

St Margaret's Church Topsham

ANNUAL REPORT of Church Activities 2025



Annual Report on the proceedings of the Parochial Church Council and the activities of the parish generally, for the year ending 31 December 2025

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Margaret's Topsham
Charity Number 1128301

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

Vicar's Letter	3
Churchwarden	5
Parochial Church Council	6
Financial Review	8
Electoral Roll Officer	8
Safeguarding	9
Church Bookings	10
Development Projects	10, 11

CHURCH LIFE

8am Holy Communion	12
10am Holy Communion	12
6.30 Choral Evensong	12
Midweek Morning Prayer	12
Occasional Offices.....	12
Children's provision	13
Sheltered housing and care home communions ..	13
Anna Chaplaincy	14
Julian Meetings ..	14
Prayer Breakfast	15
Eco Church	15

CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Vergers and Welcomers	16
Sacristans.....	16
Church cleaning	17
Flower arranging	17
Hospitality.....	17
Fundraising	18

MUSIC

Choir	19
Community carols.....	19
Lunchtime Concerts	19
St Margaret's as a Concert Venue	19
Bell ringing	20

CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS

A Church Near You.....	21
Find a Church	21
Weekly Parish Newsletter	21
Monthly Parish Newsletter.....	21

PARTNERSHIPS

Churches Together in Topsham	22
Deanery synod.....	22
Support for Mission	23
Estuary Magazine	23
Community Volunteering	24
Topsham Museum	24
Love Topsham.....	24
Little Ducklings.....	25
Charter Day	25
Patronal Flower Festival	26

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

Vicar's Letter

St Margaret's continues to build upon a strong ethos of outreach into the local community, seeing mission as serving the most vulnerable in the midst. This has been most especially demonstrated through excellent pastoral care from the Anna Chaplaincy, ably led by Elizabeth Reed. Elizabeth has established weekly social gatherings for the elderly, and the whole team reaches out with monthly communions in residential settings, as well as 1:1 visits. This ministry has been supported by monthly group meetings that provide accountability and support, as well as a rigorous logging system so that we can keep track of who is being visited; and ongoing training and development opportunities. This outreach of care, practical and with compassion, ripples out into all aspects of church life.

2025 saw an Alpha course for the benefice, headed by St Luke's churchwarden Jackie Crozier, and a small team including Malcolm Crozier, Revd Peter and Caryll Ingerslev and Revd Louise Grace. It was a fulfilling time for all as the newer church participants (including a cross over from the forest church congregation) inspired and challenged the more seasoned leaders as we explored together the foundations of our faith.

Families work continued to flourish with leadership provided by our new family worker Jan Renwick, who brought a deepened level and consistency to pastoral engagement. Sadly, in the autumn Jan left us, as we were unable to meet her need for enough hours' work; but her legacy continues as we build on the contribution she made. However, we have had to pause on midweek provision whilst the lengthy process of recruiting a new family worker takes place.

The family communion, though, continued to grow in strength and numbers, under the direct leadership of Revd Louise Grace and Sue Hill (music). This vibrant, inclusive service is achieving Louise's vision of a Eucharist All Age community; hopefully embedding the theology that Eucharist is for all, and enabling those who would not normally identify as communicant members to have confidence and know that they belong as much as any other attendees.

Our services overall in church are well attended, maintaining a steady state through newcomers despite the inevitable losses as some of our congregation become unable to attend and also pass away.

The wide variety of music that is offered in services - Sue with the band at family services, Tony Yates with the well-established and accomplished formal choir - ensures that a standard of high-quality musical worship is offered. The broad and often eclectic range of concerts that are hosted at St Margaret's are also a great strength; huge thanks go to Tony for his tireless work in establishing the Wednesday lunchtime concerts as such a feature.

The hosting of the arts will hopefully be enhanced in the future after the development of the facilities and standard of the community part of the church is completed. This work owes a huge debt of gratitude to Paul Jakeman, PCC secretary, Ian Rogers, PCC treasurer and Geoff Bateman, Assistant Warden. Teamed with Revd

Louise, Philip Rumbelow, project manager, Matt Rayner, architect, and Clemmie Fisher, fundraising consultant, the project finally was ready to launch into the actual build by the end of 2025.

The development project has underlined how nothing can be achieved without teamwork, support and accountability. We are grateful to a very effective team of volunteers at St Margaret's. It is these acts of service that keep everything running smoothly. These jobs include sacristan duties, verging, reading, leading intercessions, arranging flowers, cleaning, and providing drinks after the service.

Other notable acts of service for the benefit of the church are Jose Northay and Diana Trout's faithful and excellent editing of the Estuary magazine, and Valerie Holland's organisation of the annual flower festival. All of these events, concerts and activities contribute to a sense of community and fundraise vital contributions to the budget.

In addition to all of these positives, the church community, and vicar, have faced significant challenges in 2025. The PCC co-commissioned an independent professional safeguarding audit in April 2025. This was engaged with and had good participation and input from congregation and PCC of St Margaret's. The auditors reflected that our benefice, over both churches, showed a strong, inclusive and warm welcome. However, they also saw that there were significant needs to improve participation in safeguarding practice, particularly around reporting concerns; health and safety, and safer recruitment, as well as the worrying conclusion that there is a minority but dominant strain of behaviour that was leading people to feel unsteady and unsafe in certain contexts. This included PCC meetings, where people reported being unable to sleep before and after, and in informal social gatherings and through social networks. This aspect of the life of our churches erupted at several points during the year, causing great stress within the leadership team, and also the sadness of departures of people from the PCC, the associate priest Maggie Stirling Troy and of churchwarden Jackie Crozier.

Revd Louise and Katie, the safeguarding officer, have been leading the PCCs in addressing the concerns raised in the safeguarding audit through an action plan document (RAG document) which have involved regular sessions at PCC to look at aspects of safeguarding, including safer working culture.

It is possible to hold these experiences of stress and challenge alongside the great positives of our church life together. In fact, being able to articulate and address concern and conflict will only add to the continued strength of the community. St Margaret's has continued to offer a spiritual home where people are welcomed and cared for, and faith is nurtured. The whole congregation gives very active support to our church activities either through attending services, encouragement, prayer support or joining in with events and helping out in different ways. Together we work as a well-coordinated team. There have been exciting and creative initiatives to help us to engage with our local community.

Thank you so much to everyone.

Revd Louise Grace

Vicar

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION (Cont.)

