

St John the Baptist, Cottered & Holy Trinity, Throcking

Annual Report 2025

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Kathy Cassels

During 2025 six PCC meetings were held in January, March, June, July, September, and November.

Revd Mark Bailey was Instituted by Bishop Jane, and Inducted and Installed by Archdeacon Janet as Rector of the Benefice of Ardeley, Benington, Cottered with Throcking and Walkern at St Mary the Virgin, Walkern on Monday, 16 th June.

Heather Ferguson retired as Benefice Administrator in July and was succeeded by Kim Horton.

CHURCHWARDEN'S REPORT 2025

Kathy Cassels

During 2025 services at both Churches were held according to the usual rota. It is disappointing that the number of congregants attending services continues to be low.

We are still without a Church Organist for regular Sunday services. The Hymnal, purchased in 2022, continues to be successful although it cannot replace a live organist. We have appointed a new Organ Tuner in Andrew Stevens. He described Cottered's organ as "delightful and historic", but said that Throcking's was in a "very, very poor state".

Maintenance work at Cottered included the installation of surge protection to the lightning conductor and the refurbishment of the Churchyard paths. At Throcking, Raymond Swain has installed a lock on the vestry door which means that the church can be open to visitors at weekends.

Lesley Greensmith organised another successful Harvest Supper in September and, with Liz Pitman, arranged the fortnightly coffee mornings during the warmer months.

Removal of the ivy from Cottered churchyard wall revealed that the section near the southwest gate is in very poor condition. At Throcking in September, it was noted that part of the organ loft ceiling had collapsed. Matthew Stevens, the Church Architect, has drawn up a schedule of works for both projects and it is planned that repairs will be undertaken in 2026.

There are a number of people to thank for their efforts to keep both Churches in good order. Raymond Swain who mows Cottered churchyard regularly during the summer months, John Harwood-Bee and the Cottered Appreciation Society who hold "tidy ups" in the churchyard twice each year. Melanie Shaw and Ingrid Snell put beautiful flower arrangements in Cottered Church throughout the year and organise others for major events. Shirley and Barry Fowler keep Throcking Church clean (despite the bats) and prepare the church for services. The volunteers who joined the Cottered Church cleaning rota: Nigel and Sylvia Bentley, Paul and Ingrid Weekes, Lesley Greensmith, Sue Tyler, Anita Adams, and Christine Robinson. I hope that I have not forgotten anyone, but if I have, then please know you also are appreciated.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Kathy Cassels

COTTERED

Freewill (i.e. regular) giving via Standing Orders and donations received via the collection plate or the card reader were reduced in total by 33%.

Fundraising activities included the Harvest Supper, Village Day, and the provision of refreshments at The Old Rectory, where the gardens were opened under the National Open Gardens Scheme.

The level of interest received decreased, and dividends received increased slightly. The value of the PCC's investments decreased by £1,242.

The Church running expenses were slightly lower than in 2024. However, we were only able to pay £2,700 towards the Parish Share request of £11,760 which means that Cottered now has a Parish Share debt of £9,000.

THROCKING

Throcking's finances continue to be a source of concern. Income was reduced and the value of the investments decreased, but as outgoings also decreased, at the end of the year total assets had increased by £571.85.

No Parish Share was requested and £1,678 of aged debt was written off. It is hoped that the remaining debt of £2,424 will be written off 10 2026.

SAFEGUARDING

Revd Mark Bailey

The Parish is committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and to supporting those who have been victims of abuse, as well as those who may present a risk to others. The PCC has complied with the duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to the House of Bishop's guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). The PCC continues to follow all the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance, as well as "Promoting a Safer Church" (child protection and vulnerable adults policy) and the Domestic Abuse statement. An item on Safeguarding is on every PCC agenda. Those who work with vulnerable groups in the Parish are recruited in accordance with the Practice Guidance Safer Recruitment July 2021. DBS checks are renewed every 3 years. Members of the PCC are requested to take the appropriate safeguarding training, to be renewed every three years. There is adequate insurance cover for all activities involving children or adults undertaken in the name of the Parish. There have been no issues of safeguarding concern reported during 2025.

BUNTINGFORD DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

Jackie Hayward Wendy Waygood

There were 4 meeting this year:

Meeting: 10 February 2026 St Peter's Church, Buntingford Chair: Revd James Sawyer (Rural Dean)
Advent and Christmas Feedback: Attendance varied across churches, but many reported seeing new or occasional visitors. Some noted declining midnight service attendance. Having midnight at 21.00 which is midnight in Bethlehem. Ideas shared included combining services for larger gatherings and

creative events such as pub carols, quiet Christmas services, and community activities. **Deanery Choral Evensong:** held on 22 February **General Synod Report:** Emma Robarts spoke at General Synod about the importance of Lowest Income Communities funding and asked questions about church strategy and finance.

