

THE PARISH AND WARD CHURCH OF ST BOTOLPH-WITHOUT-BISHOPSGATE

Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council for the year ending 31 December 2024

Under the Church Representation Rules, the Parochial Church Council ('the PCC' or 'the Council') is required to prepare an Annual Report on its proceedings and on the activities of the parish generally. It is also required to prepare a financial statement for the financial year that gives a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the parish as at the end of the financial year and of its income and expenditure for that period.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

The Parish and Ward Church of St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate is situated in Bishopsgate, in the City of London. It is part of the City of London Deanery, the Two Cities Area and the Diocese of London within the Church of England. The correspondence address is Bishopsgate, London EC2M 3TL. Day-to-day management is delegated to the Rector, with the support of the Churchwardens.

The Verger, Hall and Court Manager is Mr Paul Gibson.

The Church Administrator, PCC Secretary and Parish Clerk is Miss Mhairi Ellis.

Bankers:

Metro Bank, 117-121 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 7PP

Independent Examiner:

Mrs Julie Griggs BSc Hons FCA, Levicks, West Hill, 61 London Road, Maidstone, Kent ME16 8TX

Inspecting Surveyor:

Mr Kevin Stephenson BSc FRICS Dip Proj Man, KSA Property, 33 Broadwick St, London W1F 0DQ

AIMS AND PURPOSES

The Parochial Church Council of St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate has the responsibility of co-operating with the Rector in promoting the whole mission of the church, liturgical, pastoral, educational, evangelistic, social and ecumenical, in the ecclesiastical parish in its care in the City of London. It is also responsible for maintaining a fine (Grade II* Listed) Georgian church building—restored after bomb damage, and most recently refurbished in 2015-17—and the adjacent Church Hall, Churchyard, and Netball/Tennis Court.

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. The PCC maintains an overview of worship and makes suggestions on how our services can involve the many people and groups within our parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through sacrament, music, prayer, and exegesis. To facilitate this work it is important that we maintain the fabric of the church building, and to this end we undertook major refurbishment works during 2015-17; further works including repairs to the stonework of the Tower and an overhaul of the electrics were identified as a result of the 2018 Quinquennial Inspection, and undertaken during 2019, and improvements to the church lighting and electrics took place in 2022-23. A further Quinquennial Inspection took place during 2024 and identified necessary repairs to the stonework of the tower, which are scheduled to take place early in 2025. Sway tests on the bells necessary to complete the tower work, originally intended to be undertaken in 2020, will be done once the tower repairs have been effected. Background work continued throughout 2024 for our major project to rebuild the pipe organ within its historic case – this is reported on in more detail in the Churchwardens' Report on the Fabric.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit, and the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In particular, we try to enable all people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through worship and prayer, and teaching about the Gospel; provision of pastoral care for people living and working in the parish; and missionary and outreach work.

We also have very much in mind the Diocese of London's collective 2030 Vision, with its aim 'for every Londoner to encounter the love of God in Christ' and its themes of Confident Disciples, Compassionate Communities and Creative Growth.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

In another year dominated by news of war and environmental disasters in many countries, and other disruptions at home, we continued to maintain St Botolph's as much as possible as 'a place of calm, sanctuary and God's love in the City'.

We remain proud members of Inclusive Church and believe that the Church should celebrate and affirm every person and does not discriminate in any way. Our 'open door' policy was maintained throughout the year, to ensure a ready welcome to all visitors, with the church open from 7.30 to 5.30, and often longer, every weekday. We continued our work with the homeless community in Bishopsgate and beyond, and a secondary focus on mental wellbeing in the City.

The staff continued to work hard – for the majority of the year, in the Verger's and Administrator's cases, from their remote outposts at home - to ensure that the day-to-day administration of the church, Hall and Court were kept up, and new ideas researched and developed where possible.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

St Botolph's Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England, and operates under the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956 (as amended).

The Council is a charity, previously exempted from registration with the Charity Commission but registered in May 2010 (Charity Number 1135985).

All those who regularly attend our services are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules: members of the PCC are either *ex officio* or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) in accordance with the Rules.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish, including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent.

REPORT ON THE BUSINESS OF THE COUNCIL

During the year the following served as members of the PCC:

Ex-officio members

The Revd David Armstrong (Rector)

Mr Frank Curtiss (Churchwarden)

Mr Alex Coles (Churchwarden)

Mrs Christine Ferris (Deanery Synod representative)

Mr Alex Coles (Deanery Synod representative)

Elected members

Mr Nick Creswick Gough, Mr Simon Davis (to 22 May), Mr Alastair Harris, Ms Wendy Hyde CC (to 22 May), Mr Christopher Lawrance, Mr David Lee, Miss Mary Moore, Mr Bruce Morrison (from 22 May) Mrs Adrienne Slaughter, Ms Chris Watkins

Notes

We are currently permitted to elect nine members to the Council.

The Churchwardens are Joint Treasurers.

The Church Administrator, Mhairi Ellis, also acts as PCC Secretary and Electoral Roll Officer.

The Council has a Standing Committee and a Finance Committee, both including the Rector and Wardens. The Standing Committee meets as necessary between Council meetings, and has power to transact the business of the Council between its meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council. The Finance Committee meets to discuss the Accounts, budget, investments and other financial matters as necessary, and in 2024 met quarterly in advance of PCC meetings.

During 2024 the full Council met for business five times in hybrid mode in person in the Hall or church and by Zoom. Council members who could not be present at meetings were encouraged to ask questions and raise concerns in advance so their voices could be included. The Council was consulted electronically in between meetings as necessary (and the results of such consultations were ratified at the succeeding business meeting).