Churchwarden's Report

For most of 2025 there was no churchwarden in post following Gill Yates's resignation, though she kindly continued with some of the work and Paul Jakeman also assisted.

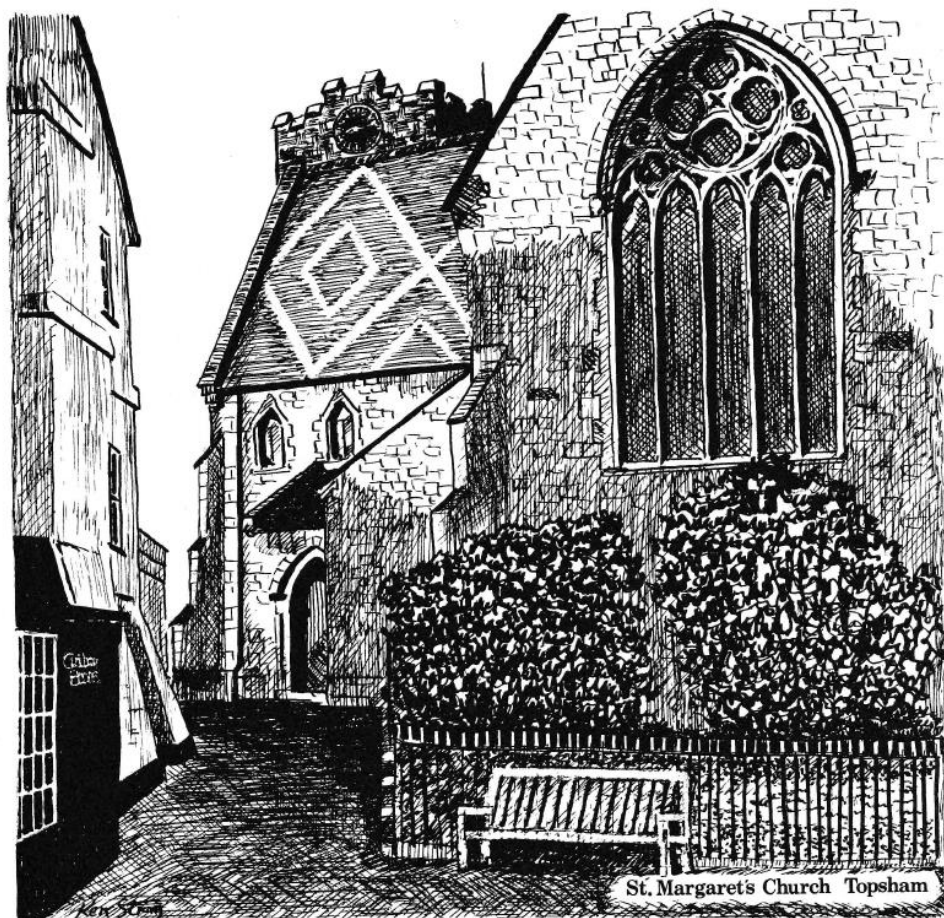
On 3.11.2025, an extraordinary Meeting of Parishioners was held, as Louise had invited Helen Swaffield to apply for the role, and she was duly elected as churchwarden. Helen is fairly new to the church and to the role but is enthusiastic and motivated and has been welcomed into the church community.

There have been no changes to the inventory during the year, and the logbook has been kept up to date with repairs and maintenance activities.

A new maintenance plan was agreed by the PCC, and the roof has been thoroughly assessed and urgent repairs undertaken. This included some additional guttering which has successfully stopped the ingress of water into the southwest corner of the church. The rope-access roofing team will be returning next year to replace the wooden ventilators on the roof as they are currently seriously at risk of rot, though we will need to raise funds to cover the expense of this work.

Helen Swaffield

Paul Jakeman



Line drawing by the late Ken Strong, with permission

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION (Cont.)

Parochial Church Council

Aims and Purposes

St Margaret's PCC has the responsibility for promoting, in the ecclesiastical parish of Topsham, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the Church of St Margaret and the Church Rooms.

Administrative Information

St Margaret's Church is located in Fore Street, Topsham. It is part of the Diocese of Exeter within the Church of England. It is a Grade 2* listed building.

The correspondence address is:

St Margarets Church, Fore Street, Topsham, EXETER, Devon EX3 0HL.

The administrative e-mail address is pccsecretarytopsham@gmail.com

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a charity and is registered with the Charity Commission, charity number 1128301.

A new Electoral Roll was prepared in 2025, as part of the regular six yearly cycle. 106 members joined the new Roll which was published at the annual meeting. During the rest of the year, there were two deletions, and two additions.

Membership

Members of the PCC are either *ex officio**, elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, or co-opted, for example if they have not been on the Electoral Roll for the qualifying period.

The following served as members of the PCC during 2025:

Incumbent*:	Revd Louise Grace, Chair
Associate Minister*:	Revd Maggie Stirling Troy (Resigned 21.5.25)
Churchwarden*:	Mrs Helen Swaffield (Elected 3.11.2025 at extraordinary meeting of parishioners)
Lay Representative on the Deanery Synod*	Mrs Gill Yates (Elected 21.5.2025)
Other Lay PCC members:	Dr Jane March-McDonald
	Mr Ian Rogers, Treasurer (Re-elected 21.5.25)
	Dr Paul Jakeman, Secretary
	Mr Andrew Griffiths
	Mrs Elizabeth Reed (Resigned 21.5.25)
	Dr Min Wild (Co-opted 20.12.24, elected 21.5.25)
	Mrs Katie Gray (Co-opted 26.2.25, elected 20.5.25)
	Mrs Elizabeth Hodges (Co-opted 26.2.25, elected 21.5.25)

All members of the PCC are trustees of the charity.

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION (Cont.)

Structure, Governance and Management

The method of appointment of the PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules 2020. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. The Parish, by virtue of the size of the electoral roll, may elect 10 lay members of the PCC, and 2 lay members of the Deanery Synod.

The Treasurer is in regular contact with the leadership team. He brings a report to each meeting of the PCC so that there is a clear understanding of the church's financial situation. He is supported by a Chartered Accountant who prepares the quarterly and annual accounts.

Objectives and Activities

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our church and to become part of our parish community at St Margaret's. The PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and makes suggestions on how our services can involve the many groups that live within our parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, the 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. We try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the Gospel; and developing faith in Jesus.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Mission and outreach.
- Work with children and families

A part of this work we maintain and enhance the fabric of the Church of St Margaret's and during 2025 a faculty was granted for the installation of toilets, a new server, and additional storage in the church in support of our mission objectives. The Church Rooms are now let to the Little Ducklings nursery, but the PCC retains responsibility for structural maintenance.

