

**THE PARISH OF ST. NEOTS WITH EYNESBURY: ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISHIONERS
& ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING**

Sunday 6th April 2025 in the Church Room after the 9.30 a.m. Eucharist at St Neots.

Apologies:

Annual Meeting of the Parishioners

- 1. Appointment of Clerk**
- 2. Approval of the Minutes of the 2024 Meeting of the Parishioners.**
- 3. Election of Church Wardens** (*two for St Neots, two for Eynesbury, all being wardens of the whole*).
- 4. St Neots Charities Report.**

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

- 1. Appointment of Clerk.**
- 2. Approval of the Minutes of the 2024 Annual Parochial Church Meeting.**
- 3. The Receipt of Reports:**
 - (a) Electoral Roll Report.**
 - (b) The Annual Report of the PCC and the Financial Statements of the PCC.**
 - (c) The Safeguarding Officer's report**
 - (d) The Fabric, Goods and Ornaments Report.**
 - (e) The Deanery Synod Report.**
 - (f) Other informal reports of sub-committees and organisations**
- 4. Election of 4 or 5 Representatives of the Laity to the PCC** (*4 for 3yrs, possibly 1 for 2 yrs*).
- 5. Appointment of Independent Examiner to PCC**
- 6. The Rector's remarks (delivered orally)**
- 7. Questions about parochial church matters (if any).**
- 8. Resolutions to discuss matters of general church interest (if any).**
- 9. Date of next meeting**

A meeting of the PCC follows:

For the appointment of: a Secretary of the PCC; a Treasurer of the PCC; a Vice-chair of the PCC; an Electoral Roll Officer; a Parish Safeguarding Officer; the standing Committee (being in addition to the Minister, two of the Churchwardens and two others); a Stewardship recorder and Gift Aid Officer; Sidesmen.

For the identification of the date of the next meetings, and no other business.

A meeting of the Churchwardens follows (chaired by the Rector) to appoint two of their number to be the two churchwarden trustees of the Newton's and Hatley's School Foundation.

The Annual Parochial Meetings of the Parish of St. Neots with Eynesbury
Minutes of the Meeting of Parishioners, Sunday 28th April 2024 held at 10.30am after the
9.30am Eucharist at St Neots Parish Church.

Attendance:54

The Rector, Revd Paul Hutchinson welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that all on the Church Electoral Roll and all on the Civil Electoral Roll for the Parish are entitled to attend: anyone else was welcome to be present but could not participate.

1. Catherina Griffiths was elected as **clerk to the meeting**.
2. **The minutes of the 2023 Meeting of the Parishioners** were accepted on a show of hands proposed by Peter Raggatt, seconded Andrew Isaac.

3. Election of Church Wardens:

Christine Miles proposed by Bob Grantham, seconded Marion Catmull.

Tony Hopwood proposed by Margaret Grantham, seconded Christine Miles.

Jacky Isaac proposed by Lynn Burnell, seconded Andrew Isaac.

All were duly elected with thanks for their service during the past year. All will serve as wardens over the whole parish of St Neots with Eynesbury.

4. Disapplication of six year time limit: Fr Paul explained that at present churchwardens have to step down after 6 years. Christine and Tony have completed 4 years in post and Jacky 3 years. As it is difficult to find parishioners prepared to fill the posts it was proposed that the time limit be disappplied. This was agreed by all.

5. St Neots Charities Report. (Circulated in advance) The report was accepted with thanks to Ron Watkins for his work with the charities. Fr Paul explained that the bequests were set up before PCCs and so many of the small charities should be in PCC funds. In the recent past, money has been sent to the local Foodbank but this is not technically in the terms of the bequests which are limited to the parish of St Neots. The changes to incorporate the charities began in 2022 but changes in the Charity Commission and illness have slowed the process and there is not a full set of accurate figures in the report. Once the process is complete, some of the funds will be used by the PCC in accordance with the terms of the bequests and the remainder will become a single charity administered by trustees. Jacky Isaac is in the process of sorting this out. Ron Watkins is unable to continue in post and Fr Paul thanked him (in absentia) for his work on this.

The meeting of the Parishioners ended.

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Meeting, Sunday 28th April 2024

Attendance:54

Apologies were received from Canon Robert Sibson, Stephen Gill, Liz Linley, Carol and Terry Way.

The Rector explained that members of the Electoral Roll were entitled to attend, but that, as with the previous meeting, others were welcome to observe but not participate. The

Rector further explained that, as a more complex meeting, it would be recorded to assist with minute taking.

