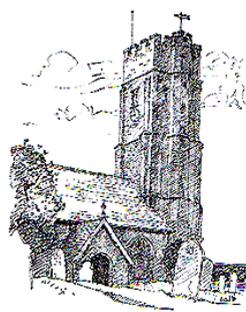


Coast & Mission
Country St Peter's, Stoke Fleming
St Michael's, Strete Community
St Michael's, Blackawton
St Andrew's, East Allington



St Peter's Church Stoke Fleming



Welcome to Revd Matt Gorton and his family.

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

The Parochial Church Council 2023

Priest-in-charge

*Revd Matt Gorton (from August)

**Ex officio*

Churchwarden

*Mr. John Dietz (Health & Safety Officer, Fabric Goods & Ornaments Officer)

Representatives on the Deanery Synod

*Mr. Peter Barker (Reader, Vice Chair and Hon Secretary)

*Mrs. Rosemary Minshall (Safeguarding Officer)

Elected to the Parochial Church Council

Mr. Mike Dodsworth (Hon Treasurer)

Miss Jenny Harris (Reader) Mrs. Sue Walford

Mrs. Heather Stramik Mr. Mike Warner

Word from the Priest-in-charge



God works in mysterious ways. This is such a misused phrase, mainly by people who don't really believe in God. But for this Mission Community you have seen this first hand. Having said goodbye to Alison Shaw in August 2022, the inevitable vacancy loomed large, knowing that these can take at least a year if not longer to resolve; for some it can take several years and attempts to find a suitable candidate. Yet in May 2023 I sat down with representatives of each church and from the Diocese at an interview to appoint me as your new Priest-in-charge. Then on the

1st of August we had a wonderful evening as I was Licensed to this Mission Community.

The first six months have not been without its challenges. Just meeting and starting to understand four distinctly different, unique and wonderful parishes is daunting by itself. This has obviously been made easier by the wonderful team of people in each church who have offered to help and support me as much as is possible. This has been a real blessing.

However, the car crash, seizure and ensuing driving ban have not made this easier, nor the fact that the post is currently part-time, something that doesn't necessarily work well with a job such as this. So, it really has been a mixed bag of blessings and trials. Yet as always, the one constant is God. He has been with us and working through us, and around us.

As we approach the first anniversary of this new season for the Coast & Country Mission Community it is time to start dreaming big and believing for even bigger, this may manifest itself in different ways. Through small changes that most won't notice, people stepping into new roles, new projects starting as well as continuing those things that are already such a blessing to people. The main constant will be our requirement to stay attentive to God, He knows how to grow His Kingdom in these parishes and if we are open to Him and willing to follow His lead, then we can witness this becoming a reality, I truly believe there is so much to be optimistic about and I truly believe God is not done with these Churches or with you, so let's journey together and discover what is next.

Blessings, *Matt*

Support during the Vacancy

From January to July we were still without a vicar and continued to be very grateful for the help of Archdeacon Douglas and a number of retired priests. We offer our sincere thanks to Revd Diana Crook, Revd Simon Franklin, Revd Mark Kichenside and Revd John Corrie, for their support and encouragement, their inspiring services and their willingness to take an occasional wedding or funeral.

Revd Matt Gorton

Revd Matt Gorton was licensed as Priest-in-Charge of the *Coast and Country Mission Community* by Rt Revd James Grier, Bishop of Plymouth, at a well-attended and joyful service at St Andrew's, East Allington, on Tuesday, August 1st. Archdeacon Douglas then duly installed Matt. The service was followed by a delicious hog roast.



Financial Report

Introduction

I'd like to thank Sue, Heather and Rosemary for their backup when I'm not around for "Sunday duties"; also John for his essential help in keeping our Excel spreadsheet in fully working order. We are also very grateful to Shirley and Caroline who, with others, work so hard to ensure the success of our Christmas Tree Festival, enjoyed as always by a large attendance from far and wide.

Church Income & Expenditure

The average congregation size has settled at a consistently lower level (about 20% down) than in pre-Covid times but the Parish Giving Scheme has again helped to minimise the effect on income. Thanks to all those who opt for their



Wedding Flowers.

annual increase in contributions to be inflation-linked, particularly in a year when inflation was higher than we have become used to. Despite this, income this year was £2100 less than 2022, but because expenditure on major items such as fabric repairs has been unusually low, income has exceeded expenditure, for the first time in three years, by £4972. A greater number of weddings also contributed to this and the Christmas Tree Festival made its usual major contribution.

