

THE PARISH OF BICESTER WITH CAVERSFIELD

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES IN 2025

1. STATUTORY REPORTS

A. FABRIC REPORT 2025

It is the legal responsibility of the churchwardens to produce an annual Fabric Report to the APCM. The report covers the condition of the fabric of the churches as well as the accuracy of church's property as listed in the Church Inventory and Terrier. This ensures that the Church and all its property are properly secured and maintained.

ST EDBURG'S CHURCH, BICESTER

The Church is the only Grade I listed building in Bicester. The Major Works Committee holds responsibility for progressing any significant work on the fabric as well as the on-going re-ordering of the church.

2025 saw issues with the heating system within the Church with the boiler leaking CO gases. The result being that the heating system had to be disabled. Repairs to the system were completed before the very cold weather took hold.

We reported in the 2024 Fabric Report we had a new accessible ramp installed by our North door. Throughout 2025 this has resulted in numerous comments on how much easier and user friendly the main entrance to the Church has become.

On-going maintenance is undertaken by skilled volunteers, with paid contractors as required. This keeps the fabric in good repair and allows us to plan for more major repairs. The churchwardens are very grateful for this vital assistance.

The Archdeacon's inspection was scheduled for late in 2025, however with the change in the Area Dean it was postponed to January 2026. The result of the inspection was extremely favourable with only two minor issues being raised.

The plans for 2026 are to replace the cupboards in the tower area and to install a platform and steps at the entrance door.

The church owns 55.41% of a house on the Kingsmere estate with the diocese owning the other 44.59%. This house is currently rented through the Diocese, from which some revenue is received by St Edburg's Church.

The inventory and terrier continue to be updated with any changes.

ST LAURENCE'S CHURCH, CAVERSFIELD

The Grade II* listed church of St Laurence, Caversfield is used for two regular services every month as well as special services at certain festivals.

The church was added to the Heritage at Risk Register in late 2018. It is in an isolated position on the busy B4100, so access remains a serious challenge for the church's sustainability – delivering a safe access into the churchyard is key to safeguarding the church building in the long term. The only utility is electricity as there is no gas, water or sewage; heating is by unfixed oil-filled electric radiators.

In 2025, our priority was to repair, refurbish and replace the damaged glazing and the Victorian casement windows, which had significantly deteriorated. With a grant from the Diocese of Oxford for £10,528 and monies from the Trebble legacy, this work has been completed. 8 metal casement windows have been refurbished or replaced (depending on the condition of the window) and reglazed, the damaged glazing in the chancel & nave windows has been repaired and the external ironwork has been refurbished.

We continue to work through the recommendations of the 2022 Quinquennial Inspection Report as funds allow.

In 2026, we are keen to explore alternative heating options as the oil-filled radiators are inefficient and ineffective, as well as pursuing options for an eco-toilet in the churchyard.

Work to maintain the churchyard and to manage the flora & fauna to support a healthy ecosystem continues to be done by volunteers on a regular basis to ensure the overall condition of the churchyard is maintained and improved.

Adrian Balshaw, Ian Cribbes (Churchwardens) & Tina Shaw (Deputy)

B. BICESTER & ISIP DEANERY SYNOD REPORT 2025

During 2025, Deanery Synod met on three occasions (April, June, and November), continuing to support the shared life, mission, and administration of our churches across the deanery. Representatives from Bicester with Caversfield are Laurie Ekins, Christopher Young, and Tina Shaw, with Tina Shaw also serving as Lay Chair of the Deanery Synod.

Leadership and Ministry

The year saw significant developments in clergy leadership. Progress has been made in filling vacancies, notably the appointment of the Revd Cortney Dale as Team Rector in Ray Valley later in the year. Work continues regarding the vacancies in the Cherwell Valley Benefice (CVB) and in the Shelswell Benefice, with interviews and planning ongoing into 2026. A key transition also took place in November, when the Revd Peter Wright was licensed as Area Dean, following the faithful service of the Revd Gareth Miller over seven years. Revd Sarah Mortimer also joined the leadership team as Associate Area Dean.