- 1.** There being no other nominations, Catherina Griffiths was appointed as **clerk to the meeting.**
- 2.** **The minutes of the 2023 Annual Parochial Church Meeting** were accepted on a show of hands after a correction of date, proposed by Lynn Burnell, seconded Elizabeth Sibson. As the 2023 meeting was adjourned and resumed on 18th May, these minutes were proposed by Elizabeth Sibson, seconded Lynn Burnell and accepted as a true record. At the latter meeting, there was no appointment of an Independent Examiner but Kathryn Pickering was later appointed by the PCC.
- 3.** **The Receipt of Reports:**
 - a) Electoral Roll:** Elizabeth Sibson, Electoral Roll Officer, reported that since the last meeting on 23rd April 2023, 6 names had been added, and 11 removed from the roll. The roll stands at 232. Of the 11 removed, 3 of these people had died –Nell Marshall, Peggy Martin and James Mills. Mary Richardson has recently died and so her name will be removed. This is the last revision of the current roll and next year everyone will need to fill in an application form. Elizabeth was thanked for her report.
 - b) The Report of the PCC:** (Circulated in advance). This was accepted by the meeting. The narrative shows the public benefit to the Charity Commissioners.

The Financial Statement of the PCC: (Circulated in advance). Tony Hopwood explained that 2023 had been a difficult year with £128,000 income and £149,000 expenditure. Expenses are increasing while Parish Giving is decreasing. The Ministry Share rose from £57,000 to £59,000 for 2023 and this year is £62,000. There have been repairs to the organ, gutters and electrics, and other costs. Fr Paul commented that much of the deficit was due to the spending of donated money from previous years; for altar goods, the Church Room fire escape, and also work on the buttress. Rosemary Darrington asked what had happened to the money raised by the bazaar last year. This is in 2d) Income from General Fundraising Events. Tony will provide some breakdown of fundraising in future. The refreshment station money is in restricted funds Jacky Isaac said that she proposes to look at stewardship income and contact everyone on the Electoral Roll. The Parish Giving Scheme works well and tax is reclaimed quickly. The accounts were accepted by the meeting on a proposal by Angie Robertson, seconded Gordon Depledge, with thanks to Tony Hopwood.
 - c) Safeguarding Officer's Report:** (circulated in advance). There have been no safeguarding issues during the year and the report was accepted with thanks to Ann Barnsley for her work in this.
 - d) The Fabric, Goods, and Ornaments Report:** (circulated in advance). Accepted by all. Thanks were expressed to the Church Wardens and the Treasurer for all their work and support.
 - e) Deanery Synod Report:** (circulated in advance) Accepted by all.

f) Informal Reports: (circulated in advance). Thanks were expressed to all on behalf of all in the church.

5. Election of Representatives of the Laity to the PCC: There were 5 nominations presented to the meeting for 5 places. All were elected, and were appointed to serve for 3 years:

David Read Prop – Godfrey Wilson; Sec – Jacky Isaac

Tara Skey Prop – Christine Miles; Sec – Tony Hopwood

Angie Robertson Prop – Jacky Isaac; Sec – Liz Linley

Lynn Burnell Prop – Jacky Isaac; Sec – Andrew Isaac

Marion Catmull Prop – Tony Hopwood; Sec – Christine Miles

6. Independent Examiner to PCC: Fr Paul explained that the PCC had appointed Kathryn Pickering earlier this year, when she agreed to act (for a reduced fee). She is a member of Loves Farm Church and also known to Jacky Isaac through their shared work for Money Advice St Neots (MAST). In addition to her primary work, she has provided some helpful recommendations for simplification in future years. Jacky Isaac proposed, Christine Miles seconded that Kathryn Pickering be re-appointed. This was agreed by all.

7. Rector's remarks: Fr Paul explained to the meeting that the last few years had been frustrating. Time has been spent looking at the charities, and this has not been completed although there has been approval from the Charity Commissioners. A conversation began in PCC about the re-ordering of the building, but it needs outside funding and has been delayed by circumstances. We need the capacity of people power to take this forward. In order to use the money set aside for the refreshment station, it would have to be part of a fuller scheme which will account for environmental issues, heating, access etc. There is also work to do at Eynesbury, with funds available to restore the walls and plasterwork. It is hoped that we will be able to re-engage with this and take things forward.

