

# Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council of Whaley Bridge Parish Year ended December 2023



## **Administrative Information**

Whaley Bridge Parish forms part of Chadkirk Deanery, in the Diocese of Chester within the Church of England. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a charity excepted from registration with the Charity Commission. PCC members who have served from 1 January 2022 until the date that this report is approved (brackets denote year of election) are:

Incumbent	The Revd Frances Eccleston
Wardens	Vacant
Deanery Synod	Joan Gibson (2023) Sue Mellor (2023)
Reader	Steve Eccleston
Reader emerita	Beryl Axcell
	Marion Lacey, Mark Leonard, Jeff Swindells (22 – 25)
	Jo Fyfe (treasurer). Gill Thomson (Parish Safeguarding Officer), Tim Talbot (23 – 26) Jeanette Nicholls (resigned June 23) Malcolm Green (secretary), Stella Whitehurst (from Nov 23), Chris Nelson (from Nov 23) (21 – 24)

## **Structure, Governance and Management**

All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and to stand for election to the PCC. The PCC has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It has maintenance responsibilities for the church buildings and churchyard.

**The purpose of Whaley Bridge Parish is**  
**to demonstrate the love and care of God in Christ for everyone**  
**to grow a living community of faith of all ages**  
**to deepen our faith as we pray and worship God together**  
**to become an inclusive, hospitable and accessible church where all**  
**can feel that they belong**  
**to be at the heart of our community, and to have our community on**  
**our heart**

## **Electoral Roll 2023**

There were 97 names on the 2023 Electoral Roll for the Parish of Whaley Bridge. During the year, six names have been removed. This gives a total of 91 names on the 2024 Electoral Roll.

Jo Fyfe, Electoral Roll Officer

## **Fabric Report**

In the absence of churchwardens it has fallen to me as Vicar to take a lead on the maintenance of the fabric of our church buildings, with the support of the PCC and Finance and Fabric Group.

The quinquennial inspections (QI) of the buildings became severely overdue and on advice from the Archdeacon we asked Duncan Sanderson to step down and appointed Graham Holland as QI architect and he completed the inspections in April 2024.

Heating has continued to be a major theme. A router and internet package were purchased for St James and a new heating control installed to enable remote control of the heating. We are grateful to Steve Eccleston who operates the heating at Taxal and to Jeff Swindells who has taken on checking and ordering oil at Taxal.

Tom Parker operates the remote heating control for Holy Trinity. The second boiler at Holy Trinity which serves the meeting rooms failed and became obsolete in the autumn. Major plumbing work was undertaken to connect the meeting rooms to the main boiler, so the system is now simplified. When the weather is very cold outside, the system is not capable of lifting the temperature in the nave to the required level, as there are not enough radiators. A grant enabled the purchase of a wall mounted boiler in the kitchen at Holy Trinity.

The PCC has established a group to look at future heating plans in line with the Diocesan commitment to carbon net zero. The boiler at Holy Trinity has a limited life and can only be replaced further down the line if we can demonstrate there is no other more suitable green heating option. The organ at Taxal has been intermittently faulty and is nearing the end of its life. PCC has planned for the Holy Trinity keyboard organ to be used at Taxal when this happens and adjustments are being made to the sound system to enable this.

The area of the graveyard up to the fence at Taxal is now full for burials and it became necessary to open the remaining area. The fence has been removed and landscaping, including the sinking of a field drain, a pathway and a boundary marker are planned. Peter Fox has agreed to project manage this work, which has been delayed by the bad weather. A successful churchyard clear up day was held in the summer with a dozen volunteers mostly from the wider community.

Various other projects are on the “to-do” list but lack of person power and stretched finances mean we have to phase works carefully.

The buildings remain largely in good order, but the question of how our congregation will sustain the care and maintenance of not one but two historic buildings and a very large graveyard going forward is a real one. Revd Frances Eccleston, Vicar.