The Annual Meetings took place on Wednesday 22 May in church.

In addition to the elected members, Mhairi Ellis (Administrator, and Secretary to the PCC) and Paul Gibson (Verger, Hall and Court Manager) attended meetings as appropriate, and presented in advance of meetings background reports on Finance, Fabric, Services, Events and Activities, and other matters as required. The Independent Examiner, Mrs Julie Griggs, attended and addressed the May meeting when the 2023 Accounts were reviewed.

Dates of meetings and attendance

The number of members of the Council during the year was 13 to the APCM on 22 May, and thereafter 12.

Full business meeting, 29 January	<i>Present 11, apologies 2</i>
Full business meeting, 8 May	<i>Present 9, apologies 4</i>
First meeting of the new Council after the APCM, 22 May	<i>Present 10, apologies 2</i>
Full business meeting, 17 July	<i>Present 9, apologies 3</i>
Full business meeting, 30 October	<i>Present 11, apologies 1</i>

The main matters discussed in the course of the year were:

- Fabric and planning matters, including Quinquennial Inspection and subsequent works on tower; organ rebuild project and fundraising options; local planning developments
- Church, Hall and Court running and maintenance, including repair and replacement of Hall lifts and Hall flat roof
- The Good Coffee Kiosk, operating from the Bishopsgate porch of the church
- Homelessness, rough sleeping and mental health issues in the City – liaison with Corporation, Police and charities, Homeless Hubs in the Hall and Clinical Bus
- PCC policies – updated and reviewed during the year as part of a rolling three-year cycle
- Progress on implementation of the recommendations of the Diocese of London Fraud Impact Inquiry Report
- Financial matters, including budget, Accounts, Voluntary Church Rate, Rectory letting, Common Fund and Housing Allowance, salaries and fees, hire charges, banking arrangements
- Charitable giving, including Lent and Advent charities, support of partner churches St Francis at the Engine Room and St Mary's Cable Street, seasonal support for charities including Christian Aid, ABCD Bethlehem, St Mungo's, Beyond Conflict and The Refugee Council
- Services, liturgy and music, including new service books for various seasons of the year; new liturgical textiles; Director of Music's annual report; bellringers' (first) annual report
- IT and communications, including regular communication with parishioners and wider community on various platforms; upgrading of telecommunications and computer equipment
- Staffing and security, including staff work patterns, recruitment of an assistant to alleviate the Administrator's workload, and concerns about caretaker workloads
- Safeguarding matters including Diocesan annual audit
- Mission and outreach, and reinforcing existing relationships with neighbouring organisations and charities including St Botolph's representation on the boards of the Bishopsgate Institute, Central Foundation Schools and the Samuel Butler Foundation, and Fr David's presence and engagement with partner charities and livery companies

The Finance Committee's regular items for discussion at its quarterly meetings included income, expenditure and cashflow, investment valuations and market performance, Rectory income and expenditure, Common Fund, charitable donations, and staffing matters.

Safeguarding

The Council takes seriously its role in the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults: it annually renews its adherence to the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy, and is thus compliant with its duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 in relation to having due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding.

The Council receives safeguarding updates at every business meeting, and the parish safeguarding audit was reviewed during the year. Chris Watkins, the church Safeguarding Officer, undertook further safeguarding training and was in regular contact with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

Data protection

The Rector and Council take seriously their roles as Data Controllers in complying with the protocols for the processing of personal data governed by the Data Protection Act 2018, the 'UK GDPR' which is the retained EU law version of the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679, and other legislation relating to personal data and rights, and the parish is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. The parish's General Privacy Notice is clearly signposted from the website and from staff emails, and consent forms are collected as necessary.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR—OUR MISSION AND ITS PUBLIC BENEFIT

A church open to all

The church is much used and appreciated by people from the surrounding businesses and by commuters from Liverpool Street Station. During 2024 we maintained full opening hours of 7.30am to 5.30pm each weekday, and if the staff are on site for an evening or weekend booking they are often happy to let people enter the church to look around or sit and pray.

The Church Hall, Netball/Tennis Court and Churchyard occupy a central place in the life of many who work around Bishopsgate, and they were all fully used during 2024. Thanks to the ease of booking the Court directly through the website, and the extended booking hours possible with higher levels of caretaker cover, there were record figures for bookings and income. We welcomed many hirers both old and new to the Hall. The Churchyard is a busy thoroughfare as well as a place of rest, reflection and recreation, and we are grateful to the City's Open Spaces team who keep the garden and the Court so well maintained. We see this as the provision of a very useful service to the public—all are welcome on our premises regardless of belief or opinion, and we strive to make everything we do in and around the church and Churchyard accessible to all in the area, including the local homeless community.

Fr David continued to keep in touch with members of the congregation and the wider St Botolph's 'family' through email and phone contact and the monthly newsletter, and many were grateful for the thoughts and prayers of the Church especially in times of sickness and distress. Many Easter cards were sent and appreciatively received, and Christmas cards, with another wonderfully uplifting photograph of the clergy, choir, staff and Freddie the church dog, were circulated to a wide range of friends and contacts.

An active and inclusive church

The Electoral Roll underwent its annual revision in advance of the Annual Meetings on 22 May, and the Roll presented to the APCM held 106 members, all of whom live outside the parish. By the end of the year the number had increased to 109.

The regular pattern of weekly services - Tuesday 8.10 am and 12.10 pm Said Mass, Wednesday 1.10 pm Choral Mass with sermon, Thursday 12.10 pm Said Mass - continued to attract both parishioners and visitors.