8. Questions: Jacky Isaac has been asked if and when we will get another curate. Fr Will is still technically our curate pending a new appointment for him. . The relationship with Loves Farm Church has changed with the retirement of Revd Helene Tame. Although an Anglican priest, she was employed by the URC. Loves Farm Church is still active and relates also to the Wintringham estate. Diocesan plans for new curates have a 15 month lead in time, and the Diocese will soon be considering whether there is a suitable candidate for 2025. Some curates come with prior experience, perhaps of a pioneering nature, which may be useful for the work east of the railway line.. We may hear something in the next few months.

9. Resolutions: there were none.

10. Date of next meeting: It was proposed to meet on Sunday 6th April 2025 in the Church Room at 10.30am after the 9.30am service at St Neots.

The meeting ended at 11.25am.

REPORT FOR THE MEETING OF PARISHIONERS

St Neots Charities (whose trustees include Rector and Churchwardens)

2024 was a frustrating year in the reorganization and administration of the Charities. There were steps forward, but as many steps back; and it is difficult to make straight and quick progress via correspondence with third parties.

The Rector and Churchwardens are some of the trustees of the Newton's & Hatley's School Foundation, along with Council appointees. The Charity is the Managing Trustee of about half the site on which St Mary's School stands (by law, the Diocese must be, and is, the Custodian Trustee on the Land Registry deeds; just as it must be the Custodian Trustee of the Church Rooms). The Charity also acts as an annual conduit of funds granted from the Alderman Newton Educational Foundation, based in Leicester: nine-tenths to St Mary's School, one tenth to the parish. Funds were dispensed in 2024 in the usual way, and the parish portion was used to help fund the work of the Children's Schools' and Families Minister. We were expecting to hear from the Alderman Newton Educational Foundation about an application that was being made by them to the Charity Commission in 2023 to change the objects to focus more on families in need. So far as we are aware, no change has yet been approved.

The other historic charities of which the Rector and Churchwardens are trustees can be grouped in three blocks: five are old will trusts to support church purposes; ten are old will trusts to support poor persons in the parish; and the will trust of Charles Percival Rowley (the bulk of the funds) was for both of those purposes – this latter being one charity on the Register, but with separately identifiable funds for the two parts.

I must record my thanks again to Ron Watkins for the work that he did when he took over clerk responsibility from John Walker, before health meant that he needed to pass the papers to me.

On the basis of Charity Commission permissions given in 2022, we were able, in the summer of 2024, to identify the value of the five small charities for church-related purposes, to transfer their funds to the relevant areas of the church accounts, and to close the charities (a success!). We were also able to identify how much of the remaining funds that are ring-fenced in the parish accounts (that came to us when Barclay Bank closed the bank account) were properly attributable to 'Rowley Windows and Curate' (i.e. parish funds), and to transfer that sum out of the ring-fence. But the CCLA investment fund for that has not yet been transferred, and 'Rowley Windows and Curate' cannot be closed until we finish what's below.

Unfortunately, our formal decisions to deal with the amalgamation of the ten poverty accounts and the poverty element of the Rowley account by creating a single charity with widened purposes have not been fully understood by the most recent correspondent at the (overworked) Charity Commission; the 2022 order made in respect of the Rowley funds needs correcting so those funds can go in two different directions; and our hopes that we could deal with the mandates for the investments in those two directions has also consequently been delayed (preventing, for the time being, the payment of quarterly

dividends). At the time of writing, we await a reply from the Charity Commission to our most recent email to them, and we need to work out how to deal with the investment mandates so that funds are being received again. We sincerely hope we will not be reporting in these terms again next year!

We were able to do the required annual filings for the sixteen before the closure of the five, bringing the Charity Commission register up to date for now. The day when we only need to file figures for one charity will be very welcome when it comes.

The Rector.

REPORTS FOR THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

Parish Safeguarding Report

As mentioned in my report of last year, the requirement for up to date training and awareness has continued to be increasingly significant, in respect of anyone fulfilling any role in the Church. Emphasis has been placed on raising awareness of the need for training to whatever level required for any given role within the Church and I have attended 6 PCC meetings this year to inform the PCC of what is happening in this regard, as well as seeking input from the PCC on various aspects of safeguarding.

We have held our first in-house training session for people who needed to undertake training, but either, do not possess a computer of their own, or are not confident in undertaking the required training online.

Further sessions will be held as necessary to ensure that everyone requiring safeguarding training is up to date with their specific training requirements.

The changes and adjustments to safeguarding requirements authorised by the Church of England, are significant and need to be subject to constant review. Up to date role descriptions and risk assessments are being finalised by various groups within the church.

One safeguarding issue has arisen this year which was dealt with and resolved following liaison between the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, the Rector and myself.