PCC Meetings

The PCC met formally 5 times in 2025. The average attendance was 6.

The usual practice is to meet jointly with St Luke's PCC to discuss matters of Mission Community concern, and then to separate for meetings of the individual PCCs.

The Dream Big project necessitated some additional meetings between our architect and project manager and representative members of the PCC.

Examples of topics addressed by the PCC include financial matters, especially around fundraising for the Dream Big project, issues of safeguarding, and the maintenance of the church. Minutes of meetings are available on request as soon as they have been approved by the PCC and are published on our *A Church Near You* webpage.

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) was held in church on 21 May 2025, with 27 people signed in. The minutes were circulated shortly after the meeting.

Paul Jakeman
PCC Secretary

Financial Review

Total cash received for the year amounted to £198,766 (2023: £188,255) with total payments of £159,956 (2023: £170,009) giving a net income for the year of £38,810 (2023: £18,246). The payments during 2024 reflect full payment of the 2024 common fund contributions to the Diocese of £58,028.

The PCC, as trustees, have elected to continue to prepare the 2024 accounts on a receipts and payments basis. This has been done in order to simplify the accounts and aid understanding of the Church finances. In previous years, a full accrual accounting basis was used. The full statement of accounts and the Independent Examiner's report are available on request.

Reserves Policy

It is the policy of the PCC that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to six months of the general fund expenditure. This equated to approximately £64,104.50 (2023: £69,875). The members consider that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the PCC's current half-yearly activities. Consideration would then be given to ways in which additional funds may be raised.

At the year-end, whilst the charity held general unrestricted funds of £59,803, a further £81,936 of general reserves and £9,145 endowment are held within the investment portfolio. The PCC are constantly reviewing their reserves position and their cash and investment policies.

Ian Rogers
Treasurer

Electoral Roll Officer

The Electoral Roll is the nearest thing the Church of England has to a membership list. A completely new Electoral Roll is required every six years to keep the records up to date. Advertising in the church and more widely led to some new people applying for membership; but a small number of previous members did not reapply. There is no closing date for applications so new members are always welcome. To vote at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, applications have to be submitted two weeks before the meeting.

At the time of the APCM, there were 106 members, and this remained the same until the end of the year, with two deaths and two new members.

With this number on the electoral roll, the PCC can have up to ten elected lay representatives. Only members of the Electoral Roll can vote for members of the PCC and Diocesan Synod, and those proposed for PCC and Synod membership must have been on the electoral Roll for six months before the election.

Safeguarding

Since the Spring of 2025 my role as Parish Safeguarding Representative has followed the Action Plan that was put together following the Safeguarding Audit that took place in March 2025.

A key area of the audit was to consider the Safeguarding Culture within our Benefice. Therefore, within each PCC meeting's 'Safeguarding Standing Item' I have led brief training sessions. We have used a tool called a 'culture cube' to encourage the PCC members to be reflective on various aspects of church culture. We have also reflected on the reasons behind DBS checks and the different levels of DBS checks. Time has also been spent looking at definitions, as well as possible indicators, of Spiritual Abuse cases – psychological abuse with a religious rationale.

A number of policies have also been thoroughly reviewed during the last year. There is a new Safeguarding Policy and Lone Working policy. These are available to view on 'A Church Near You' and I urge everyone to read the Safeguarding Policy in particular. There is now a dedicated Safeguarding Page on our 'A Church Near You' webpages.

We have held two 'safeguarding' drop in weekends over the year to enable those interested in volunteering with the church to get support with application forms and DBS checks. These weekends have also been used to complete other elements of the Safer Recruitment process, in particular for our Anna Chaplain team. We were able to carry out interviews for those wishing to be Anna Chaplains, Anna Friends and Anna Volunteers within our Benefice.

Another important element of the Safeguarding Audit was the section about Health and Safety and so within the year I have liaised with the PCC and Dream Big team to look at how we ensure the safety of all our church visitors, particularly children and vulnerable adults.

It has been lovely to have been able to encourage a variety of church volunteers to complete the various Safeguarding Training Packages that are available online. I have also found some of the training that I have taken part in over the last year very thought provoking, particularly an element of the Church of England Leadership Training reflecting on 'The Social GRRRAACCEESSS' which is a mnemonic framework. developed by John Burnham and colleagues. It's a useful tool for relationship building as they provide a framework for understanding value bases and sense checking cultural competence and awareness. It stands for Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Employment, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, and Spirituality.

Towards the end of this year the Leadership Team have been considering our action plan going forward and as part of this we are pleased that we will soon be offering the course 'Pastoral Principles for Living Together Well' and hope that this will be of interest to a range of people within The Benefice.

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION (Cont.)

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has engaged with the development of safeguarding processes within our Parishes. From completing application forms for the range of volunteer roles, to engaging with training and DBS checks. It is so helpful when these are completed efficiently and it goes a long way to ensure the safety of the more vulnerable members of our Church Family.

Katie Gray
Safeguarding Advisor

Church Bookings

In 2025 St Margaret's Church was booked for many different services and events. The most important uses have been for the weekly Sunday services, and prayer meetings. The church has also been used for numerous baptisms, weddings and funerals for which the beauty of the church has been much appreciated.

The church has been open during the day to fulfil a variety of needs. The Social Area will be unavailable during the Dream Big building work. The work of the Anna Chaplaincy will continue with the weekly 'Coffee and Cake' session transferred to the North Transept every Wednesday afternoon.

The choir and the bell ringers have regular practices in the church. Other regular bookings have included weekly rehearsals by a local community choir and monthly meetings of students with a local piano teacher. There have been concerts that are part of Topsham Music Festival as well as our own lunchtime concert series and other events such as an art exhibition and the major Christmas Market held in the church by Love Topsham.

Dr Caryll Ingerslev
Bookings Administrator

Development Project: G2GG Ecofriendly heating

The Church of England's Give to Go Green scheme was introduced to encourage parishes to look carefully at their energy usage, and it subsidises, by matched funding, energy efficient installations.



Exeter Diocese was invited to be a pilot for the scheme, and we were successful in a bid to put infrared heaters into the north transept. This will allow that area to be heated without needing to use the gas boilers which heat the whole building (and especially, because heat rises, the roof.) Infrared heats things rather than air, so works quickly and efficiently in a smaller area.