The Choral Masses on Wednesdays and Feast Days continued to be livestreamed, along with some externally organised services like weddings and memorial services on request. Fr David and the staff have continued to receive messages of gratitude from those who have appreciated being able to join worship online.

Aside from the full rota of regular services, St Botolph's own 'special' services during the year began with Ash Wednesday when there were three Masses with Imposition of Ashes. A holy Lent culminated in a full programme for Holy Week including additional Said Masses and Choral Mass with Maundy Ceremonies on Maundy Thursday. The now customary non-Eucharistic service on the Wednesday in Holy Week included this year two significant anniversaries, with the Bible Songs and their associated anthems by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford being juxtaposed with poems by G K Chesterton in a programme which was much appreciated.

The Patronal Festival was celebrated in style on 12 June. Fr David was obliged to start the service with apologies for absence: our guest preacher, Canon Daniel Burton, Chair of Action around Bethlehem Children with Disability (ABCD Bethlehem) was unwell; his powerful address was read on his behalf by Alastair Harris, also a trustee of ABCD. Another last-minute absentee was Alderman Kawsar Zaman, who had been due to read the lesson, but who was called away to Court; his place was willingly taken by Ward Deputy Shravan Joshi. We welcomed among the substantial congregation many other representatives of the City Civic including Members of the Ward of Bishopsgate, the Bishopsgate Ward Club and our linked Livery Companies. The collection at the service was for ABCD Bethlehem's emergency appeal to refurbish the Nour Shams rehabilitation centre which had been ransacked during the ongoing conflict. Fr David was joined in leading the service by Fr Andrew Williams and his Curate Fr Keith Jackson, and supported by a good team of servers. Splendid music was provided by Iestyn and the Choir.

Our indefatigable seamstress friend Sue Young had been labouring for many months to produce a completely new set of altar and legilium falls in the four principal liturgical colours, along with a fresh set of fair altar linen. All the new textiles were completed and safely delivered to the church in time for them to be blessed and dedicated for use in St Botolph's at the start of the Patronal service.

Following the service, the clergy cut the special St Botolph Cake, baked and decorated by our friend John Marshall. Caterer Jeff Claxton of Impeccable Taste, never having attempted any Palestinian cooking before, rose magnificently to the challenge with a wonderful spread which was much enjoyed and commented on by all who tried it as everyone chatted in the sunshine in the Churchyard garden. Huge thanks are due to all those mentioned above and the many others who worked so hard behind the scenes to prepare for this very special celebration.

Another joyful event took place on the Feast Day of St Francis, Friday 4 October as animals and their human companions gathered for our annual Animal Blessing Service in greater numbers than in previous years. This service received additional publicity by being linked with the celebration of World Animal Day and advertised on their website, as well as on various listings for animal lovers.

Our December offerings of the Advent Carol Service, the Parish Carol Service, an early evening service of Carols by Candlelight, and the Christmas Eve Family Mass and Crib Blessing, brought many people into church and had many online views. Fr David's Advent theme of 'The Healing of the Nations' proved a striking choice, and the levels of donation for our Advent charities Beyond Conflict and The Refugee Council were higher than in previous years.

The Parish Carol Service took place on Thursday 12 December. The Choir of the Coopers' Company and Coborn School joined forces once again with our own Choir to lead the carol singing; they offered two 'solo' spots each and joined together memorably in a final item. Carol Service readers represented some of St Botolph's varied responsibilities and links, coming from The Coopers' Company and Coborn School, The Firefighters' Company, Bishopsgate Institute, Andaz Hotel, and Bishopsgate Police Station, with the Gospel of the Incarnation being read by Fr Paul Gismondi, Priest-in-Charge at All Hallows on the Wall, the Guild Church in our parish.

December was an extremely full month, with many external organisations booked in for carol services as well as our own Advent and Christmas services. There were so many requests that some of the carol services had to move back into November, necessitating early delivery of the church and Hall trees. In addition, several choirs held their Christmas concerts at St Botolph's with great success.

Our Priest Missioner, Fr Andrew Williams, was able to assist with services monthly throughout the year, and we are most grateful to him, and to other visiting clergy who helped with cover. The Administrator was particularly thankful to be able to call upon the help of visiting clergy when Fr David was suddenly taken ill at the start of the carol service season, spending a great deal of time either in hospital or recovering at home throughout the month of December, although he struggled back to take some of the key carol services. Fr Toby Thomas kindly agreed to look after the Tuesday early morning services, and Frs Peter McGearry and Brian Lewis also helped with a number of services each, backed up by other clergy.

We are also grateful to all those who give generously of their time to play particular roles in regular worship, whether as servers, chalice-bearers, readers, or those taking up the offertory collection or offering a welcome at the door.

Enquiries about baptisms, weddings and marriage blessings were back to a more regular level during the year.

On Sundays, St Botolph's continued to offer the hospitality of its fabric and space to the Ethiopian Lutheran community of Mekane Yesus, who gather for worship in the Hall. From July we also welcomed a new worshipping community, refugees from another City church, the Filipino congregation Christ's Commission Fellowship London, who use the church on Sunday mornings and afternoons, and the Hall for social gathering until the Ethiopians arrive at 3 pm. Towards the end of the year we began to welcome a Muslim group into the Hall for Friday prayers and it was hoped that this would become a more regular arrangement in 2025.

A church supporting music-making for all

St Botolph's has an enviable reputation for the consistent excellence of its musical liturgy. The Council would like to take this opportunity to thank Iestyn Evans, who together with his team of singers and deputy organists has provided such a high standard of music.