Ann Barnsley, Parish Safeguarding Officer

Fabric, Goods and Ornament

Fabric at St Neots Parish Church and Eynesbury Parish Church

Routine servicing has taken place in both Eynesbury Parish Church and St. Neots Parish Church this includes; fire extinguishers, gutter valleys and downpipes, lightening conductors and security system. The boilers in Eynesbury Church and St. Neots Church Rooms have been serviced.

Fabric - Eynesbury Parish Church

The following has taken place;

- External vegetation has been removed from the buttress
- Benches that were beyond repair have been removed from the church yard.
- The west door has been re-stained
- The gates have been painted
- Draught excluders have been fitted to the church door
- The north door has been re-hung

- New blinds have been fitted in the Church Rooms

All of the work above has been completed by parishioners and Church Wardens.

The replacement of the Church Path is still outstanding as we are awaiting a faculty to carry out the work. The work will be funded from the Mel Young legacy.

Fabric – St Neots Parish Church

The following has taken place;

- Following some suspected infestation in the nave roof, the chancel and the bell chamber a full inspection was carried out. This confirmed that there was no current infestation in the nave or chancel roof. The bell chamber was treated for suspected woodworm with no other works required.
- The lights have been replaced in the Jesus Chapel and in the north door external porch
- Following concern regarding the tower pinnacles, these were inspected and found to be safe.
- Annual maintenance has taken place on the SNPC Church Clock which included work on the winding mechanism which had to be repaired off site.
- The following repairs have been undertaken as highlighted in the Quinquennial Inspection report ;
 - The louvres to the belfry have been replaced this was funded by a generous donation and completed in November 24 (completed costs £27k)
 - The clerestory windows have been repointed.
 - The tower roof door has been repaired.

St Neots Parish Church - Church Rooms

Work has been carried out during the year on the Church Rooms of St Neots Parish Church this included;

- The Church Rooms, toilets and entrance lobby have been redecorated including all woodwork and the entrance door to the kitchen has been rehung to open into the main hall.
 - The main hall sensor for the heating has been replace
 - The floor in front of the fireplace has been made good
 - Black out roller blinds have been installed on the windows.
 - A heater has been installed in the entrance/lobby to reduce condensation
 - The external doors and wood work have been repaired and repainted.
 - The drains from the kitchen which back onto Samuel Emery Close have been replaced.
- Other smaller internal works have been carried out regarding locks; installation of the blinds etc and these have been facilitated by Terry Way assisted by Steve Gill for which the Church Wardens are very grateful.

St Neots Parish Church - Church Wall

Discussions have continued regarding the outstanding work required on the Churchyard which is the responsibility of the Town Council.

After a further survey it has been established that the whole wall will need to be replaced. At the moment discussions are taking place with the Diocese as to whether or not the 2019 faculty can be extended.

It is anticipated that the replacement wall be completed in two parts but this is yet to be confirmed.

Ornaments

St Neots Parish Church and Eynesbury Parish Church

There have been no additions to the ornaments at either church.

The following repairs to existing ornaments have been carried out at SNPC;

- The Lady Chapel silver plated candle sticks and cross, which were given to SNPC in 1961, have been repaired and re-silvered. The repair was funded by the Burrows legacy.
- The two brass candle sticks from the main altar have been repaired and repolished.

Jacky Isaac/Christine Miles/Anthony Hopwood, Churchwardens

PCC

The PCC has met regularly to discuss affairs of the parish; to approve the budget and monitor finances and approve charitable giving; to discuss and approve necessary repairs to the fabric; to approve policy documents. The Church Schools Covenant was discussed and adopted by Eynesbury School but not by St Mary's School. Ann Barnsley has attended to report on Safeguarding and explain updates in national safeguarding guidelines. There was a discussion about hymn books resulting in both churches adopting the latest version of Hymns Ancient and Modern, at a cost of £4,652. £3,429 of this was paid out of the Burrows legacy and the remainder from the Eynesbury General Fund.

Catherina Griffiths, PCC Secretary

Deanery Synod

The Synod has met four times during the year to discuss matters of interest for the parishes of the deanery. Ruth New, Development Officer for Children and Families, attended the April meeting to explain her role in supporting work with children and families in the diocese. The Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech, Ven Richard Harlow attended the November meeting and spoke about the importance of safeguarding and also future allocation of clergy in the deanery. The latter and concerns over the payment of Ministry Share prompted an extra meeting in December. Parishes are finding it increasingly difficult to pay the share and if it is not paid in full by the end of the year there is no deanery rebate and there is likely to be an even higher increase in requested share to pay for ministry. This will impact on the desire to fund a part time priest in St Neots East.