### **Treasurer's report**

Total levels of giving rose 8.4% to £30.4k compared to £28.1k in the previous year. This is largely driven by the ongoing generosity of regular givers, together with frequent donations from visitors to the churches. All Gift Aid / GADS recovery is now up to date and receipts from Gift Aid/GADS for 2021, 2022 and 2023 provided income of £13.3k. Going forward, based on current levels of giving, Gift Aid / GADS recovery is expected to be in the region of £3.3k pa.

Dividends, generated from our investments, provided a steady source of income of £9.1k and we also received a legacy of £5k which has been placed on deposit.

Fundraising activities raised £4.8k, an increase of £1.8k on the previous year. The main contributor was again the Christmas Tree Festival (£1.9k), and we received several grants amounting to £1.8k. Other activities such as the sale of history booklets, children's swap, ladies swap and warmhearted Fridays provided a further £1.1k.

Income from bookings of the parish rooms has risen by 35% to £7.7k compared to £5.7k in 2023. Car parking at Holy Trinity raised £2.5k and advertising revenue from the parish magazine was £1.4k. Parish residents continue to choose to hold weddings and funerals at our churches although net income was down on the previous to £8.4k compared to £9.8k in 2022.

The Parish Share – our contribution to the costs of ministry - is our major outgoing of funds and during 2023, we maintained our commitment to the Diocese to pay 100% of the full annual amount (£39.5k) in addition to deferred payments from 2023. The Parish Share for 2024 is £41.4k and it will continue to be a challenge to meet this payment.

Tom Parker continues to offer his administrative services free of charge, which keeps salary costs down, with the only salary payment in respect of our cleaner Lesley Mansfield.

Utility costs were £5.7k for the year, split £1.1k for St James and £4.6k for Holy Trinity. This was an overall rise of 37% which was due to increased consumption reflecting greater use of the church and parish rooms. Repair costs were £5.8k compared to £3.9k in 2022. This included an exceptional sum of £1.8k for electrical works at Holy Trinity with the other costs comprising regular maintenance and servicing of equipment.

There was slight surplus of £1.3k for the year compared to a deficit of £4.7k in 2022. However, finances are a cause for concern. After stripping out one-off items such as recovery of Gift Aid / GADS from previous years (£10k), the legacy (£5k) and grants (£2k), expenditure for the year exceeded income. Going forward, efforts will need to be made to both increase revenue and to keep outgoings under control.

Jo Fyfe, Treasurer

### **Deanery Synod report 2024**

Deanery Synod meets 3 times a year, in different churches in our deanery. We have speakers on a wide range of topics. We have realised that our parish being involved in Churches Together in Whaley Bridge, isn't like many other parishes in our deanery who don't work together with other churches in their towns. As a deanery we want to start sharing resources and visiting the other churches in our deanery when they have events on. You don't have to be a rep. to come along to a meeting, so if we are discussing something of interest to you do join us.

Sue Mellor

### **Whaley Bridge Parish Magazine**

Whaley Bridge Parish Magazine is now a bi-monthly publication with six issues of the magazine produced each year. It has a print-run of 350 copies per issue, with an extra 50 copies printed for the Christmas Tree

Festival each year. Magazines are distributed locally to supporting businesses and parishioners, and copies are freely available at both Holy Trinity and St James Taxal churches. The magazine is printed by Pear Tree Print in Whaley Bridge. To keep costs down, the cover prints in full colour and the internal pages print mono. Magazine advertising revenue covers the cost of printing the magazine, new advertisers are actively encouraged, and donations towards the cost of producing the magazine are welcome via a QR code printed in each issue.

The magazine editor also produces a colour pdf of the magazine, which is freely available to view via the Parish website.

