

All Saints Church, Hethel: Financial report 2024

Although occurring in 2025, it is important to acknowledge the tragic and unexpected death of Alfred Barnes, who has served as this and other churches' Independent Examiner for more years than the current treasurer has been in office. Alfred has been accommodating to our schedules and quirks, kind and supportive, at the same time as being meticulous in his checking, leaving us confident of our honesty and our financial position. We already miss him, while being immensely grateful to Susie Whitehouse for stepping in at short notice and doing an excellent job of running the rule over our accounts.

This is a brief commentary on the accompanying Return of Parish Finance (RoPF), which records figures approved by the Independent Examiner in the form required by the Church of England. This report is a narrative on important aspects of the RoPF. The numbers referenced below are row labels, which are in the left-hand or centre margins. For most of these there are unrestricted (U) and restricted (R) columns. Receipts/income are in the green section; payment/expenditure items are in the blue section. If your eyes glaze at the detail, please move on to the boxed paras overleaf!

- This was a 'normal' church year, with monthly services of Holy Communion and occasional extra services and events. "Beating the Bounds", Harvest Thanksgiving, and 'Remembering Loved Ones' took place as did the benefice Advent Service of Light and the Christmas Day service for Hethel and Bracon Ash. One funeral was held here (offering to the family's chosen charity) a June wedding (offering to the church) and an interment of ashes. Cream teas proved popular in the summer as did 'tea and toasted teacakes' on some winter Sunday afternoons: building community, blessing the neighbourhood and raising money..
- At £2675, **Planned giving** is 14% down on 2023 (box 1U). The number of planned givers (6, apricot box 14 near the bottom of the sheet) is one fewer at the end of the year than at the beginning. With Gift Aid recovery, this amounts to about half of the church's income. The church remains grateful to those who faithfully give regularly and those who put money in the wallbox or collection plate.
- **Collections** (box 3U) at £1248, although 4% less than in 2023 is bound to fluctuate a little from year to year according to which benefice services are at Hethel and whether there are weddings or funerals.
- **Other giving** (box 4U: £373) was wall safe donations, £53 down on 2023. Nevertheless, these gifts more than cover the cost of providing free tea and coffee for visitors.
- **Gift Aid** is claimed every two to three years, saving work and giving a handy reserve 'kitty' that can be called on should additional need arise. Hence a good sum in 6U and 6R cf 2023 which was zero.
- **Grants** (boxes 8U and 8R) totalling £3800 were received in 2024: parish council grant for churchyard maintenance; grants made for the ledger slab refurbishment and assessment of the mausoleum plaques together with the first forward-looking grants for the tower and bell project.
- **Fundraising activities** (9U minus 17U) yielded £1268 net. Aside from the much larger grants for tower work, this is funds raised at our hospitality events. The church is, of course, grateful to those who served teas, coffees, scones and teacakes over the year, and to Mulbarton Community Choir for its afternoon tea concert.

- At £1392, **wedding and funeral fees** (11U) were 9% up on 2023. Hethel Church remains a valued place for these important rites.
- Turning to **Expenditure**, the church **gave £678 away** (18U), to *Care for the Family* for its bereavement work and to *Embrace the Middle East* working in Israel-Palestine towards relief and peace. In total this is about 6% of the church's income (box B). We seek to follow the biblical principle of giving away 10% of our income ("tithing") and have fallen short this year, although the different categories of income make what should be included for tithing calculation a complicated discussion.
- We are pleased to have paid our **Parish Share** in full in 2024 (£4570 in box 19U). This contributes to the Rector's stipend, house and diocesan support. It is also often a question from trusts when we are applying for project funding.
- **Running expenses** (23U+R) at £2412 is roughly the same as in previous years. It costs about £200 per month to keep the building and churchyard kempt and safe.
- **Utility costs** (24U) were £5 down on 2023, reasonable in today's circumstances, winter events, of course, adding to the bill but being recovered through charges.
- **Major repairs** (27U) did not feature in 2024 as architect's work for the tower and bell project took place and were paid for in 2023.
- Box 99 (**Other payments**) includes some onward fees associated with funerals and weddings, plus small items of expenditure that don't fit readily under any other heading.

The big picture is that Unrestricted income (box AU) at £11698 exceeds matching expenditure (£8612; box CU) by £3086. So far so good. But this excess includes £2367 Gift Aid recovered for two years, grants of £1944 and fundraising of nearly £1500. We are grateful that again our generous God has provided, not least through his people and their generosity. As for several past years, "resilient" is not a word that one could use of our finances. Perhaps that's the nature of faith: we don't need to exercise it when we are managing nicely in our own strength.

The loss of one regular donor will affect income in future as well as for some of the past, which illustrates what could happen if anyone else dies or moves away.

On the other hand, seeking grant aid for the tower and bell project has gone well to the end of 2024 and we are confident that the total needed will be raised. This is hard work and has probably been helped by having an attractive focus in restoring the 16th century bell. More mundane maintenance may struggle to get the same assistance.

As I wrote last year, in the face of stiff headwinds, the church remains solvent, so we thank God for these results and for his faithfulness over the years whilst recognising that we ourselves must play our part with vigour and enthusiasm.

Peter Nicholls, Treasurer, 28.04.2025