Catherina Griffiths, Deanery Synod Rep

Churches Together in St Neots

CTSN has become an umbrella group for all the work done by Christians in the town. There is a very small working party continuing to keep links alive. Pam Branch, the secretary has been working in conjunction with St Neots Initiative.

Some of the CTSN groups include the Foodbank, ACTIOS, Thursday Food, the Christian Care Centre, the Men's Forum, St Neots Bereavement and Friendship Group, Christian Aid. The speaker at the AGM in September spoke about prayer needs in the ever-changing situation in the Middle East, particularly in Gaza and Israel.

Catherina Griffiths, CTSN Rep

Christian Aid

The total area collection for Christian Aid Week amounted to £2,045.35 of which we raised £401. The Christmas Card Tree collection raised £231 for the Christmas Appeal and during 2024 a total of £2,661.35 was sent to Christian Aid from St Neots and District. This does not include online donations.

Catherina Griffiths

St Neots Initiative Report

The Promotion and Tourism committee (part of the St Neots Initiative) has been meeting regularly in The Museum. This group has representation from ESCA, Churches Together, St Neots Museum, St Neots Local History Society, The Pightle, St Neots U3A, and a representative from the Town Council. Alex Hughes was elected chairman of the Initiative and has lots of enthusiasm and new ideas to share with the groups, redefining the aims and purpose for the groups.

Catherina Griffiths

Sub-committee Reports

Mission and Care

The Committee met to discuss allocation of charitable giving. Helen Bloxham keeps us informed of news from the various charities and it is hoped to invite speakers during the year so that we are informed about what our money is being used for.

Children's Activities

All Aboard

It has been a year of both consolidation and development at All Aboard. With additional publicity items - posters, banners and leaflets - featuring a more dynamic logo and the introduction of Passports (to collect attendance stickers and earn rewards), we now have a small core of regular attenders, who LOVE coming. Andrea Eckloff makes fabulous themed cakes, which adds another 'must see' element - we are so grateful to her.

We changed to the second Sunday of the month to avoid various clashes, and this seems to have helped.

The format remains the same, with original songs, 'scratch' dramatic storytelling, craft activities and plenty of participation (including the ringing of our 'ship's bell). A good time is had by all.

Easter and Christingle editions come with extra activities and have proved popular, with more people attending. We owe thanks to the Mother's Union and others for serving refreshments and various additional assistants.

It's going well in a difficult climate... and cut-down versions of some of the 'productions' go into St Mary's school, too... so more children get to enjoy them. It's been a successful year.

Revd Margaret Marshall

Stay and Play

We have had a busy year at Play Church, the number of families attending in general is up and we have run some successful sessions during the school holidays which have proved popular. Our Christmas film morning was a huge success bringing lots of families in. Since Sept 2024 many of our regular families moved to school or nursery so it was a slow start with numbers going down. Margaret has re-branded the group to 'St Mary's Stay + Play'. We feel the new name and the A frame sign and logo have been successful in bringing in new families and we have recently had some child minders in attendance which has really boosted the numbers. We now have a larger storage cupboard so we are able to have a few more toys in rotation. We do however need a working light for the cupboard so we can see what we are doing when packing away.

Sadly both Sian and I will be moving on from our voluntary positions at St Mary's Stay and Play in September 2025 as our children will be at school and we will both be upping our work commitments.

Hazel and Sian

Church Organisations

Choir Report

'Psallam Spiritu et Mente'

'I will sing with the Spirit and with Understanding' RSCM Motto

The choir continues to lead worship at most services. We have the monthly choral evensong service which is a complete contrast to the weekly Sunday morning Eucharists. We sang in St Edmundsbury Cathedral on June 1st and again on January 4th this year. We didn't manage to sing evensong at the 'Crooked Spire' church in Chesterfield on Saturday August 24th as planned.

Very sadly, last year, two of our sopranos left the choir but we welcomed two new Sopranos. Although the choir is going well, we are still short of voices in all parts.

We are hoping to go to Rochester cathedral to sing evensong. A place the choir has not been to. Planning is still underway for that but we do have a date to sing evensong on January 10th 2026 at Southwark cathedral in London. This has been a favourite visit because it also includes Borough Market.