It is also good to note that our charitable giving to various organisations ranging from Devon Historic Churches through, among others, Mary's Meals, a water improvement project in Ghana and Dartmouth Caring to the Seamen's Mission amounted to almost £3000.

Major Maintenance and Enhancement Projects

Essential preparatory work on the updated servery/disabled toilet project (including advice from the Diocesan Advisory Committee, the Church's equivalent of planning permission) has been progressed to the point where tenders are about to be sought for implementation of the project. So far, the cost has come from current reserves, but we expect to need to seek grants from suitable bodies to finalise completion. I'm pleased to report that we seem to have a sufficiently large sum in our investment account to ensure we have at least the likely requisite minimum contribution of our own. It's also likely that the water ingress to the Tower mentioned last year will need attention this year having had little progress during 2023. As always we are grateful to the Friends of St Peters (FOSP) for their active support on projects of this nature.

Financial Planning for 2024

With prevailing interest rates being at their present levels, it's apparent that we need to earn more interest on the funds we have, than we have been doing in 2023. Accordingly we will be closing the Tower account and switching its amount to the Church of England Deposit Account in which most of our current "savings" are currently held. The amount switched will be "reserved" for ongoing spending on the Tower, but this does not justify any longer a separate account. It's likely that a considerable portion of our other current account will also be so invested, as funds can be accessed at two days' notice if needed urgently.

Mike Dodsworth, Hon. Treasurer.



*The Four Evangelists Window,
behind the Priest's stall.*

Churchwarden's Report

New Priest Appointed

In August, the Rev. Matt Gorton was appointed as the new Priest in Charge of the Coast and Country Benefice. He and his family are living at the Rectory here in Stoke Fleming and we are pleased to welcome them to the village.

Church Building Maintenance

In March Paul Daniels, the electrician, carried out the five yearly routine testing of the church electrical installation.

In August Peter Bailey fitted a new frame to the door on to the tower roof from the stone steps. The original frame had decayed in the severe weather conditions occurring at the top of the tower.

Also in August Western Lightning, of Ilsington, Newton Abbot, fitted a lightning conductor to the flagpole, carried out work to the rest of the lightning conductor system, repaired a bearing on the weathervane and replaced two slates in the north west tower louvre.

The tower clock had its annual service by the Cumbria Clock Company.

In December the electrician replaced one of the remaining old light fittings in the North Aisle with a new LED fitting.

Just before Christmas a leak appeared in the water pipe running around the south side of the church to feed the kitchen and toilet. That was repaired but another, much smaller leak remains and is yet to be located.

Throughout the year discussions have been taking place between the PCC, representatives from FOSP and the church architect, Julie Boulby, regarding the proposed servery and alterations to the toilet at the south west corner of the church. Drawings are now being finalised in preparation for applying for faculty permission from the Diocese.

Churchyard

After several years of regularly cutting the grass in the north churchyard, Ian Forsythe has given up the work, and it has now been taken over by Christopher Reeve, the contractor who cuts the grass in the main part of the yard on the south side.

In March, the hedge along the north wall of the yard was cut back, in part paid for by FoSP and partly by the PCC. It had become overgrown with a thick mass



of brambles and the considerable quantity of cut vegetation was removed by volunteers from the *Living Churchyard* group. The area in the north east triangle, formed by the path from the war memorial to the east end of the church, and back to the north east corner, is being looked after and cut by the *Living Churchyard* group.

Organists

Our band of regular organists, Mike Dodsworth, Carol Warboys, Janet Dietz and Karen White, between them continued to play for all our services. We are grateful to Mike for playing on the first Sunday of every month for no charge.

Bellringing

We continue to ring the bells regularly for services and weekly practices, thanks to our faithful team of ringers. We now have eight active regular ringers living in the village.

Unlocking and Locking the Church

Jenny Harris undertakes the unlocking of the church every morning, and Peter and Anne Bailey lock it again in the evenings.

Finally, to anyone who does anything for the church, be it great or small, but who I may have forgotten to mention, please accept my apologies and my sincere thanks.

John Dietz, Churchwarden.

Open the Book

The OtB team (Heather, David, Ruth, Rosemary, Mike and Peter) continued week by week to present dramatized Bible Stories to the whole school assembly on Tuesday mornings, and had great fun doing so. The children all listen, watch and participate so enthusiastically, and lots of them want to respond to Mr Hensby's invitation to comment afterwards.



In June we again presented Year 6 pupils with copies (given by *Wordwise* in Kingsbridge) of the Scripture Union guide to moving to secondary school, *It's Your Move*.