Background work continued on the organ rebuild project – this is reported in more detail in the Churchwardens' Fabric Report. The costs of the preliminary stages of this project continue to be covered by grants from the Bishopsgate Church Foundation, and the Council is grateful to the Foundation for this generosity. The PCC agrees with the Director of Music that the new organ will enhance the musical aspirations of the parish and the City at large, as well as St Botolph's desire to develop outreach, both musical and social, deep into the community.

Education is, of course, a priority, and already there is very keen interest in St Botolph's organ rebuild project from London conservatoires including the Royal Academy of Music which has an internationally renowned organ department, and the Guildhall School of Music which has no organs available for teaching, and there would doubtless be interest from the music departments of schools as well. A new organ will open up wider social engagement with the community in the parish and beyond, and help continue the church's mission for generations.

Additional music is brought to our Wednesday services, weddings and occasionally memorial services by our loyal team of bellringers, led by our Tower Captain, John Adams. We were delighted when the team won first place at the Middlesex County Association and London Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers annual striking competition in May. There were many visiting bands of ringers throughout the year.

We were pleased to be able to the splendid acoustics of both church and Hall available to visiting musical groups for concerts, rehearsals and choral workshops – these included not only the many amateur choirs which operate in the City and beyond, but also some of the well-known professional groups such as Siglo de Oro, Tenebrae and Stile Antico.

It has become increasingly appreciated that making music together promotes confidence and is good for individual and collective wellbeing within workplaces. St Botolph's has worked over the years with two organisations which help to get music into workplaces, Music in Offices and City Music Services, and continued in 2024 to facilitate music-makers within local firms by providing a venue for the rehearsal and performance of their in-house choirs and orchestras.

A church working in partnership with others

Close and fruitful liaison continued with associated liveries (the Worshipful Companies of Leathersellers, Coopers, Bowyers, Fan Makers and Firefighters), the Bishopsgate Ward Club, the Bishopsgate Institute, and with our linked regiments the Honourable Artillery Company and the Rifles. The Ward Club used the Hall for their AGM and lunch and other functions, and held their annual carol service followed by a festive lunch in the Hall. The Leathersellers came to church for their Election Day Service in June, and the Bowyers attended for their Master's Day Service in July; both companies held their annual carol services as well. The Coopers came for their Henry Cloker Service in October, as well as attending the Parish Carol Service, joined for the first time by the Firefighters who are now based at Coopers' Hall. The Fan Makers continued to use the Hall for social events. Fr David and the Administrator were honoured to be invited to represent St Botolph's at the June and Christmas gatherings of the London Rifle Brigade Veterans, forging new bonds with these doughty and dignified old soldiers.

We are grateful for our links with, and the moral, financial and corporate support of, all these organisations - as well as that of many local businesses. It can sometimes be difficult for a member of the clergy to gain access to businesses in the parish, but Fr David continued to persevere with local links. Despite this there was a rather disappointing return on Voluntary Church Rate requests in 2024, but we are aware how fluid the business population of the parish is and that everyone is undergoing financial difficulties following the pandemic period. Our thanks go as always to our Voluntary Church Rate Officer, Andy Newman, for his diligence and attention to detail in all aspects of the Rate administration.

We continued to work in collaboration with the City Police, especially the Bishopsgate Station, the City of London Corporation and the Ward of Bishopsgate, with regular liaison with various Corporation departments. The fortnightly Homeless Hubs hosted in our Hall and run jointly by the Corporation, the City Police and homeless agencies remained on a firm footing with substantial financial support, resulting in many homeless people being given accommodation and being able to access other services. The weekly Clinical Bus - the brainchild of former Pc Jason Foster who had been instrumental in setting up the Hubs but now works with homeless people at Hackney Council - is staffed with a GP and nurses and any homeless person can come to be seen; they can be registered without an address and can receive prescriptions.

The provision of packed lunches for those attending the Hub, offered free of charge by the Andaz Hotel, continued throughout the year, and the Coopers' Company continued their financial support for the provision of sleeping bags and other essential items. Andaz and the Coopers had asked what else they could do to help and it was agreed to lay on a Christmas lunch for homeless people on 18 December with Andaz providing the food and another local firm, regular users of the coffee kiosk Icen Risk, serving the guests at the lunch. The Verger made use of a special grant from the Coopers to buy holdalls and fill them with practical items for the guests to take away with them.

The Bishop of London, in planning a City Deanery Day on 14 November, during which she would visit various church projects, asked to come and see our work with the homeless. Fr David and a representative of the Hub met her and explained the provisions we had in place. He also introduced her to some members of our regular homeless community. After this we had the honour of hosting the Deanery Synod for Evening Prayer followed by refreshments and a meeting of the Synod Standing Committee.

Wendy Hyde CC, PCC member until May and sometime Churchwarden, continued to be an enthusiastic and valuable link between St Botolph's and the Corporation, and our thanks go to her for this helpful liaison. In her capacity as Chairman of the Keats House Consultative Committee she was our link between St Botolph's, where the poet was baptised, and those at Keats House planning events commemorating his life and works. Wendy also served as the Chairman of Sculpture in the City, the annual 'urban sculpture park' using the City's streets and iconic buildings as a rotating gallery space. St Botolph's has been involved with Sculpture in the City since its inception as part of the 'Celebrate the City' cultural festival in 2012.

St Botolph's was selected in 2018 as one of the City Churchyards to benefit from the City Churchyards Enhancement Programme, a joint initiative of the Corporation and the Diocese of London. Paul Gibson represented the church as part of the consultation process, and we look forward to hearing more about the plans in due course.