Fundraising was achieved by a range of means, including direct donations, lectures, retiring collections from lunchtime concerts, and an innovative scheme for recycling cables of all sorts. After obtaining designs and permissions, a contractor was selected at the end of 2025 with a view to completing the work early in 2026.

Paul Jakeman



Development Project: Toilets and Servery (etc)

Progress with the Project

Last year, we were hoping to complete the first stage of the Dream Big project by 2025, including new toilets, a new servery, an area for flower arrangers, improved storage, and new flooring in the social area. We took time to agree the design details among ourselves, and our fund-raising consultants, Chell Perkins, advised that we needed to have the faculty (church planning permission) before making the grant applications that we needed to reach our financial target.

By last summer, we were able to apply for the faculty, although it took eight months to navigate through committee meetings, consultation periods, and legal requirements. The Diocese was supportive and a site visit by the Archdeacon and his architectural advisor – initially perceived as causing additional delay – brought some new ideas that were incorporated into the final design. These included the closure of the northwest door, which allows for more space for the disabled toilet, and a practical storage solution in the south transept.

In February 2025, the faculty was finally issued. We are grateful to our architect, Matt Rayner of Hmad Architects, who managed the faculty application on our behalf, and Philip Rumbelow of Hills, our project manager, who has diligently kept us on track through meetings, emails, and site visits. We are very grateful that these professionals were involved early on, to guide us through the complexities of the project.

More Recently

In March 2025, the project team instructed Matt to embark on the final design details for the refurbishment. A budget review showed that we had raised almost £60,000 in donations (with some Gift Aid still awaited), with a further £70,000 from reserves, rental income and bank interest. Before contracts could be awarded, we needed to ensure sufficient funds were available for the actual building work. Grant applications to major trusts and funds were sent off as soon as the faculty had been issued, and we were encouraged that in a three-week period, we received £46,000 in grants, out of the budget target of £75,000. However, other grants may take longer.

We aim for funds to be secured by the end of November. This will allow work to begin early in the New Year and it should be completed by Easter 2026. Costs have escalated – we will lose 40% of the VAT refund we had anticipated due to the Government cap on this scheme, and construction inflation has been running at 10%. The summer of 2025 was focussed on reaching the £15,000 target for local fundraising. Our appreciation to all who have already contributed to the project from the congregation, from the local community and from national grant giving bodies.

Geoff Bateman
Paul Jakeman

CHURCH LIFE

8am Holy Communion (BCP)

Our service of Holy Communion according to the rite of the Book of Common Prayer is held on the third Sunday of the month with additional 8am services on Christmas Day and Easter Day. There is a loyal congregation of about 12 but we also attract visitors from further afield. Many thanks to Daphne Burdick, our sacristan, for ensuring all runs to order and newcomers are welcomed.

10am Holy Communion

The first three Sundays of the month are sung Eucharists, the third Sunday being a joint Mission Community service that alternates between our two churches. Very few parish churches are still able to offer the range and depth of choral music provided by the St Margaret's Choir and this is a significant element of our worship. Although these services are traditional in flavour, they attract a varied regular congregation of around 60 people with many more for the greater festivals. The fourth Sunday Family Communion is more informal, with lively music provided by a small all-age band led by Sue Hill. Families with younger children tend to prioritise this service. Thanks to a dedicated team, refreshments are provided after all the services, and many people stay on to share fellowship and build friendships.

6.30 Choral Evensong

These services continue to be a much-treasured jewel in the range of worship offerings. The standard of singing and other music is incredibly high, and St Margaret's is privileged to host this service of such high quality, the like of which is usually found in Abbeys and Cathedrals. Huge thanks again to Tony and the choir for being dedicated to this service. It is appreciated not only by those who enjoy the choral aspect, but also those who need a quieter space to be and be carried.

Midweek Services

Morning Prayer is said at St Margaret's every Friday morning from 9.00 to 9.30am. This is part of the church's centuries long tradition of celebrating the Daily Office, incorporating praise, intercession and reflection on scripture. Nowadays it's all provided for us by the Church of England daily prayer app. All are welcome - don't worry if you haven't got a smartphone- someone will share with you! Zoom worship is offered on Monday evenings at 7pm (Compline) and Wednesday mornings at 10am providing fellowship and support for those unable to get to church in person.

Occasional offices

As the parish church for Topsham St Margaret's continues to be an important venue for the community to mark key life events. Six baptisms, five weddings, 13 funerals and the burial of ashes have taken place throughout the year.

CHURCH LIFE (Cont.)

Children's provision : All age services and Mini-messy church

The offerings across the mission community continue to strengthen and grow in numbers.

Mini Messy Church is firmly established, and now occurring twice a week welcoming preschool children from birth upwards. Adult carers include grandparents, minders, and parents, and create strong, supportive bonds. Each session has a firmly embedded spiritual message that aligns with current trends and research regarding human development and societal issues. We thereby can support families from both a Christian and societal perspective in a more relevant and accessible way.

On one Sunday a month, a **Family-friendly Communion** demonstrates that eucharistic worship can be accessible for all ages, and is well attended.

Jan Renwick was appointed as Family Worker in the Mission Community at the end of 2024, and has developed the provision considerably. Unfortunately, she left in the autumn, and Mini Messy church will be suspended during the building work. Recruitment of a new family worker is already underway.

Sheltered housing and care home communions

St Margaret's clergy continue to lead monthly communion services at Watermeadow Grange (2nd Friday) Armada Court (3rd Friday) and Pym Court (final Friday). The service at Pym Court is facilitated by Sue Allen, Anna Chaplain and resident, and is extremely popular, with up to 18 residents managing to fit into the room for services. Many thanks to Pat Green for organising the services at Armada Court which are attended by a small but committed congregation. At Watermeadow Grange a pastoral team accompanies the minister and hymn singing is led by Tony Yates. The clergy and Anna Chaplains also provide home communion visits to housebound members of the congregation.

Julian Meetings for Contemplative Prayer

We meet in the quiet area of the Church on the second Monday of each month at 2.30 pm. We are an ecumenical group, welcoming people from Holy Cross and St Nicholas Churches, as well as those who may not belong to any church but are seeking a time of quiet reflection.

We begin with gentle music and a short reading, often taken from *Enfolded in Love* by Julian of Norwich. This helps lead us into forty minutes of sitting with God in silence.

"Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10).

Soft music then draws us out of the deep silence. We pray the Julian prayer together and conclude with the Grace. Afterwards, we share a time of fellowship over tea and cakes.