Mission and Ministry with Children and Families

A major area of encouragement has been ministry among children, young people, and families. The deanery has been recognised at diocesan level for good practice, particularly in

relation to Holiday Clubs and strategic planning. In summer 2025, three Holiday Clubs were successfully held across the deanery, alongside ongoing initiatives such as “Fun Day Fridays” and the “Cherish” project.

The development of the “Lighthouse” project in Bicester has been especially significant, fostering ongoing relationships among children and families. Planning is already underway for further expansion in 2026.

Finance and Parish Share

Financially, the deanery has remained relatively stable, though challenges persist. Parish Share contributions reached key targets during the year, ensuring receipt of the diocesan rebate, however, at year end 93.2% of Parish Share was paid, with a shortfall of £29,129.

The deanery continues to encourage timely payments, especially with a 4% increase in Parish Share for 2026. Investment funds remain modest but stable, and careful stewardship continues to be emphasised.

Buildings, Environment, and Community Engagement

There has been encouraging progress in building projects and community engagement. Notably, Wendlebury completed a significant refurbishment project with external funding support, demonstrating the importance of linking building development with mission objectives.

Environmental work continues through the Eco-Church programme, with increasing participation across benefices. Local initiatives, including Pilgrim Paths walks and community events, have strengthened connections between churches and their wider communities.

Worship and Parish Life

Across the deanery, churches have reported encouraging signs of growth and engagement, particularly at major festivals such as Easter. Creative initiatives—ranging from outdoor services and school partnerships to special events and installations—have helped broaden participation. At the same time, some parishes continue to face challenges, including financial pressures and sustaining regular worship patterns.

Administration and Support

The role of Deanery Administrator continues to be reviewed, with adjustments made to working hours and funding arrangements. A fuller evaluation is planned for 2026 to ensure the role best supports the needs of the deanery.

Conclusion

Overall, 2025 has been a year of both transition and encouragement. While challenges remain—particularly around finance, clergy vacancies, and sustainability—there are clear signs of growth in mission, especially among children and families, and a continued commitment to collaborative ministry across the deanery. The Synod looks ahead to 2026 with hope, building on these foundations. *Christopher Young, Laurie Ekins, Tina Shaw*

2. SUMMARY OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES 2025

'Encounter' at Kingsmere

After a year's hiatus, the Bicester Ministry Team restarted a weekly Sunday afternoon service at St Edburg's Upper School. Our aim was to create an informal act of worship welcoming to families with children, with a weekly game adding to the relaxed feel.

A team from St Edburg's has planted and is running the congregation, which is proving popular and beginning to grow, benefitting from good links with St Edburg's School. The average attendance to date is 14 adults and 4 children.

Easter Sunday was a highlight, attended by 22 adults and 12 children, who enjoyed an Easter Egg hunt before the service.

The next step for Encounter is to establish a focused leadership team.

Revd Sam Mortimer



Major Works Committee

The plans for a revamp of the tower area had been drawn up, with work expected early in 2026.

The following aspects were considered during the year:

- Audio / Visual upgrade:
 - The systems were installed many years ago and technology has vastly improved in recent years. It was agreed that an upgrade to these systems would be beneficial.
- Lighting System upgrade:
 - At present operation of the lighting system is restricted to pre-set areas thereby limiting dedicated lighting, particularly in the south aisle. It was agreed that this would be investigated.
- Solar Panels:
 - With the ongoing rise in energy costs and in keeping with the move to net zero the fitting of solar panels on areas of the Church roof was discussed. St Mary Magdalene Church in Woodstock have recently fitted solar panels to their Church and have offered to assist in any application we decide to make. It was agreed that this would be investigated.
- CCTV:
 - A proposal was raised regarding the installation of CCTV to cover the external doors of the Church. It was agreed that this would be investigated.