Fr David's *ex-officio* roles on the Boards of the Bishopsgate Institute (now with additional responsibility for the future strategy of the charity), The Central Foundation Schools of London (where he serves on the Investment Committee as well as the main Board), and the Samuel Butler Foundation continued. He is also a board member of the Coopers' Company and Coborn School's Representative Religious Body advising on admission policy. The church's presence in these governance *fora* is an important part of our contribution to our area, and a further example of our acting to enable public benefit.

A church engaging with its community

Our refreshed website and social media pages are regularly updated with the latest news and have continued to attract new people to church. There is a monthly email newsletter to which it is easy for people to subscribe via the website. We publish full lists of services and events monthly online; special services and events are also advertised on A Church Near You and Eventbrite, with postings on the latter proving particularly successful in bringing new congregation members to the Animal Blessing service and carol services and raising awareness of our presence among different demographics. Colourful posters are displayed on exterior and interior noticeboards so those who pass or enter the church can see St Botolph's is an open and active church. The recently designed logo emphasising St Botolph's status as 'a place of sanctuary' has been widely incorporated into our paperwork and communications.

The Good Coffee Kiosk, the ethical takeaway drinks outlet open since September 2021 in the Bishopsgate entrance of St Botolph's, having been temporarily closed from November 2023 for research to be done into how it might operate more profitably, was re-opened in the summer of 2024 with new staff and new products, and soon began to attract regular custom again.

We are aware how lucky we are to have the Hall and Court as additional facilities to offer our community, and it was good to see users coming back to both in greater numbers during the year, although changes in working patterns in the City inevitably continued to have an impact on the way they were both used. The Hall was used by both regular and occasional hirers, including film and television companies and for the first time a season of French theatre. The ability to book and pay for Court use directly through the website resulted in a steady stream of casual bookings, which together with the use by the main evening and lunchtime hirers PowerPlay meant that the Court was operating at nearly full capacity. The Court Manager continued negotiations with the Corporation about essential and long-term maintenance of the Court. All hirers were made welcome by our team of diligent caretakers, supported by our efficient and ethical cleaning firm Clean for Good.

A church that remembers

As a large church St Botolph's is in demand for the memorial services of respected and popular figures from the local banking and insurance communities: more of these took place during 2024. We now have a reputation for delivering memorial services of a consistently excellent standard, although some require demanding levels of administration, and Fr David and the staff have been working on ways to ameliorate this for memorials and other special services.

A particularly memorable memorial service took place in September as members of the Bishopsgate Ward Club, the Musicians' and Loriners' Companies, and representatives of other City institutions gathered for a joint memorial service for two much-loved City figures well known to St Botolph's, Eugenie Maxwell and her husband David Lancaster. Tributes were given by distinguished City figures, and St Botolph's Choir and Iestyn Evans sang and played music by favourite composers of Eugenie and David. A special highlight was the performance of the instrumental piece 'Fragments', commissioned by Eugenie to commemorate a visit of the Musicians' Company to St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace; the performers were members of the Musicians' Company Young Artists Programme, and the piece was introduced by the composer, Adrian Horsewood. Further memories of Eugenie and David were exchanged over sparkling refreshments in the Hall after the service.

St Botolph's holds the memorial to those who have died as a result of receiving contaminated blood, and we have close links with the Haemophilia Society. The Public Inquiry into the use of infected blood, first announced in 2017, has worked hard for the past few years under the indefatigable and sensitive chairmanship of Sir Brian Langstaff, and finally on Monday 20 May his Report was published. Fr David, as a guest of the Haemophilia Society, joined a capacity audience at Westminster Central Hall to hear Sir Brian speak about his findings. Following his impressive and powerful address, there was a 'Reflections' event at which St Botolph's Choir and London Contemporary Voices joined forces to provide the musical elements interspersed between moving video testimony from survivors and relatives of those who have died, and addresses read by actors. The arrangements for this event involved a great deal of additional administration time for Mhairi and Iestyn, with lengthy planning meetings (some including Fr David as well) and hundreds of email exchanges with the organisers; there were also the arrangements which needed to be made for multiple visits to the church and the Memorial by television and other media companies to film in advance of the publication of the Report.

In October we welcomed the Haemophilia Society back to church for their annual Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance for those who have died as a result of the contaminated blood tragedy. This year the congregation was at full capacity as the Infected Blood Inquiry and the report earlier in the year had raised awareness of our national memorial to those who died.

This moving service was closely followed by our own Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls) on 6 November which included the ritual, which many find so helpful, of the solemn reading out of the names of the departed while their relatives light candles in their memory. St Botolph's Choir marked the centenary of the French composer Gabriel Fauré by singing movements of his Requiem Mass at this service.

Later that week came the Honourable Artillery Company's annual Remembrance Service, led by Fr David and the HAC Chaplain, Fr Mark Speeks, and also involving St Botolph's musicians, and the following Monday, 11 November, Fr David and the Railway Chaplain, Michele Ashton, led the Armistice Day Commemoration at Liverpool Street Station. St Botolph's provided musicians to enhance the occasion, and Ben Murphy CC kindly took one of the readings along with members of station staff.

On 4 December, in between the first few carol services, the London Rifle Brigade Veterans attended church for a very moving Page Turning Ceremony at their memorial – it is their and our hope that this will become a more regular occurrence.

A church working charitably at home and abroad

We are grateful that a modest amount of charitable giving was possible in 2024. The PCC is committed to its role in assisting in a small way other charities wherever possible, and in 2024 continued its policy of supporting organisations already linked in some way with us.