The editor endeavours to include material that reflects the life of the parish, including events involving our ecumenical partners and local schools. Regular church activities are advertised and this year there has been an increased focus on the local community and welcoming young families. The vicar writes a regular column, provides details of forthcoming events and services, interviews with members of the local community, etc. Parishioners/readers are actively encouraged to submit articles of interest to the editor for inclusion (email [alimg99@aol.com](mailto:alimg99@aol.com)), and CofE news, puzzles, poems etc. are sourced from the Parish Pump website, to which we subscribe annually.

Alison Rowland, Magazine Editor

## **Website**

Our website [www.whaleybridgecofeparish.org](http://www.whaleybridgecofeparish.org) is updated weekly by our extremely capable admin assistant Tom Parker. The weekly newsletter and the current magazine are available on the home page, together with a giving link, plus a link to the Facebook page. Regular services and upcoming events are clearly visible. Thanks to Tom for keeping our information so current and attractively presented.

## **Warm Hearted Fridays**

Since January 2023, Holy Trinity has been open every Friday from 12.45 to 2.30pm for anyone to enjoy homemade soup, bread and a hot drink followed by cake, homemade too of course. There is no charge, donations are welcome.

There is always a lovely buzz of chat and fellowship – with a jigsaw always available for those who like that challenge. We have a good mix of

folk, anywhere from 8 - 16, some from church and some not, some regulars each week, some who just pop in now and again.

Although it was initially set up in response to the cost of energy crisis, in April last year we decided to try and keep it going on a weekly basis as folk appreciated the friendship and fellowship. During the year Cod and Cake (the chippie/café just up the road at Horwich End) came on board and provide soup every fortnight. We are very grateful to them for their support, and of course the delicious soup.

We are also very grateful to DCC for a grant which has allowed us to purchase a new fridge with a four star icebox, two slow cookers and a stockpot.

Finally, our grateful thanks to our band of volunteers.... making soup, serving soup, making hot drinks and welcoming all who visit. We really couldn't do it without them.

New volunteers are always welcome, either helping on the day, or making soup and cake which can be collected anytime. Have a chat with Sarah, Louise or Frances if you'd like to know more.

Sarah Talbot

### **C.A.T.S. (Carers and Toddlers Play and Praise)**

meets on the first Wednesday of every month offering free- play, crafts, music, singing, Bible Story and snack (usually including birthday cake.) Numbers vary from month to month but usually around 15+ children. Siblings are welcome during school holidays. At the beginning of April, during Easter Week, we had 32 (!)children (nurseries being closed as well), with lots of parents/ grandparents/ carers. Thank you to all our helpers, especially Janice Nelson who, single-handedly prepares all the wonderful crafts every month.

Beryl Axcell

### **Baby and Childrens Clothes and Toy Swap Report 2024**

We started the swap in 2013, and still meet on third Saturday every month. We still have many families coming including new families. As well as bringing and taking clothes and toys, families enjoy chatting while children play or do some colouring. Also they can have a drink and biscuit. Open for everyone.

Sue Mellor

## **Churches Together in Whaley Bridge**

Churches Together in Whaley Bridge (CTWB) is affiliated to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. All the churches in Whaley Bridge are members of Churches Together in Whaley Bridge; that is, our own Parish Church, the Uniting Church, Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, Fernilee Methodist Chapel and Good News Church.

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.** Simple services and discussion groups were held in each of the churches, culminating with a joint service at the end of the week.

**Lent** started with a joint service on Ash Wednesday and then was followed, as in each year, by the Lent weekly study groups. The study groups give us a wonderful opportunity to meet with and discuss our faith with members of different churches. The groups are organised to meet in afternoons or evenings of each of the five weeks of Lent. Churches Together organises the Good Friday Service on the top of Eccles Pike, walking up from the Good News Church at 4.00pm to meet at 5.00pm. Always a wonderful experience.