Thank you to all the members of the Major Works Committee for their ongoing efforts throughout 2025.

Ian Cribbes, Chair – MWC



St Edburg's with Caversfield Safeguarding

A bit of a sideways start to this year's report with the news in August that a third party supplier to the recommended DBS verifying company we use had suffered a data hack meaning that some of our congregations data had been leaked, Those affected were made aware and the diocese is now in the process of changing to a new DBS verifier service.

Christine Styles stepped down after many years acting as the Parish DBS verifier. We were very grateful for all her hard work.

We continued to be in correspondence with the Diocese Safeguarding team this year who are invariably helpful and prompt with advice.

(Richard Brown, PSO)



Children, Families and Young People (Tapestry Ministry team)

Family Ministry report for 2025

In 2025 the Family Ministry Team (Tapestry Team) was supported by Jane Clements, Alison Birch, Kev Hayes, Andrew Anderson-Gear, Lindsey Anderson-Gear, Rev Peter Wright and led by James Killen. We were joined by Rev Sam from January.

The team meets monthly, to pray, reflect and plan Family Ministry for the St Edburg's and Kingsmere communities, serving God to discern, show and build God's kingdom within the community.

After pausing Messy Church in 2024, which took place at St Edburg's School, Rev Sam led discernment and planning to commence a new weekly service 'Encounter' from October 2025.

OUR SERVICES AND MINISTRY

Stay and Play

Fridays, 9.30 - 11.30 (term time only); Kingsmere Community Centre. For mums, dads and grandparents looking after babies, toddler and pre-school children.

Toys are laid out in the large hall and refreshments are served during the whole of the session with children's snacks (chopped apple and banana, and raisins) served halfway through the morning. There is always a craft activity. At 11am we call for tidy up time and shortly afterwards every enjoys a short session of nursery rhymes which always includes the Family Prayer.

Average attendance is around 22 adults and 25 children. For our session just before Christmas when Santa visited, we had 40 + adults and 50 children. Each child received a present from Santa.

As with most church activities we couldn't survive without our volunteers so many thanks in 2025 to Ray, Sarah-Jane, Andrew, Lindsey, Faith, Honor, Sandra, Sam, Kev and James.

If you are interested in helping, roles include manual jobs (getting out tables, chairs and toys and tidying away), helping with refreshments in the kitchen, organising the craft activities, welcoming; please speak to Alison Birch.

Café Church

After a successful beginning in 2024, our monthly Café Church continued to offer a more informal all-age worship style, supported by the Worship Band and a Refreshment Team (serving fresh pastries each month). Taking place on the second Sunday each month, Café Church seeks to offer an accessible way into the life of our church and through 2025 we saw a slow, but steady growth in those attending. There are adults and children attending who we only see at this service. In June an Agape Meal for Pentecost was explored and in December Café Church was replaced by Christingle in the Trees (Christmas tree Festival weekend).

Children's Church

Children's Church has continued to run this year, operating on the 1st and 3rd Sundays in the month when the Sung Eucharist services are held in church, and with a break for the summer holiday. Numbers of children have remained low (between 2 and 7 each week), although 12 children were on the register during the year. Several of the attendees are enthusiastic regulars. Each session includes a craft activity, often a game, a song and prayer and a main teaching/story element. The theme of each week follows the lectionary, so that both children and adults in church are linked to the same texts.

The sessions have 2 facilitators and would benefit from more consistent help to allow for absence etc.

Baptism Preparation Team

It would be easy to focus this report on the continued reduction in the numbers of families seeking baptism. However, the Baptism Team (Andrew & Lindsey Anderson-Gear, Adrian Balshaw, Alison Birch and James Killen) continue to celebrate that in 2025 **we supported 35 children who were baptised (of which 6 were aged 5-17) and 60 parents. We offered 4 Saturday morning Preparation Sessions** for our families and a big thank you to Honor Hollis for providing important refreshment support for these events. We continue to see a consistent number of families returning with their second or third child and a number of multiple baptisms within one family.