We continued our partnership with St Francis at the Engine Room in Tottenham Hale, and as in previous years the support of the Vicar, our Priest Missioner Fr Andrew Williams, was the object of our Lenten collections and almsgiving. As in previous years (when they were seen as Common Fund top-ups) it was agreed to make grants towards parishes less well off: St Francis at the Engine Room and St Mary's Cable Street both received support in this way, at a higher level than in previous years. In addition, grants were made among others to Christian Aid, and to St Mungo's for its work with the homeless. Our Advent charitable donations were divided between Beyond Conflict and The Refugee Council; talks from representatives of the charities at Wednesday services were so moving that the appeal was well supported, and it was agreed that it should be carried over to January to be completed at the Epiphany Choral Mass.

We were pleased to be able to act as agents in the processing of further charitable donations, and also, to be able to offer our premises at greatly discounted rates for the use of local, national and international charities. We continued our close relationship with XLP (the ExCeL Project) based at All Hallows on the Wall in the parish, including offering them use of the Hall at no charge for meetings of their leadership team.

The school which we built in 2012 in the parish of St Barnabas, Songo, Uige, Angola (in conjunction with our former US partner church St Barnabas, Greenwich, CT) continues to overflow with many hundreds of local pupils. During the year we exchanged seasonal greetings with the parish (with the help of Portuguese-speaking translators), and Fr David was pleased to be asked once again to record the Morning Prayer service organised by ALMA (the Angola, London Mozambique Association), the Diocese's link group with our partner dioceses in Lusophone Africa, on the very day in June that our own linked parish was being prayed for across the Diocese of London and beyond. Fr David and Chris Watkins represented St Botolph's at the annual ALMA service on 21 July in St Paul's Cathedral, where the principal guest was Bishop Filomena Estevao of the Diocese of Bom Pastor (Good Shepherd) in Angola, the newest and only female Bishop in Angola and Mozambique.

A church playing its part in the Diocese and beyond

St Botolph's has continued to pay Common Fund – at a significantly higher level as we now have a full-time priest - and so support the wider charitable work of the Diocese. In 2024, as in the previous two years, it was decided to reduce the level of Common Fund contribution after it was noticed that some housing elements appeared to have been double-charged, but our slightly lowered bid was nevertheless accepted with gratitude by the Diocese.

Christine Ferris and Alex Coles continue to represent St Botolph's on the City Deanery Synod. We are grateful to them for their faithful attendance at meetings, and for their report on the Synod's proceedings, presented to the Annual Meeting at the same time as this Report. This provides the PCC with an important link with the wider structures of the Church.

During the year Fr David continued to serve as one of the clergy representatives on the City Deanery Synod Standing Committee, and regularly attended Deanery Synod and Chapter.

St Paul's Cathedral Chapter are the Patrons of St Botolph's, and on Sunday 28 July Fr David preached at the Cathedral at the invitation of the Dean.

St Botolph's once again took part in 'Thy Kingdom Come', the annual Global Week of Prayer from Ascension to Pentecost, in conjunction with the Diocesan initiative '2030 Vision'.

We continued our membership of the Society of St Botolph, an informal linking of all the parishes in the UK and abroad dedicated to our patron saint. One of those churches with which we have long had ties is the one in Iken in Suffolk, the most likely location of St Botolph's monastery at 'Icanho'; we were invited to join their congregation for a celebration of the 1370 years since the establishment of St Botolph's mission.

The network of City church administrators, inaugurated in the early 2000s by Mhairi Ellis when she was Area Dean's Assistant, and more recently enhanced by the addition of administrators from the Westminster Deaneries, continues to allow encouragement and support, assistance in need, and sharing of information across the Two Cities Area. The administrators have a dedicated Chaplain, Fr Jack Noble, Rector of St Giles Cripplegate, who has organised retreats and gatherings for his flock.

A well-staffed church

St Botolph's benefits greatly from knowledgeable and dedicated staff. In all that we do we endeavour to reflect the Christian ethics by which we live, and in this respect we are very fortunate to have staff who openly share the ethos and aims of the church.

Paul Gibson and Mhairi Ellis have contributed greatly to the success of St Botolph's for many years, yet remain innovative and focused in their work. Fr David and the Churchwardens are particularly thankful to the staff for adapting with good grace and flexibility to the unusual and frequently changing working practices which were necessary during the pandemic period and continued thereafter.

Mhairi and Paul came in to St Botolph's at least one day a week, usually on Wednesday, our principal service day, but otherwise worked almost entirely from home, and continued to prove themselves willing and able to take on new roles and learn new skills whilst working in this new hybrid pattern. Regular staff meetings were held by Zoom, and in person at church.

Further IT equipment and support was necessary for these new working patterns, and we are as ever grateful to Andy Newman for his expertise and his willingness to spend additional time visiting St Botolph's remote staff outposts to upgrade and replace equipment and software.

Mhairi and Paul continued during the year to take advantage of online training sessions run by various organisations to extend their knowledge in areas relevant to their work.

Throughout the year the staff deal with many genealogical and historical queries, both from visitors to the church and in enquiries by email and telephone. They are always learning something new about the fascinating buildings in which they have the privilege to work. Occasionally we are offered gifts of historical items relating to the church which are gratefully received and carefully looked after.

Mhairi, having been appointed Parish Clerk of St Botolph's following the resignation of John Hughesdon in 2017, and elected to membership of the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks in 2018, continued to represent St Botolph's at the Company's services and functions.