In December Revd Matt and members of the OtB team hosted the School in church as usual for their Christingle Service and gave all the children copies of the latest Bible Society Christmas Booklet, *Festive Fred Finds the Greatest Gift*.

Little Stars

The drop-in group for Mums with Babies or Toddlers has continued to flourish. *Little Stars* meet during term time on Monday mornings, 9-10.30am, in the church. There is now an amazing array of toys for the children, and the toddlers also really appreciate the space the church offers in which to push the toy buggies or play 'hide' in the pews, while their mums relax and chat over a cup of tea or coffee and the team members enjoy joining in the fun.



All aboard with Heather, Peter and Sue.

To celebrate at the end of the school year the Mums organized a splendid picnic in the village playpark on Monday, July 17th. There were cake and pastries as well as coffee and tea. The weather was ideal, sunny but not too hot; there was a big turnout; the children had a great time playing and the adults talking.

Numbers peaked at a dozen children in early September before some of the older children moved on to *Little Lanterns* at School. They, and other older siblings whom we now enjoy seeing for OtB at School, returned in force and with great enthusiasm on a 'non-pupil' day when we had a very lively session with 21 children. The Little Stars Christmas Tree, organized by the Mums, featured gingerbread men designs with the children's faces.



Friends of St Peter's



In early spring the dwarf daffodils alongside the paths to the church gave a wonderful display which was greatly enjoyed; the efforts of the *Living Churchyard Team*, sponsored by FoSP, in planning, procuring and planting the bulbs the previous December were much appreciated. The Team, co-ordinated by Jenny

Hailstone, also did sterling work clearing brambles along the north side of the churchyard and raking up the strimmed grass. Leaving the area unstrimmed during the summer, apart from regularly mowed grass paths, resulted in an eye-catching array of ox-eye daisies.

In April David Curry, the Diocesan expert on churchyards, was the speaker at the



first of what FoSP plans to be a series of 'soirées'. Refreshments were served at the back of church and after a fascinating illustrated talk on '*Managing God's Acre: Why are Churchyards so Important for Wildlife*' many of the audience moved to the *Green Dragon* for supper with a special discount for ticket holders.

A number of surveys of the churchyard fauna and flora were completed (full details available at www.fospstokefleming.com). For instance in September a bat survey used sophisticated recording equipment loaned by the Devon Wildlife Trust, with the results uploaded to a sound identification program run by the British Trust for Ornithology. This revealed the presence of 13 species of bat including several very rare ones such as the Grey Long-eared Bat. In July some of the children in their Forest School lessons made a number of 'bug hotels' and it will be interesting to see how these are colonised. A 'story-telling' seat with a semi-circle of tree trunk seats is actively planned.

Several members of the FoSP Committee have contributed greatly to the ongoing project to create an accessible toilet (complete with baby changing space) using more of the present kitchen, together with a new servery in the back corner of the church; progress has been slow but FoSP hopes that official permission for this, and for the renewal of the churchyard path from the war memorial to Coffin Way, may be forthcoming soon.

Peter Barker

Safeguarding

Both inside St. Peter's Church and in the Porch are posters expressing the safeguarding standards from which church works. Safeguarding is a high priority, and policy and procedures are accessible, regularly updated and related to St. Peter's. Rosemary Minshall is our Safeguarding Officer and everyone knows who she is and how to contact her should the need arise. All our workers have regular training and know what to do if they have any Safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding is raised at every PCC meeting and there have been no reported issues during 2023.

Rosemary Minshall, Safeguarding Officer.

Donation for Earthquake Relief

After special collections at Sunday Services St Peter's donated over £400 through the Disasters Emergency Committee for the relief of earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria.

Special Sundays



St Peter's
Stoke Fleming

Mothers' Sunday

Please join us for a special service on March 19th

Tea and Coffee from 10.30am
Toys out for the *Little Stars*
Short Service at 11am

Small bunches of flowers for *Little Stars* to give their Mums

In the first part of 2023 we celebrated a number of special Sunday Services led by our *Licensed Lay Ministers* ('Readers'), Jenny and Peter. Mothers' Sunday was especially well supported and much enjoyed by all, from grandparents to the smallest toddlers.



St Peter's Church
Stoke Fleming

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY
THE CORONATION
KING CHARLES
III
2023
FAITH AND SERVICE

11am
Sunday May 7th

**CORONATION
Celebration Service**



St Peter's Church
Stoke Fleming

Fathers' Day

Coffee, Croissants, Bacon Rolls
at 10.30am

Fathers' Day Service at 11am
All Dads, Granddads & Children
especially welcome!