From the feedback we receive from our families, the team have a real sense that we are doing something right and important and we receive as much from engaging in this ministry as the families. We have seen a steady, if small, flow of families coming from Baptism prep and then attending Stay & Play and vice versa. We have been told that our Preparation process is seen as 'best practice' across the Diocese.

A key priority for 2026 is to develop some new resources to promote and support families exploring baptism.

Lighthouse

This year we ran our first Lighthouse Holiday Club, following a presentation from the CEO of Lighthouse Central at a Deanery 'Children, Young People and Families' morning. The aim of Lighthouse is 'for children to encounter God in a fun-filled setting'. Lighthouse Bicester was then set up as a charity, with support from Lighthouse Central, and a Board of Trustees was appointed, which included the Rector. The Trustees were grateful to Bicester with Caversfield PCC which agreed to provide funding.

Volunteers came from a number of churches (mostly from St Edburg's and St Laurence's), with answers to prayer in key roles, including Main Stage, Sports, Craft, Technical support, Site Management, SEND provision etc. 35 volunteers worked during the week-long club, with 57 children participating. The volunteers included teenage 'Lamplighters', who provided great back-up and were excellent role models.

The club ran for a week during the August holiday, from 9.30 – 1pm each day, at St Edburg's Lower School site on Kingsmere. A great deal of support was provided by Lighthouse Central including with themes, teaching and mainstage material, technical support for registration and CRB checks and T-shirts for volunteers etc. The moral support of LC was also crucial. The whole week was a huge success and encouraged the Trustees to offer it again for the following year.

Additional Services and Ministry

Big Family Tea Party - For a fourth year we invited all those families we have had some contact with through our various family ministry activities to our Big Family Tea party – taking place July 6th. We were encouraged with a vastly increased number turning up with 30 adults and 28 children taking part. Most of these were Stay & Play and Baptism families along with some of our regular families and children.

Easter Egg Hunt – Easter Day, this remains a popular service, welcoming Families prior to the main 10.30am service.

In December 2025 we hosted our now regular '**Carols on Kingsmere**', an outdoor carol service followed by refreshments in partnership with Kingsmere Residents' Association. We had the Bicester Concert Band to support, and this year we had around 50 to 70 adults and children.

St Edburg's Crib Service – at 4pm on Christmas Eve, which has been the long-standing time for our Family Service at St Edburg's. We continued with a more interactive Crib Service, with a full church and wonderful feedback.

Summary

Our service pattern continues to offer opportunities for families to gather for worship. In December 2025 James Killen handed back the leadership of the team to Andrew Anderson Gear.



St. Edburg's Choir

The choir has continued to sing at all the Sunday Eucharist and All-age Communion services, main Festivals, Civic and occasional services as requested, for Rev Sam's installation service, the Confirmation service, Advent Carols and Nine Lessons and Carols. Some of us sang at the concert for "Maggie's" in memory of Meg, one of our choir members, and we also sang carols at the CTF and for the Masonic Lodge Christmas party. We did take August off, giving everyone a well-earned break. We have sung for two weddings at St. Mary's, Launton, for Ken Goatley's funeral, and we were privileged to be able to sing for the funeral of Mary Roe, a past and much-loved choir member, and for the funeral of Firefighter Martyn Sadler. We thank all those singers from the wider Benefice and the Shelswell Benefice who joined us for both these services.

Our numbers have remained stable. Colin Cockshaw left us to move to Suffolk. For most services we are able to have a choir of twelve. New singers are always welcome to come along and rehearse with us on Saturday mornings. Our repertoire has continued to expand during the year to include more challenging anthems and chants. Members have also benefitted by attending a RSCM workshop for an Evening Service at Christchurch Oxford.