Our full-time caretaker, Tommy Lacken, continued to work cheerfully and efficiently at church, welcoming hirers and visitors, and remained willing to turn his hand to any new and unusual tasks requested of him. His willingness and enthusiasm has been greatly appreciated by all. He was ably assisted by our two part-time caretakers: Joe Baliddawa covering the weekday afternoon hours and some evening overtime, and Jeff Parkinson covering Sunday daytime hire, Monday evenings and overtime as required. St Botolph's is proud to be a Living Wage Employer, and caretaker pay was once again increased in line with the London Living Wage.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The 2024 financial year has seen deterioration over 2023 in terms of the overall deficit of £42,009 after unrealised investment gains of £37,832 with the corresponding figures in 2023 of an overall surplus of £71,821 after unrealised investment gains of £142,138. The operational deficit before taking into account unrealised investment gains and losses increased in 2024 to £79,841 from £70,317 in 2023 and just £9,055 in 2022. Nevertheless this represents a significant improvement on the dire position in 2020 and came closer to the pre-pandemic levels of 2019. Even so 2024 continued to be a challenging year for the parish notwithstanding increased overall income of £410,177 representing a rise of around 11% on income of £368,751 in 2023 as expenditure increased significantly in 2024 by £50,950 to £490,018 from £439,068 in 2023 as a result of rising inflation and other cost pressures.

Income

In general, parish income was marginally higher in 2024 at £410,177 over the 2023 figure of £368,751 and just above the 2019 pre-pandemic figure of £407,151. Income from commercial activities has continued to recover well and in particular receipts from the Court were £85,693 in 2024 up 3.95% from £82,429 in 2023 which was itself a record high and above the figure of £65,716 in 2022 which was until then the most successful year ever and well above the figure of £27,511 in 2021. Church Hall lettings of £39,114 in 2024 were down 29.4% from £55,409 in 2023, the latter year having had the benefit of an additional £25,000 from the Night Safety Hubs. Overall income from Church Hall lettings, Court receipts and the hire of the church increased modestly by £948 or less than 1% from £148,112 in 2023 to £149,060 in 2024 which was still far above the figure of £92,598 in 2022 and also well above the figure of £115,872 in 2019 which represents a more typical year in the pre-pandemic period.

Income from General Fund donations fell from £48,486 in 2023 by some 11% to £43,314 in 2024 which was still well above the 2019 figure of £39,838. Service collections increased very slightly from £3,514 in 2023 to £3,678 in 2024 but well below the figure of £8,902 in 2019. Other donations fell from £36,686 in 2023 to £32,072 in 2024 which was still well ahead of the figure of £22,813 in 2019. Income tax recovery decreased by 8.5% from £7,124 to £6,565 in 2024 in relation to unrestricted Gift Aid donations. The grant received from the Bishopsgate Church Foundation was £104,907 against £67,919 for 2024 against £36,162 in 2022 to assist with expenditure on various fabric works, the purchase of office equipment, and further preliminary works in the organ rebuild project.

The Parish Voluntary Rate recovered to £23,281 in 2024 from the record low of £16,533 in 2023 against record receipts of £80,856 in 2022, which included some generous one-off large donations from local businesses that were not going to be repeated. Nevertheless the 2024 figure is well behind the range of £30k-£40k received in most years before 2022 which may now be hard to replicate as it is recognised that many other City businesses are also facing major financial challenges. However we will maintain our continuing outreach activities to the local business community and hope that some past generosity will return in 2025.

In contrast, investment income arising from the unrestricted funds was stable rising slightly from £29,255 in 2023 to £29,709. The resilient income distribution policy of the CCLA CBF Investment Fund saw a distribution of 63.03p per unit in 2024 which has served us well, with much the same annual income on a reduced number of units in 2022 and 2023 following the sale of our CCLA property fund holdings in 2021.

Expenditure

The total expenditure figure for 2024 of £490,018 was significantly higher than the corresponding figure of £439,068 in 2023. Rising inflation has affected expenditure and some of the main contributors to rising costs include increased running costs for the Church and the Hall, and Hall maintenance in particular, and staffing after pay increases to take account of inflation.

Overall, total expenditure in 2024 of £490,018 exceeded income of £410,177 giving rise to an operating deficit of £79,841 compared with a smaller operating deficit of £70,317 in 2023. However, unrealised investment gains of £37,832 led to a reduced overall accounting deficit of £42,009.

Investments

Investment performance during 2024 remained volatile with a recovery in most asset classes and particularly in global equities in the final quarter of 2024 as inflation expectations eased and lower interest rates seemed to be approaching, notwithstanding adverse geopolitical circumstances. This was a favourable development for multi asset funds such as the CCLA CBF Church of England Investment Fund in which we invest and which is carefully designed to meet clients' growth and income requirements. This upward market movement was a contributor to our unrealised investment gains over the year.

No investment assets of the parish were actually sold during 2024 so no realised losses or gains were experienced but these favourable tailwinds still led to significant unrealised investment gains of £37,832 with a closing valuation of £1,706,223 for our CCLA investments at the year end against an opening balance of £1,668,391 at the beginning of the year.

The Rectory, whose acquisition was funded by the realisation of investment assets in 2018, is shown in the balance sheet under tangible fixed assets at an original acquisition cost of £655,000, and represents one of the parish's largest individual assets. Rental income was stable and exceeded expenditure during 2024.