CHURCH LIFE (Cont.)

Our group continues to grow, and since last year our numbers have doubled. Everyone is warmly welcome to join us and experience this quiet time of prayer and reflection, listening for the still, small voice of God.

Elizabeth Reed

Anna Chaplaincy

The ministry of Anna Chaplaincy has really taken off. We now have three Anna Chaplains, Elizabeth Reed, Revd Peter Ingerslev and Dr Caryll Ingerslev, alongside a wonderful team of Anna Friends, Revd Louise Grace, Gill Yates, Min Wild, Rowena Burrow, Ken Greedy and Sandra Greedy. We are also fortunate to have volunteers, Sue Allen and Clare Doggett. We also have a couple of people who are training to be Anna Friends and Verity Dovey as a volunteer.

Our Anna Chaplains visit people in their own homes who, for whatever reason, are unable to get out and about. We offer Holy Communion and spiritual support, and we also take Holy Communion into care homes, Watermeadow Grange, Pym Court and retirement development Armada Court. The Anna Friends support the Chaplains by visiting people for spiritual support and assisting the Anna Chaplains wherever needed.

This summer, we attended a training day at St Matt's Church Exeter, led by our Anna Chaplaincy Head Co-ordinator for Devon, Annie Jefferies. In attendance was the Rt. Revd Dr Mike Harrison the Bishop of Exeter, who gave an inspiring talk and reminded us of the importance of this ministry. Our team had a great day meeting fellow Anna Chaplains and Anna Friends from other parishes and worshipping together.

On the second Tuesday of each month, the team gathers for a support and prayer group, led by our lead Anna Chaplain, Elizabeth Reed. This informal gathering focuses on prayer, discernment as to where God is at work, mutual encouragement and support for one another. We also enjoy sharing tea and cakes together.

Our outreach "Coffee and Cake" initiative is hosted by the Anna Chaplaincy Team every Wednesday from 2.30 to 3.30 pm at St Margaret's Church. Free tea, coffee and cakes are offered to our community, where everyone is welcomed, valued and shown the hospitality and love of Jesus. Since its launch last March, this outreach has grown steadily, now averaging 16 attendees.

The Anna Chaplaincy Team also hosts "Songs of Praise" on a fifth Sunday of the month, held in the back of the Church. These informal gatherings include hymns, piano music often played by Tony Yates, poems read by team members and a short reflection. Our "Carols and Cake" service on the Sunday after Christmas brought 52 people together to praise God in song, followed by tea, cakes and fellowship. These services have encouraged many people to attend who do not normally come to Sunday worship, providing a warm and welcoming space to encounter God.

CHURCH LIFE (Cont.)

I wish to offer heartfelt thanks to our volunteers, whose faithful service, kindness and dedication have been a true blessing. Through your generosity, God's love has been made visible in this ministry. The ministry of Anna Chaplaincy continues to flourish and it is clear that God is at work in this. I would also like to thank our wonderful Mission Community for your ongoing prayers and support.

Elizabeth Reed

Prayer Breakfast.

We meet at 8.00 am on the first Saturday of each month in the social area at the back of the Church. Our time begins with a simple breakfast of croissants with a selection of jams, accompanied by tea and freshly brewed cafetière coffee.

Following breakfast, we join together in singing a hymn to praise the Lord. Each month we focus our prayers on a particular theme, and suitable Bible verses are shared to guide and inspire our time of prayer. We then spend around half an hour in both spoken and silent prayer, concluding together with the Lord's Prayer.

Everyone is warmly welcome to join us. God knows the thoughts of our hearts, so, even if you prefer not to pray aloud, do come and experience this time of reflection, prayer, and fellowship.

Elizabeth Reed

Eco Church and Fairtrade

As a response to the climate emergency, the PCC signed up to Eco Church. This is an organisation that supports the systematic review of churches' activities to identify those that could be improved to promote the wellbeing of the planet and the environment. They help us look at different areas of church life (worship, buildings, land, lifestyle and community), and we achieved a bronze award in 2024. The requirements have been amended recently but we will still aim for a silver award, once the Dream Big project is complete, as it will include LED lighting.

We also try to adhere to Fairtrade principles, though there is only limited access to "ethical" goods in Topsham.

The collection of cables and wires, initiated and undertaken by Peter Lockwood, has proved a useful focus on recycling for the church, has been appreciated by the community, and has raised a significant amount of money for our projects.

Paul Jakeman

CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Volunteers are essential to the life of the church, but also provide an opportunity for socialising and meeting new people.

Vergers and Welcomers

The role of the vergers in a church is not to be underestimated. Whenever there is a church function, most commonly on a Sunday morning or evening, it is really important to have someone to “meet and greet” at the door. For newcomers and visitors who may not “know the ropes” it gives them confidence and a positive start to the service. The vergers are there to answer any questions especially when there are children, other vulnerable people or those unfamiliar with the service.

Yes the role does include providing the hymn books, service sheets and storing them later and also being aware of the fire safety regulations and safeguarding requirements, but the most important thing is to give all those coming to the service a warm welcome including greeting the regulars who may enjoy a quick catch-up chat. If you would like to join the "Verging group" please contact Gill Yates.

Lesley Griffiths

Sacristans

We are blessed to have a wonderful team of sacristans who faithfully prepare the chalices and set them on the altar with the bread and wine. They carefully clean and iron the linens, polish the silver and brass used at the altar, and change the hangings throughout the seasons of the Church. Their quiet dedication helps ensure that every service is prepared with care and reverence.

Recently we said goodbye to June Swan, who felt that the time had come to step down from the role of Head Sacristan after faithfully leading and organising the team for eight years. We are truly grateful for the commitment, leadership, and dedication shown during that time. Elizabeth Reed has now taken over that role.

I would also like to thank Sue Marshall, Chris & Howard Eilbeck, Liz Taylor and Sue & Mike Chapman for their continued support, reliability, and for being such a wonderful and committed team.

Elizabeth Reed

CHRISTIAN SERVICE (Cont.)

Church cleaning

We now have 8 people in the group, which means that each pair cleans once every four weeks. At the moment this seems to be working, though I and other members of the team are struggling a bit with some of the heavier tasks.

We were not able to have our annual tea party this year because of the building works. I am wondering about some kind of tea party once they are finished, although with such a small group it may not be possible.

Inevitably, the work in the social area has made a lot of dust despite the workmen's efforts to contain it. My stalwart cleaners have tackled this cheerfully, and have all told me that although it is a challenge, they are committed to doing the best they can.