I continue to play at Eynesbury church and just recently the choir came there to sing at the memorial service for Fr. Ken Anderson. The folk at Eynesbury are always welcoming. The summer organ recitals at St. Neots church will again be happening. The first is on Wednesday 23rd July at 12.15 and these run weekly until 27th August. All recitals are free, a voluntary donation is asked for and there is usually a good selection of refreshments. My thanks to all who help in any way.

Lloyd Barnett, Director of Music

Mothers Union

2022 began with a lunch at The Barley Mow. The MU theme for the year was 'Transformation now'. In March Fr Paul led an excellent Quiet Afternoon in Eynesbury Church looking at the northern saints. Jean Underwood hosted the Garden Party in June once again. In July we visited The Stables Christian Centre at Bolnhurst. In July also some members of Brampton MU paid us a visit. The evening began with a stroll around the Riverside Park and ending up in St Neots Church where some of our members were waiting with refreshments and David Rudd gave a guided tour around the building. In our programme of speakers (to whom many thanks), we welcomed Carolyn Shaw on "the work of The Refuge"; Kath Pickering and Jacky Isaac who spoke on "St Neots Hidden Problem and How Debt Advice is Helping to Solve it"; Christian Laughton gave an interesting talk about her visit to Japan; and Ruth New spoke about her role as Diocesan Development Officer for Children and Families. Canon Robert Sibson led the Mary Sumner Day Service in August and also the Deanery Advent Service in December in church. In August, the diocese held a Banner Exhibition in Ely Cathedral, and our banner as well as the original minute book and 2 MU kneelers were on display there. In November Andrea Eckloff decorated a wonderful tree for us as part of the URC Christmas Tree Festival. This tree was on display in the Lady Chapel for our Wave of Prayer service in December, when we prayed for our link diocese and the rest of the world prayed for us. Mothers Union is a global organisation with 4 million members in 84 countries. As well as our meetings we collect necessary items for the Refuge; we raise funds to send needy families on Away From It All (AFIA) holidays; we knit items needed in care homes, hostels and hospitals; we run a Relationships Course for inmates at Littlehey Prison.

In St Neots we usually meet on the 3rd Wednesday in the afternoon during the winter months and on the 1st Thursday in the evening in summer months. All are welcome.

Catherina Griffiths

Thursday Fellowship Bible Study Group

The group meets normally on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month. We have between 12 to 14 people attending on a regular basis and have enjoyed Fellowship with one another for many years.

In 2023 we began to meet at Eynesbury Parish Church, in the little room at the back of the church and accessed from the back. It is easy to get to and doesn't inconvenience other members of the group who used to host the sessions.

We meet to begin at 2pm with a drink and Prayer before we start.

In 2024 I led two LENT courses on 5 consecutive Thursdays – while alongside this – I led the same course on the Friday at the same time. We looked at a Lent Study by Nick Fawcett, called, 'Decisions, Decisions,' The five studies were based on 1] 'A time to Decide;' 2] 'Complex Decisions;' 3] 'Who Decides;' 4] 'Flawed Decisions;' 5] 'Living with Decisions.' This Study helped us to understand how many decisions that Jesus had to make during his time here on earth. 1] His time in the wilderness; 2] How to handle threats against his life;' 3] His decision to drink from the cup offered while in the Garden of Gethsemane.' Jesus

had to face the consequences of his decisions – He understands how hard that can be is for us too!

After Easter we began looking at St John's Gospel, which is very different from the Synoptic gospels. This fourth gospel was written in a different way, for different people, and for different reasons. It has been a real blessing to us all during 2024. We studied chapters 1 to 12 through to October; then began an ADVENT Study, called, 'The Good The Bad & The Ugly (of the Church).' The ADVENT Study is 'The Good,' and we were able to see how Christians throughout history have been able to change the world to be a better place. We began with 1] William Wilberforce; 2] The Earl of Shaftesbury; 3] Florence Nightingale; 4] Nelson Mandela. Nick Fawcett showed us what a force for good, many Christian people have been, in helping to make life better for others.

Chequered as the legacy of the Church is, it points the way towards Christ, and a little less away from him.

After Christmas, we returned to our Study of John's Gospel, chapters 13 to 21; there is so much in these chapters that help us to really see how dedicated Jesus was in doing what God his Father wanted – even to dying for our sins on the cross. It has been the most remarkable journey for most of us.

During Lent 2025, we shall be looking at 'The Ugly of the Church,' again, by Nick Fawcett, which is bound to be interesting, and with much discussion to be had over four weeks leading to Easter.

If you would like to know more – please contact me at 01480-476334 or email me via the parish office. Or catch me after church one morning.