Flourishing Churches Events 2026: Upcoming events include: Hope for Rural Churches Conference (6 June) Online rural churches prayer meeting (18 March) Leading Your Church into Growth conference (16–18 October)

Next Triennium (2026–2029) Deanery Synod elections are due. Total representatives reduced to 36 due to electoral roll changes. Parishes encouraged to fill vacancies. New treasurer and secretary are also needed.

Any Other Business

- Concern raised about Church of England plans for slavery reparations (Project Spire).
- Support requested for village schools facing possible closure.

Meeting: 4 December 2025 Baldock Church Hall Chair: Revd James Sawyer (Rural Dean)

Corporate Spiritual Discernment: The Revd Mark Rodel (Diocesan Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry) led a listening session to gather views for the Diocese ahead of the appointment of a new bishop. Through Bible study and group discussions, participants reflected on ministry and how it can grow. Key themes included encouragement, recognising everyone's role, building relationships, and creating opportunities for service. Feedback from the process was requested.

Diocesan Synod Report: Topics included Bishop Jane's address on kindness, the approved 2026 Diocesan budget, mission funding bids, updates on Living in Love and Faith, church schools, and ministry strategy.

Financial Matters: Parish share across the Diocese will decrease by 3.5%, though this Deanery's reduction is 2.1%. Remaining BRAVE Trust funds were returned and will support youth work. Some parish share write-offs were approved; a pastoral support grant decision for Cottered was pending.

Elections: Emma Robarts was congratulated on her election to General Synod. Deanery Synod elections will take place in 2026.

Meeting: 10 September 2025 Hormead Church Chair: Mark Eaton (Lay Co-Chair)

Christian Aid Presentation: Phil Evans, Christian Aid's Home Counties Church Engagement and Fundraising Officer, was welcomed for this item. His power-point presentation included details of recent appeals (e.g. Gaza, Sudan, Afghanistan), a brief history of the charity and how it had evolved over the eighty years since it was founded after the Second World War, its campaigns such as climate and debt advocacy and such resources as Lent courses, harvest festival orders of service and various resources for school including 'global neighbours'. He explained that as well as appeals in situations of natural disasters and human conflict and at different times of the year, Christian Aid also maintained an emergency fund for sudden individual crises. Whilst it did not wish to hide its identity and its logo could be seen wherever it was safe to do so, it was not a proselytising agency and it generally worked through local partner organisations, particularly in countries where Christianity was not welcomed. As well as direct practical help, Christian Aid also gave money to its partners for other local projects. His presentation included various examples of how individual people had been helped as well as many other facts and figures. With his own enthusiasm and commitment to the work of Christian Aid being obvious, he also repeatedly acknowledged and thanked people and churches for their support.

General Synod Report: Canon Tim Bull's reflections on the July sessions in York were shared. Topics included finance, a proposed creation festival, support for survivors of clergy abuse, and changes to ordination processes.

BRAVE Trust: Following the resignation of the schools worker, the Trust was being wound up, though clergy would continue engagement with local schools.

Meeting: 21 May 2025 Cottered Church Chair: Revd James Sawyer (Rural Dean) Vision for the future of our Deanery: By way of introduction, James Sawyer explained that the clergy had been working together for some time on developing a vision for the Deanery with a project to assist in the implementation of that vision. Session led by Reverend Kate Lomax, Diocesan Flourishing Churches Team Leader and Church Growth Officer for Hertfordshire. Kate began with reading the account of the feeding of the five thousand from John's Gospel, as an introduction to thinking about the future and how we might collaborate together. With everyone sitting together in benefice/parish groups, people were asked to think about the disciples' initial response, what we might learn from the boy and what the miracle revealed about Jesus' power and compassion. Each benefice identified their strengths and resources on one side of a piece of paper and their areas of need on the other. Finally the meeting came together to think about as a Deanery what opportunities God might be opening up for us to collaborate and share our resources, trusting in Him to multiply our impact. Ideas mentioned included youth work, better communication, shared worship and pilgrimage. Kate finished by saying that she could see that God was already at work amongst us and the challenge now was to start to work on making some of the ideas identified happen.

Updates

- Bishop Alan retired at the end of May.
- Annual church inspections information to be published