I think we may need a re-think once the work has finished. Already some members of the team have indicated that they would not be willing to clean the loos. Unless we can recruit new members to the team, which we have been unable to do for some time despite our best efforts, I am wondering if the time has come to think about getting professional cleaners in to do at least some of the work. This is no reflection on the team, who continue to be cheerful and willing, but more to do with the age and health issues of some of them, including myself.

Sue Wilkinson

Flower arrangers

It has been a quiet year for the flower arrangers. There were two requests for assistance with flowers for funerals, and none for weddings. The trend is for brides to organise friends to arrange the flowers and then remove them to the reception. There remains a loyal group of 8 ladies who maintain the regular arrangements. It would be good to recruit a few more people and hopefully the new facilities will encourage some new church members to join us.

June Swan

Hospitality

After (almost every) Sunday morning service in 2025 there was an opportunity to stay and chat and drink coffee provided by a group of volunteers in the social area at the back of the church. It is an important time in which to touch base with friends and newcomers alike to discuss the service, the (always) inspiring music produced by our talented musicians, the fortunes of Exeter Chiefs or world events! Biscuits are obligatory, cake too for special occasions. As we look forward to our new servery and toilets, we hope that we will continue this important tradition. If you would like to help on the Coffee rota, please contact Gill Yates

Lesley Griffiths

CHRISTIAN SERVICE (Cont.)

Fundraising

Personal generosity and fundraising by church members are together an essential Christian service if the activities of the church are to continue.

Stewardship: Planned Giving, Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) and Gift Aid

A high proportion of our regular donors give through PGS or by standing order. PGS in particular continues to be a very effective way of giving, as all the administration of Gift Aid is done by the PGS organisation, saving administration in the parish. There is also the option of an automatic annual increase in amounts to reflect inflation. The total offerings given by PGS in 2025 were £47,143.50

Those with standing orders are requested to review the amounts given if they have not done so for some time; and PGS amounts may need updating if you have not enabled inflation-linked increases to your gifts.

We have retiring collections for most services, but have now started passing the plate at family services.

The Gift Aid scheme raised from PGS and plate collections came £12,391.50. This scheme adds 25% to all eligible donations at no cost to the donor and so is a win:win arrangement; *higher rate tax-payers in fact get an additional advantage.*

If you are a tax-payer, please consider authorising a claim for Gift Aid on any donation given to the church.

Legacies are a great way to help the church and are a lasting memory of your support. We have benefitted various bequests and *in memoriam* gifts, and are grateful to the generous foresight of the donors.

Card payments are continuing to increase, though most of our regular attenders at services and concerts tend to prefer cash. The availability of the card reader is particularly important for casual visitors now the entrance to the church does not have a wall safe available. Perhaps the new arrangement of cupboards after the Dream Big project will allow the installation of a cash donation point.

Fundraising for the Dream Big Development Project

The generosity of the congregation and other friends led to thousands of pounds being raised in the early days of the project. Contributions for the project have continued to be made, much of it from the congregation and friends of the church supporting concerts and other fundraisers such as the Salmon Supper and the quiz nights at the Old Fire Station. We have been grateful for the grants received towards the project, but individual donations have been encouraging as evidence of community support. Every penny is welcome, and with the Collectin card reader, we hope that visitors to the church will also choose to support the project.

MUSIC

Choir

During the year we welcomed Caroline Gostling, soprano, and welcomed back James & Cherry Liell, David & Fenny Gill, and several other visiting singers who join us more or less regularly, mainly for evensong. Up to ten members of the Choir meet for extra choir practice on Tuesday mornings at Tony & Gill Yates' house.

We have added to our repertoire pieces by Francis Poulenc, Philip Stopford, Sally Beamish, Joanna Forbes L'Estrange, George Arthur and James Macmillan. On Palm Sunday we sang Bach's St Matthew passion – without arias – conducted by Andrew Millington. We have a large music library, most of it now in the church loft – thanks to the much-improved access made by Maurice Webb.

The year ended well, with an Advent evensong, a Carol Service and a Christmas concert. We practise on Fridays in the north transept from 7 – 8.15 p.m., and on Sundays, 45 minutes before the service. We always welcome new members!

Community carols

This popular service had nearly 500 people enjoying a traditional carol service, which for some represents the start of the true Christmas season. A band joined the organ for the carols, and there was hearty singing from the congregation in the pews and the social area where it was standing room only.

Lunchtime Concerts

During 2025, we had concerts during April - July which, after expenses were paid (usually £50), produced over £1,500 for the Red Cross. The September – October concerts, raised over £800, for the Dream Big project.

An afternoon Hymnathon was also held raising money for Christian Aid.

Tony Yates

Concert Venue

The third Topsham Music Festival used three venues over the three days of the Festival and six concerts. St Nicholas Methodist Church has a more intimate space but a maximum of one hundred chairs. Matthew's Hall is used for one concert which is Jazz. St Margaret's Church has a good Yamaha grand piano, and we use the church for all the concerts that require a piano. It also has good seating capacity with fixed pews. The piano is on the same level as the audience making it difficult for much of the audience to see the pianist's hands. On the other hand, the acoustics are reasonably bright. We understand the church will be undergoing some building work to install toilets and improved kitchen facility which is to be welcomed. The 2026 Festival will take place mainly in Matthew's Hall.

Tony Raven

Chairman, Topsham Music Festival

Other concerts which used the church included the Exe Vox choir, the Exeter Philharmonic Choir and the Exeter String Ensemble.

Bell ringing

2025 has been an enjoyable year of ringing at Topsham and our practice nights are consistently popular. We continue to welcome a number of other ringers from around the Aylesbeare Branch, both those looking for extra practice and more experienced ringers who help and support us. Numbers on practice nights are regularly in double figures, and we've run extra practices throughout the year on Wednesday evenings using our simulator to help our learners progress quicker.

The year began as ever with our ringers' meal, this time held at the church. The ringers and friends enjoyed local pizza and were entertained by speeches, community singing and an excellent cryptic ringing quiz written by Lily and Hugh. The unique nature of our meal has made it a real high point of our calendar. This was followed up by our tower clean up; this year as well as general cleaning and polishing, the focus was a deep clean of the clock chamber meaning the majority of the tower is now clean and hopefully will stay that way!

In July, we held our outing, travelling to north west Somerset and visiting no less than six towers: Watchet, Old Cleeve, Minehead, Dunster, Bicknoller, and finally Crowcombe. A long but enjoyable day was had by all and again our thanks to our friends who came along and joined us.