Morning Worship
St Peter's Church
Stoke Fleming

June 11th at 11am

Hear how you can help Mums like
Jen and Esther in Malawi.

Collection for
Christian Aid.



Morning Worship
St Peter's Church
Stoke Fleming

Sea Sunday



Supporting
Mission to Seafarers

Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen.

Visit of the Bishop of Plymouth



A large congregation of adults and children enjoyed the Palm Sunday Service led by Bishop James. Little Morwenna was baptized by the bishop and warmly welcomed by the congregation which included several fellow 'Little Stars'. In his address Bishop James referred to *Plymouth Argyle* as well as to the crowds who supported Jesus on Palm Sunday but deserted him on Good Friday. Jesus calls us all to follow him faithfully through the tough

times as well as the good times.

Rogation Day

Once again the weather was fine for our special open air Rogation Service on Sunday, May 13th, led by LLM Jenny Harris. At each location, in church, field, Sanders' garden and churchyard there were readings, hymns and prayers as we thanked God for the wonders of his creation and prayed for farms, gardens, the environment and the community.



Ascension Day

A special service was held at 7pm on Ascension Day, Thursday 18th May, led jointly by our LLMs Jenny Harris and Peter Barker. The congregation which included members of the other 3 churches in the Benefice sat together in the chancel and



much enjoyed singing Ascension Day hymns, accompanied by Janet Dietz on the organ. Afterwards a simple supper of soup, rolls, biscuits, cheese and grapes was served at the back of church



Choral Evensong

A large congregation enjoyed a full Choral Evensong sung by *Chorus Ecclesiae* on Sunday June 25th. Licensed Lay Minister Jenny Harris led the service, Janet Dietz was the organist and the choir of over 20 was conducted by Ian Curror.

Harvest Festival

Revd Matt led the Harvest Service on October 1st. The lunch afterwards was much enjoyed and gave parishioners a chance to get to know the Gorton family as well as each other.

We would love you to join us for the
Harvest
Festival Service
and/or
Thanksgiving Lunch
at
St Peter's Church
on
Sunday 1st October

11am Harvest Service.
12noon Harvest Lunch at the back of Church.




Royal Avenue Gardens Fundraiser

We had a good day in Dartmouth on 11th August raising some £575. Many thanks to all who helped or contributed.

Coffee Morning

A coffee morning in aid of St Peter's was held at the Stoke Lodge Hotel on 9th November. Attendance was not large, but there was a lovely relaxed atmosphere and a great opportunity for much appreciated conversations. Our heartfelt thanks go to the Mayer family and all at Stoke Lodge.



Remembrance Sunday

After the usual Remembrance Sunday Service in church, Revd Matt led the wreath layers and congregation (undeterred by the damp weather) to the War Memorial, where a short service had already been held at 11am on Armistice Day itself, when senior children from the School planted memorial crosses in the banks beside the path.



Photos by Barry Morris.

Christmas Tree Festival



The 2023 Christmas Tree Festival was held once again in early December and saw 25 sponsored trees, 737 visitors and raised £2,200 in total. This was to support *Shelterbox*, this year's chosen Charity, and we understand that

Rotary generously agreed to match fund the amount given to *Shelterbox*. St Peter's Church also received £1,100. There were approximately thirty requests for a card machine as less people seemed to be carrying cash and I am hopeful that the PCC will be able to provide one next year to generate much needed revenue for the upcoming Church projects.

The Prayer Tree was hugely colourful from the first day due to the efforts of the Stoke Fleming Primary School who prepared their wishes and prayers in advance and brought them along on the opening day.

Shelterbox provided a very striking presentation which included an actual *Shelterbox* with all essentials which are so important to people in need throughout the World. Great support was received from Rotary members who were on hand throughout the festival to answer any *Shelterbox* related questions visitors may have had. Sadly, Shirley, having worked so hard, was unable to attend due to being unwell and was sorely missed!



As well as the 737 visitors, I would like to thank everyone for their help in staging the festival this year. Whatever you have done and however big or small...it is hugely appreciated. I would like to add my personal thanks for all the kindness and support you have shown me this year in Shirley's absence.

I am already looking forward to the 17th Christmas Tree Festival which will be held from Friday, 13th December to Sunday, 15th December 2024. I wonder, will the sponsors be able to top their amazing efforts from this year?

Caroline Martin