a safe caring environment and culture for all.
- Implementing all safeguarding policies and practice guidance issued by the House of Bishops.
- Recruiting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility related to children, young people and vulnerable adults within the church.
- Responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation.
- Listening to and take seriously all those who disclose abuse.
- Co-operating fully with statutory agencies during any investigation.
- Caring pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons.
- Responding to those that may pose a present risk to others whilst maintaining appropriate confidentiality and the safety of all parties.

We will:

- Have a named Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) to work with the incumbent and the PCC to implement policy and procedures.
- Display in church premises the details of who to contact if there are safeguarding concerns or support needs.
- Review the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Practices at least annually.

Each person who works within this church community will agree to abide by this policy.

Our **Safeguarding Representative** is:

Hilary Clarkson - hilaryclarkson27@icloud.com 01342 851495

Our **Associate Vicar** is:

Reverend Stephen Hills hills.rectory@yahoo.co.uk 07896 971723

The following policy was agreed at the Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting held on 3rd March 2025.

Appendix C. (Accounts spreadsheet available as excel spreadsheet)

Treasurers Report - Felicity Wheeler.

Last year receipts increased by just under £10K, £35,517 in 2024 compared to £25,663 in 2023. This was mainly from an increase in planned giving through the Parish giving scheme along with kind and generous donations from individuals in the church as well as being able to reclaim the gift aid.

Payments were down by a little over £4K as there were no large expenses on the church fabric. Decorating costs to prepare the rectory were the largest expense but these were covered by a diocesan grant and a very kind donation.

We were able to keep our pledge to increase the Parish share to £6,000 as had been agreed and in the current year we will be increasing the amount further.

We finished 2024 with an excess of receipts over payments of £13,832.

Many thanks to all those who give through the Parish giving scheme, standing orders and regularly by yellow envelopes or cash collections. The introduction of the Sum up payment machine has proved successful and is a useful addition as a way to donate in our modern culture especially during our Christmas services.

My personal thanks must go to Tim Jackson who has very kindly covered the role as treasurer for St Mary's as well as being treasurer for Hartfield over the last few years and who has patiently helped me in my in the gradual handover during this year as I have taken on the duties from the summer onwards and lastly to Hilary for all her knowledge and support in the ways of the diocese and the running of the church.