**Whaley Bridge Carnival** was special last year. Churches Together always provides a float for the procession but last year, we were surprised and pleased to be approached, a few days before the carnival, by the Carnival Committee to organise a refreshment tent as well. The tent was provided for us and phone calls to our supporters resulted in a catering team arriving with hot and cold drinks and dozens and dozens of cakes. We made no charges but asked for donations and these were generous. It was a glorious day, the band played wonderfully and we all went home exhausted and elated. What a wonderful opportunity for Christian witness. The Carnival Committee have asked us to do the same this year, so do come and join in the fun!

**Open the Book** continues to go from strength to strength taking a dramatized Christian message into each of our three primary schools each half term. It has now been extended so that a small team leads a follow up RE lesson on the theme at Kettlethulme School. The Holiday Club was held again for a week in August to great acclaim and building on this success one day Holiday Clubs have been held in the Christmas and Easter holidays



**25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration** 2023 marked 25 years since the formation of Churches Together in Whaley Bridge. We celebrated with a lovely thanksgiving service and a fabulous feast on September 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Uniting Church. We were delighted that so many of the former ministers who had been involved with Churches Together in Whaley Bridge, several of them former chairpeople, had come to join us from far afield.

**The Luncheon Club** is a sub-group of CTWB and continues to provide lovely freshly cooked meals on the second Thursday of each month at the Uniting Church. The lunches are open to everyone and the club is a good example of our churches working together as a Christian witness in our town.

**Lighting the Christmas Tree** is a wonderful community event in Whaley Bridge and Churches Together in Whaley Bridge joins with the town council and the Whaley Bridge Brass Band to make this a truly magical event. Last year, the lantern parade through Memorial Park was the LONGEST parade we have ever seen. Thank you so much to the children, parents and helpers who worked so hard to produce this spectacular event. Mary and Joseph and the donkey, also illuminated, were escorted through the park to the Jodrell Arms car park where we joined for carol singing and a lovely nativity dramatization acted out by members of Churches Together. And then the tree was lit, Christmas had started. Do join us next time to help us make the point that Christmas is a Christian Festival.

Stella Whitehurst

### **Kettlethulme St. James CE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School**

Kettlethulme School has grown to 62 pupils and although the school is based in Cheshire, more than 80% of its children live in Derbyshire. 2023 was a tough year for Alicia, our head, with two of the three class teachers leaving due in part to ill health. We were able to appoint two talented replacement teachers and have continued to make and embed widespread changes to the curriculum. The emphasis on outdoor learning continues with strong links to Whitehall Outdoor Pursuits Centre in addition to forest school.

The school's links with the Parish have also strengthened with both Rev'd Frances and Beryl regularly taking collective worship, in Beryl's case this has increased to weekly. The school also continues to welcome in the

Churches Together's Open the Book team, every half term as do the two Whaley schools. The school's vision and values are rooted in biblical teaching and we were fortunate in being successful with a grant application which allowed for beautiful murals reflecting these values, to be installed during the Autumn term - our hall is now dominated by one featuring St. James' church.

Two of our governors also left during the year and we were pleased to welcome 2 new PCC nominated governors in their stead, Chris Johnson and Ruth Lockett. All governors are involved in school in a range of ways as part of the Kett family alongside staff, pupils, parents and volunteers. During a recent extended stint in hospital, I couldn't help shedding a few tears when I received a lovely handmade card incorporating an encouraging note and picture from each child in the school – what a loving gesture! Paddy Fox, Vice Chair of Governors

### **Taxal and Fernilee CE Primary School (voluntary controlled)**

As I reflect on another year, there are many things to rejoice about and celebrate at Taxal and Fernilee CofE Primary School.

At the end of last school year, we had a very successful Ofsted report where we continued to be a 'Good' school. The first two sentences of the report; 'Pupils enjoy coming to school,' and 'The staff care for all pupils,' recognise that Taxal cares for, and about its pupils.

Our new Headteacher, Karen O Connor, joined us in September. From the outset, Karen has ensured that our school continues to develop and thrive whilst remaining a caring school for both pupils and staff. She has actively strengthened links with the local community, local Schools, the parish and the Diocese, and is keen to develop these further.