August brought Topsham Charter Day, with ringing to welcome the procession to the churchyard and then quickly switching to running the Teddy Bear Zipwire, raising £150 for the church's Dream Big project. In September, we once again took part in Topsham's Join the Club event, with a lot of interest and plenty of people coming along to have a go. Sadly, despite a follow up session, we didn't gain any new ringers this time around.

We finished the year ringing for many Christmas services and then ringing in the New Year in traditional fashion. My thanks as ever to our friends from other towers who continue to support us and to the Topsham band for all their dedication and enthusiasm throughout the year.

Matt Pym, Tower Captain

COMMUNICATIONS

A Church Near You

This Church of England website has a page for every parish in the country, containing information for visitors and congregations alike. On our page there is a welcome message from Louise, and information like location and contact details. It also has pages for services and events in different formats, as well as a church calendar, Zoom links and information about donating to the church. Searching for “A church near you Topsham” will get to the page. Caryll Ingerslev has taken over editing from Tony Raven.

Find a Church

This site is another way people can find out about St Margaret’s. It is not updated as often as ACNY but gives basic information about services, activities and a general picture of church life.

Weekly Parish Newsletter

Members of the congregation who subscribed to the Newsletter, which is now reaching over 200, can read a message written by one of the clergy, as well as news of events and services. The lectionary readings for the week are included, as well as those on our current prayer list. Members of the congregation are more than welcome to contribute or offer ideas, and anyone not receiving the newsletter should speak to one of the clergy or PCC members. Many thanks to Gill Yates for keeping us all up to date.

Monthly Parish Newsletter

The monthly newsletter was suspended during the year, to the disappointment of many, and this decision was finalised when Revd David Byrne sadly suffered a deterioration in his health. The PCC extended its thanks to David for all the effort and prayer he had put into its production and distribution over many years.

This was all in the context of discussions with Estuary Magazine – which started life as our Parish Magazine, and is still published by the church – about increasing the church’s input into the magazine. Changes are expected in the middle of 2026.

PARTNERSHIPS

Churches Together in Topsham

Collaboration in 2025 between the three churches in Topsham followed the traditional pattern overseen by the Topsham Ecumenical Group. Holy Cross Catholic Church hosted all the events supporting the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, though with responsibility for leading the five prayer meetings distributed amongst members of St Margaret's Parish Church and St Nicholas Methodist Church as well as Holy Cross. The supporting literature for the Week had been worked up by the ecumenical community at Bose in Northern Italy, including that for the concluding ecumenical service.

One activity during the year that is always a lively source at the social level for ecumenical interaction is the series of six Lent lunches evenly distributed between the three churches. 2025 was no different and the well-attended events also served to raise much-needed funds for the charities selected by each of the hosting churches. The St Margaret's lunches raised £40 for Christian Aid.

The traditional Good Friday walk of witness was somewhat different from the norm. Because of inclement weather, it was moved inside to St Margaret's where the 'walkers' followed the traditional readings, prayers and hymn verses as they paused while making their way around the church. It was a surprisingly effective substitute for the usual promenade around the town.

St Margaret's and St Nicholas shared two morning services during the year. That at St Nicholas, on Trinity Sunday, was led by the Revd Paul Collings and the Revd Peter Ingerslev, while the St Nicholas congregation (as well as some from Holy Cross) joined St Margaret's for the annual Remembrance Sunday service in November. The year ended, ecumenically at least, with carol singing on Chapel Platt on a Saturday morning in December followed by mince pies at St Nicholas.

Connections between the three churches remain warm and cordial, with many shared friendships both inside and outside the church circle. Feelers were also put out to the New Hope Baptist Church which had recently opened a branch in the Gospel Hall in Topsham but, for the moment at least, their congregation was content at that point not to join the Ecumenical Group.

David Battye

Deanery synod

Christianity Deanery is formed of 16 local benefices under the chairmanship of the Area Dean. Synod meetings are normally held quarterly.

The parish's lay representative is Gill Yates who was elected the 2025 APCM to fill a longstanding vacancy.

PARTNERSHIPS (Cont.)

Support for Mission

Anne Plested is now a CMS Associate, based in the UK, but working with the Bethlehem Development Trust, the UK organisation for the college. The church continues a regular contribution to her work, and we regularly hear her news.

Bread of Life Outreach

St Margaret's Church now gives regular support to Bread of Life Outreach, a Christian charity which provides physical and spiritual support to the homeless in Exeter and the surrounding area. They run a soup kitchen two days a week, and a mobile distribution of food and other items on Sundays. Additional financial support, and regular volunteers (eg 1 Sunday morning a month) would be particularly welcome. More details at <https://breadoflifeoutreach.co.uk/> or from Elizabeth Reed.

We also support other charities, including Christian Aid and British Red Cross.

Estuary Magazine

The church wishes mark the invaluable contribution made by Di Trout and José Northey to its success. Month on month, for more years than they care to remember, they have captured copy, sold advertising space and written pithy editorials. We thank you Ladies!

We also thank Stuart and Margaret Finn for their stewardship managing distribution so efficiently over the last 3 years. As they move on to new challenges, Liz and Tony Taylor will be taking over the reins in 2026.

The distribution would not be possible without the sterling efforts of over 30 local people each month. To them we are truly grateful.

Estuary Magazine Distribution

The estuary magazine is still welcomed by all the subscribers. It is the 'go to' magazine to keep abreast of all the daily events in the busy lives of local residents. The main comment by all subscribers is the relief that the magazine price has remained at £2.00.

The print run remains at 600 with circulation down slightly on the previous year. Approximately 20 people have either died, moved into care homes or left the area.

We are now providing magazines to Watermeadow Grange and Pym Court. We are slowly but surely attracting new subscribers, and hopefully will regain the 20 subscribers lost through the current trend at some point in late autumn.

PARTNERSHIPS (Cont.)

Shop sales are difficult to predict. Footfall in the town is a very prominent factor in people purchasing the magazine. Inclement weather and the all too regular road works diminish the appetite to visit the Estuary outlets.

Finances for all sales is consistent with last year, with income nearly £22,891 against 2024's figure of £25,151.

Stuart Finn

Community Volunteering

Topsham has an enviable reputation for volunteering, and for many church members it is part of their Christian service to their neighbours in the community. In church you meet leaders, volunteers and supporters of local charities and groups which contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of local people. The most obvious connection is with Exmouth Food Bank, with its collection point close to the church entrance, though others such as Hospiscare, the Museum, the Swimming Pool, Topsham Community Association, Love Topsham, RSPB and the Goat Walk Trust are similarly represented by church members.