Rosemary Darrington, Group Leader

Church Flower Arrangers

This past year has been very productive and shown different approaches to design. Our team of flower arrangers have excelled themselves once again. Whilst being in church, visitors have commented on the beautiful flowers especially at Harvest and Christmas.

I have started to encourage younger arrangers (with the help of a Mum or Nan) – we had 3 at Christmas! I think this must be pursued.

My grateful thanks to all the arrangers.

Bev Rawlings.

St Neots Handbell Ringers

The team continue to meet weekly on Sunday evenings at 8pm. We ring a variety of music from popular tunes, tunes from shows to popular classics. In February, we joined several other musical groups in a charity concert at Moggerhanger. This involved 2 performances both in the afternoon and evening but we were treated to an excellent day listening to the other groups when we were not playing. We entertained the men's group at Berkley St Methodist Church in October. Another performance in December was at the last meeting of Wednesday welcome at Eaton Socon Church. Unfortunately last minute illness meant that we had to abandon some of the programme but everyone enjoyed singing carols instead. Anyone wishing to learn should contact Catherina Griffiths (393372).

Tower Bell Ringers

Ringling at St Neots has continued with a much reduced band, mostly ringling 6 bells on Friday nights, but this has enabled the learners to get more bell time. The Huntingdon District held a Saturday morning 10 bell practice, and the Ely Diocese also hosted a 10 bell practice on our bells. On another occasion some of the ringers attended the 10 bell practice at Soham. More repairs have been carried out on the clock during the year – the chiming barrel was in desperate need of restoration which meant that the clock was silent for a few weeks in the summer. The louvres in the bell chamber have also been replaced but unfortunately still do not prevent water ingress from several storms towards the end of the year. Only one peal and three quarter peals were rung at St Neots during the year – the latter were often before evening services. Eynesbury bells were rung by 2 different groups of visitors and a single bell tolled for a funeral in March. The bells were also rung prior to the Crib Service on Christmas Eve. As well as ringling for the Christmas services, St Neots bells were rung to welcome the New Year at midnight, a tradition which has lapsed for over 10 years due to lack of ringers available.

We have also had visits from local Beavers and Scouts, who combined a tower tour and ringling demonstration with a tour of the church. We also welcomed visitors to the tower with a talk and ringling demonstration in the summer. Particular thanks to Alban Forster and Dave Griffiths who have done so much to keep ringling going. Alban stepped down as Tower Captain at the AGM in January and handed over the tower keys to James Gamble.

Catherina Griffiths

Ps and Qs

We are a group of like-minded people who meet weekly to do crafts. Many years ago we originally started doing only patchwork and quilting (hence the name), but over time have evolved and now we do knitting, crotchet, embroidery, painting, cross stitch, beading and of course patchwork and quilting.

Val Freeman

Men's Forum Group

This meets once a month usually at the Berkley Street Methodist Church (Members from the Methodist, URC, St Mary's Eaton Socon, and St Mary's St Neots with Eynesbury attending).

Visits

To Nene Valley Railway

To Fullers Mill in Suffolk which was very interesting

Talks by visitors at the Methodist Church

Talk on North Atlantic Steam ships history

Talk and exercises on Yoga/Tai Chi on chairs for beginners.

Talk on St Neots Hand Bells and demo.

Bowls Evening at Gt Barford

Skittles Evening at Gt Barford

Snooker Evening at Conservative Club

Most of these were attended well but we would like more people from the Parish Church as the numbers have dropped.

It only costs £3 for most evenings.

You can contact Derek Wheel or Philip Barrett for details for 2025 programme.

2025 Programme:

Talk Black Cat A428 Bedford to Cambridge A14

Gillian Freedman, on her book about living as a Jew in England.

Lady Hartford Boat Trip.

Bowls at Great Barford.

Talk on St Neots Common

Talk by Liz Davies on History of St Neots in ten objects.

David Roberts, on how to look at the stars.

Snooker evening.

Philip Barrett

Book Group

The group has met regularly to read and discuss a variety of books, borrowed from the library such as *The Silent Companion* by Laura Purcell; *The Whisper Man* by Alex North; *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak; *The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown; *A Terrible Kindness* by Jo Browning Wroe; *A History of the World in 12 Shipwrecks*; *Balancing Act* by Joanna Trollope; *The Ladies Midnight Swimming Club* by Faith Hogan. . It is interesting to note that the books least enjoyed provoked much discussion.