Links with the Church have grown and become more prevalent this year with events being planned and communicated well with parents/ carers. Regular church events are on the newsletters and text message reminders are sent to parents/ carers about events in the Church and local community. Throughout the year, the children in each year group will have the opportunity to lead a service in Church. The school choir sang at Nine Lessons Carols, the Christmas Tree festival and for the Luncheon Club and the Year 6 pupils took part in Remembrance activities and a worship at Fernilee Church. A Pentecost service is planned and the

Traditional Leavers service will be held in Church. Rev Frances leads worship in school and the Open the Book team visit too.

Edwina Thorogood is the RE lead and recently presented to the Governors the exciting new RE curriculum that the school is adopting. Governors and staff have worked even more closely this year. Karen and the staff have invited Governors into the school not only to special events, but to regular staff meetings, development days and meetings with link subject leaders

Karen, Steph and the Taxal team are keen to actively promote and celebrate our wonderful school. Steph started this journey with the fantastic entry in the Carnival, which was enjoyed by pupils, staff and parents/carers alike. Steph also set up the schools Facebook page, which celebrates the wonderful achievements of our pupils both in and out of school. Karen and the Taxal team held open school events for current and prospective parents which provided another opportunity to celebrate and share our school with the community.

Currently Karen, the staff and governors are working on 'creating a whole school theologically rooted vision.' Alongside our SCRIPT values, this will then be embedded into our school. The whole school community are also working on 'behaviour.' We are in a period of transition from the current behaviour and rewards policy to the strategies outlined in 'When the Adults change,' by Paul Dix. These are exciting times as Karen leads the Taxal team through some changes, whilst keeping the caring ethos that is so important to everyone at Taxal and Fernilee.

Amy Swift, Deputy Chair of Governors

### **Sanctuary and Serving team**

I continue to order sanctuary supplies. The serving team presently consists of Tim Talbot and Sue Mellor and Marion Lacey. Serving has been increasingly short of people, both because under the new arrangement we need two servers at each service, and because of Sue's fall. If people would like to assist with it, I expect that offers will be gratefully received.

Tim Talbot, Sacristan.

## **Bell ringers**

Bell ringing is an amazing skill to learn, it's a dying art form but here at St James Taxal we are dedicated to keeping our bells pealing. Our practice night is Monday 7-8pm with great tuition from teachers who have decades long experience. We are a small welcoming band of ringers but also have a few learners who are doing well, but we always have room for more.

We ring for weddings and occasions such as the Kings coronation and we have great socials throughout the year. Please contact me on 07895055463 if you fancy a go.

Victoria Shelmerdine

## **Open Doors at Taxal**

The opening of St James Church April to October 2023 and April to May 2024 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays between 2pm and 4pm has been successful, with a few visitors coming into the church on most occasions. Many thanks to all the people in the church opening team who have opened St James and stayed in the church whilst it was open. Our new history booklet has proved popular with visitors with 150 selling in 18 months. Consideration is currently being given to allowing visitors to visit St James Church at some times without a member of the team remaining present. If you would like to join the rota, please speak to myself or Revd Frances.

Mark Leonard

## **Men's Midweek Walking Group**

The group is now into its second year. It was born out of a sense that, while there are lots of activities taking place in the parish, there often weren't so many men involved. The idea was to provide a space, with activity, which men would feel happy to pop along to and join in. It offers a monthly local walk of around four to six miles, usually starting from the Transshipment Warehouse. There are about a dozen men on the email list and between four and six usually walk. Most have some connection with the church though by no means all, one gent comes all the way from Tideswell. Aside from all the benefits of exercise and fresh air, the group provides a relaxed space where the gents walking can talk about things which are important to them if they wish. There's no pressure. I have had some engagement with Blythe House and will be speaking at a men's group there in the coming weeks. I hope the group offers, in a small way, a practical example of sharing Christ's love in the community in a low key and relaxed way. Steve Eccleston