Topsham Museum

The church and the museum have been collaborating on a project to research and document aspects of the church building, and to produce a series of monographs in the run-up to the 150th anniversary of the dedication of the church in 1877.

The first two books, by Dr Penny Bayer, were published during the year, and deal with the changing form and footprint of the church, and the vaults under the church. The books are available from the museum shop, currently online only. The church is grateful to the museum for this collaboration, and for the dedication and expertise of the museum's research team.

Love Topsham

Following the huge success of our now annual Christmas Market, St Margaret's partnered with Love Topsham to run the Christmas market again in 2025. The purpose-built pew boards which were funded by Love Topsham were much appreciated and we were glad that they can also serve the annual church Flower Festival.

Love Topsham volunteers also erected the community Christmas Tree in the churchyard, and provided festive lights in the church, initially for the Market, but then remaining in place throughout the Christmas season.

Marcus Parry
Chair, Love Topsham

PARTNERSHIPS (Cont.)

Little Ducklings

Having our nursery open in the church rooms has been such a successful experience for us. We have absolutely loved having the connections with the church and have always had warm and welcoming experiences with Revd Louise.

We still get numerous comments made to us regarding how much of a need there was in Topsham for a nursery and about how all the parents feel it hugely benefits them with us being here. We have noticed a real community feel between the parents; lots of Mums have made some much-needed friendships and support groups. There are numerous groups that happen around us including Louise's Messy Church and Squid and the Kid playgroup which we encourage parents to visit too.

We now have a waiting list of 2 years and are still serving the community of Topsham and surrounding areas as best we can. We are very much enjoying meeting new parents and their little ones.

We are extremely thankful to the church and volunteers in welcoming and supporting us.

Donna May

Charter Day

Much of the week leading up to Sunday 24th the Charter Day Team are busy organising other activities for children of all ages, one of which is Flower Arranging in St Margaret's. Many parents and grandparents enjoy participating in this. Jam jars are decorated with 'jewels' and ribbons before fresh flowers and greenery are chosen, arranged and carried home safely!

On Charter Day itself, St Margaret's is buzzing from early Sunday morning after the morning service. Safe games are set up for children of all ages, and parents themselves have great fun too, not only with the Coconut Shy but also with the Teddy Bear Zip Wire! Many adults proudly watch as their personal 'soft toy' (we won't discuss age!), zips down the wire to be received safely at the bottom before it receives a certificate!

Another delight for children of all ages and adults is the Punch and Judy, which joins us each year and holds two shows.

Charter Day also appreciates being able to have teas inside St Margaret's - they are always very popular! Last year we were able to make a generous donation from Charter Day teas towards St Margaret's fund for changes in the rear of the Church.

We thank St Margaret's Church for your support!

Thank you!

Valerie Holland.

PARTNERSHIPS (Cont.)

Patronal Flower Festival

On 16th July the doors opened as greenery, flowers, vases, board coverings and much, much more was carried into the church - the first day of preparation for the following 3 days - 17th to 19th July - of our Flower Festival! A really special time when St Margaret's is full of a wonderful atmosphere which will remain for many days!

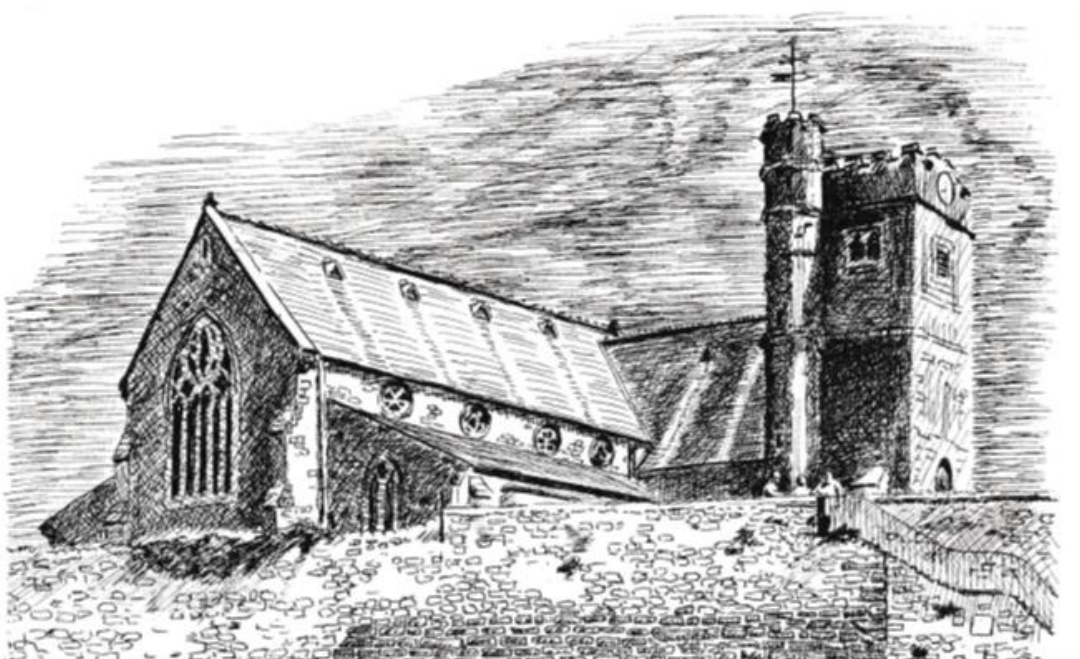
The overall theme was 'Say it with Flowers' and each of the 33 displays had their own titles which were interpreted by the wonderful scents and colours of flowers and greenery as well as books, dancing shoes, children's toys, children's art from Topsham School, bells, a globe, a message in a bottle --- the list is endless! Many Topsham residents and visitors returned on more than one day and numerous photographs were taken.

My thanks go to all the volunteers who acted as Stewards, those who made cakes and to those who were busy serving teas, coffees and cold drinks. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to everyone!

Personally, I also would like to thank Maurice Webb for our wonderful new boards and to those who helped me set them up and take them down, Jose Northey for taking photographs, Optima Graphics for our programmes, St Nicholas Church for making their toilet facilities available to St Margaret's and finally my appreciation goes to the Church Community who supported me 100% in so many ways!

Thank you!

Valerie Holland



Drawing by the late Ken Strong, with permission