Catherina Griffiths

Saturday Social

Saturday social celebrated its 3rd year in November. At Christmas we were entertained by the choir conducted by Lloyd. This was followed by an anagram quiz of Christmas songs and carols also devised by Lloyd. In September we raised over £300 for McMillan cancer cake day. We are pleased to offer MU space to sell their cards. The numbers have averaged between 15 and 20. Numbers are not as high as previous years, but the circumstance of people attending is changing all the time. Thank you to those who give lifts to enable some to continue to attend. We are very grateful for all those who help in the kitchen especially our regular helper Chris Seward.

Christine Miles and Angie Robertson.

Thursday Food

Thursday Food continues to meet at the Methodist church in Eynesbury every Thursday evening. Volunteer numbers have remained fairly consistent with four teams of five or six who take it in rotation to prepare and cook home-made food for our guests. The volunteers continue to be committed to serving good food and spending time chatting with the guests and getting to know them. Volunteers communicate using a WhatsApp chat and if people need to swap weeks this is usually arranged through this chat.

A social evening for volunteers to get together away from the kitchen was held in early December but numbers were reduced as it was a foul evening weather-wise.

Guest numbers have fluctuated a lot during the last year with a general lowering in numbers, although we still have several regulars.

There are plans to look at how we can advertise better to ensure that those who would benefit know where we are and what we offer.

A huge thank you yet again to all the volunteers who give so generously and cheerfully of their money, talents and time. Catherina Griffiths is one of these volunteers so if you wish to know more, please speak to her.

Jane Gill

Foodbank and Acts435 Report

(Registered Charity Number 1178630)

The Foodbank continued to be very busy – unfortunately the need for our help has not decreased although our continuing aim is to reduce food poverty and the need for foodbanks.

	Oct 24	Oct 23	Nov 24	Nov 23	Dec 24	Dec 23
Stock in - kg	3241	2941	3864	3133	3476	5390
Stock out - kg	2088	2708	2193	2020	5777	6170
People Fed	236	246	241	220	248	279
No of vouchers	103	113	106	105	103	124

Calendar year Number fed Stock in (kg)

2022	2409	32,105
2023	2686	29,425
2024	2709	29,185

We have over 70 volunteers and continue to open four Distribution Centres each week. At Christmas we provided an additional 470 hampers for families in need. We were hugely grateful to St Mary’s School for lending us their out of school club to pack these, as our current warehouse would not have had the space.

We have a new manager – Helen Spencer, a member of the Evangelical Church. She has taken over from Adrienne Dunn who did a brilliant eight years. Helen is doing a marvellous job of getting to know how we work and brings great skills to the role.

We continue to benefit from workers from Citizens’ Advice and many who can help our visitors with their finances and a variety of other concerns.

Donations of food through our supermarket drop boxes, and financial support continue to be most welcome.

Acts435 continues to be a wonderful way to help people in need. Over the last year we posted 21 requests onto the website. They were all met in full and raised a total of £2735 for 21 individuals or families. A wide range of needs were met by funding cookers, school shoes, a sewing machine, replacement locks, a bed etc.

Please look at the website – acts435.org.uk – or speak to me directly if you would like to support this work.

Carol Way

The Friends of St Neots Parish Church

A little update for you all. Our next concert is on Saturday, May 31st in the Parish Church at 7.00pm for 7.30pm when The Wandering Minstrels will present “The World of Gilbert and Sullivan” (songs and scenes from The Savoy Operas). Save the date now! Tickets will be available soon at £15.00 per head. This is the first appearance of The Wandering Minstrels for The Friends, which adds to the variety of entertainment we try to provide for you and the local community.

The net profit from the Jordan Ashman, Percussionist Concert of 5th April 2024 was £1,641.20. Thank you to those who supported this concert and witnessed the amazing talent of Jordan, BBC Young Musician of the Year 2022.

We raise fund to assist in the repair, restoration and improvement of the Parish Church and its churchyard. The PCC has recently requested we provide funds totalling £9,099.00 composing of £2,772 for repair and refurbishment of the tower clock mechanism, and £6,327 for professional investigation of possible beetle issues in the roof (thankfully shown not to be present) and we are delighted to be paying this sum over when drawdown has been made.

We still have in excess of £17,000 to assist in the development of any proposed new servery in the church with additional work relating to the project. Roll on progress!

Finally, the Kings Men, the choral scholars of Kings College, Cambridge, are booked for a return concert on November 15th 2025, so save the date!

Many thanks to the Friends and others for their continued support and membership. New members are very welcome to support our work. (£25.00 subscription)

Bruce Elam