The Finance Committee continued to monitor investment performance and conducted a thorough review in 2021 resulting in the production of a new detailed investment policy and some asset allocation changes. In particular it was decided to disinvest the holding in the CCLA CBF Property Fund, which had been subject to suspended trading during 2020, to reinvest in the more liquid CCLA CBF Investment Fund. As noted above, there were significant effects during 2022 to 2024 on investment markets with rising inflation and geopolitical events leading to great volatility with implications for the valuation of investments managed by CCLA and income arising from those investments. However, income distributions from CCLA in 2022 and 2023 were stable at 61.79 per unit and were increased in 2024 to 63.03p per unit in line with expectations and have not been affected by unrealised losses. Our investment policy, strategy and asset allocation will continue to be kept under review in the light of further developments including the recent revision of the Charity Commission's guidance document CC14 on investing charity money.

Significant Post Balance Sheet Events and Going Concern Status

Market turbulence as a result of geopolitical events and macro-economic developments since the year end may affect the capital value of our unrealised investments with CCLA. Our activities as a parish together with our investment strategy and asset allocation are being kept under continuous review in the light of further developments. Rising inflation and increasing costs also pose a challenge. However, notwithstanding these developments, the parish has sufficient reserves to continue operating. Hence the Trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the PCC's ability to continue as a going concern.

Reserves policy

During 2017 the Council approved the Finance Committee's proposal that £70,000, representing three months' salary and essential running costs, should be borne in mind as a basic reserve fund, although it was not necessary to set it aside separately as the General Fund already had substantial reserves in investments which could be readily called upon.

Stewardship, and alternative methods of donation and support

Cash given in service collections and alms boxes remained low, but contactless giving by means of the two static devices in church and QR code increased steadily.

St Botolph's congregation members are encouraged to give regularly if possible by standing order, credit card donation, CAF voucher and other means, and some new regular donations were set up during 2024. Since the launch of the new website it has been very easy for donors to make credit card payments online via the Stripe platform. Gift Aid is reclaimed where applicable.

Change in banking arrangements

Following the change of banks to Metro Bank forced on us in 2022 by the withdrawal from UK banking of Allied Irish Bank, with which St Botolph's had banked since 2007, many problems had been experienced in the running of the new account, but these eased off in 2024. The PCC continued in its desire to pursue alternative banking arrangements.

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for keeping proper accounting records, for taking reasonable steps to safeguard the assets of the Parish and to prevent and detect fraud and other irregularities. The Council confirms that suitable accounting policies have been used and applied consistently, and reasonable and prudent judgements and estimates have been made in the preparation of the financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2024. The Council also confirms that applicable accounting standards have been followed and that the financial statements which appear with this Annual Report have been prepared on a going concern basis.

FR DAVID REFLECTS ON THE YEAR 2024

The past year has, by design and circumstance, focused on strengthening St Botolph's relationships with existing, new and wider-reaching communities. We have significantly increased our engagement with many including the City of London Police, the Honourable Artillery Company, the London Rifles Veterans, Veterans Aid, Liverpool Street personnel, the Coopers', the Bowyers', and the Leathersellers' Companies, the Central Foundation Schools (both Boys' and Girls'), Coopers' Company and Coborn School, the Bishopsgate Ward Club, and in an election year, our elected representatives, the Ward Alderman and Common Councillors. Our involvement in development plans around the church has greatly enhanced our relationships with local businesses especially Landsec, and its tenants, and AXA, as well as the Liverpool Street Station Development Team.

The Bishopsgate Institute Board has had a turbulent year, demanding much of my time. I am pleased to report an encouraging outcome and a new forward-looking Board Chair.

Our commitment to activities with our homeless community has led to more engagement, providing practical help, necessary goods and treats such as our first Homeless Christmas Lunch. Our thanks go to the Coopers for their generous financial support in this work, and to the Andaz Hotel for its generous preparation and provision of food and staff.

We have also strengthened our ecumenical activities, welcoming a new Muslim group to hold Friday Prayers in the Church Hall, establishing a relationship with the Filipino community now worshipping in the church on Sundays, and continuing our friendship with the Ethiopian community. In addition, along with some neighbouring clergy I have been working with Bevis Marks Synagogue, assisting the Rabbi and community with difficulties relating to the Corporation of London Planning Committee.

In terms of worship at St Botolph's itself, I must express my sincere thanks to our cohort of loyal priests who stepped up admirably during my recent illness to provide cover for all our Masses: not one was missed. A special thanks goes to Fr Toby Thomas for taking over responsibility for our 8.10am Tuesday Mass in the Lady Chapel. I have continued in my role mentoring priests and deacons, a member of our congregation exploring his calling to priesthood, and confirmation candidates. All this work goes to further our spiritual, priestly, and Christian presence in the parish and beyond. The priestly profile of the City Deanery has changed recently with retirements, notably at St Margaret Lothbury, St Mary le Bow, and the previous year, St Lawrence Jewry. This is bringing new blood into the area which is welcome. The change makes the role of the Deanery Standing Committee, on which I sit, and the Deanery Chapter, of which I am a member, more important in steering the policies and stance of the Deanery.

We achieve all that we do only because we are a thriving, and faithful community which is witness to our faith and tradition. I thank each one of our congregation and friends who provide their skills, knowledge and time to make our Church, its presence, and mission a success.

In fellowship with Christ and with God's love and blessings, Fr David

OUR THANKS

St Botolph's continues to flourish due to the dedication and support of many people: those who have been named in this report and countless other parishioners, friends and organisations who support us with their resources and their prayers. The Rector, Churchwardens and PCC continue to give thanks to Almighty God for his many mercies in the life of St Botolph's, and for the increase of God's Kingdom in this place.



*The Revd David Armstrong, Rector, Chairman
on behalf of the PCC, May 2025*