We thank our wonderful organist, Tim, and Michael and Diana, who have also played for us during the year, and I thank everyone in the choir, who continue to work together so brilliantly to enable us all to sing to the best of our ability and to the Glory of God.



Worship Group 2025

The Worship Group continues to take part in two services per month plus other special services e.g. Confirmation.

At Cafe Church (2nd Sunday), the group plays all the music including some background worship songs during the activity. At the 4th Sunday All-age communion service, we lead two of the song slots plus a communion song with the choir leading the other hymns.

Alison Birch leads the group and chooses the songs according to the service themes. Around 4 new songs a year are introduced but the main aim of the songs chosen are that they are singable by everyone.

We are fortunate enough to have musicians playing bass guitar, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, keyboard, a cajon and occasional drums, along with two/three vocalists. However, not everyone is available to play/sing at every service, so we always look out for new group members. If you have any musical talents, please don't hide them from us but come and chat to see what you can do.



Sacristan's report

Over the course of the year the Sacristan was involved in around about 120 different services: midweek communion services, many involving the school children; quiet 8 o'clock

said Communion; the 10.30am Sunday Morning Services; great Christian Festivals of Christmas – midnight communion; and Easter Day – Sunrise service at 5.30am! As well as special services such as the Confirmation.

One of the jobs of the Sacristan is to make sure that there are enough wafers, wine and candles, and that the altar linen is clean and appropriate colours are used for the services according to the Church's calendar. We have been extremely fortunate this last year to have had a kind donation of a matching burse and veil for our green set. This is the set used during the period from the end of Epiphany to the start of Lent and all the Sundays in the Trinity season, from the Sunday after Trinity until All Saints' Day.

I am very grateful for the support of certain people. Sandra continues to keep the linen used in the Communion services washed and ironed. Our two intrepid 'full time' servers – Clifford and Penny, are there to act as the Crucifer and server at the Communion Services and special Services. Penny Adamson helps me midweek if I cannot be there. I would also like to thank Lami and Ire who serve on the fourth Sunday of the month at the 'All-age Service'. I thank them all for their support and help.

If you would like to be a server or crucifer, training is given, and you would be very welcome.

Charlotte Kingston



Mothers' Union report

At St Edburg's Church we are very fortunate to have two branches associated with the Church. Bicester, St Edburg's meets each month on the third Wednesday afternoon in the Church. Bicester Area Branch meets every month on the second Tuesday evening in one of the members' homes.

Our theme for this year was Join In, Join Us. During the year we have discussions, thought provoking meetings, quizzes and speakers. Some of the speakers we have had this year included our LLM John Rodgers who talked about the MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) and another of our LLMs, Roger Winson who led a very thoughtful Bible Study at the start of Lent.

During the year we support the Diocesan Charities and the World-wide Charities. There was the annual Coffee morning in August which raised money for AFIA (Away From It All) which enables some families who would never get a holiday to have a break. We support the literacy appeal to help children and mothers in some countries in Africa to learn to read. We collect toothpastes, toothbrushes, shower gels, deodorants and single use razors for the Ronald McDonald house at the JR hospital Oxford. Some of us went to visit the house and we saw where the families stay while their child is in the hospital being treated. We also collect toiletries for the Foodbank in Bicester as well as food contributions.

We also attend various Diocesan and Deanery events. Four of our members were able to attend the Canterbury Provincial Gathering which was held in Oxford.

One of the things that the Mothers' Union does is pray. Many of our members cannot get out or do as much as they used to do, but they can pray. The world has many problems – some political, some economical, some caused by climate change. There is unrest, unhappiness, starvation, wars and refugees. We cannot change the world by ourselves, but together and with all our prayers we can make a difference. All our members spend time both at meetings and at home praying for families, for people in difficulties and for the world around us.

If you would like to become a member of the Mothers' Union or come along to a meeting to find out more, you will be welcomed.

Charlotte Kingston



Christmas Tree Festival

December 2025 saw the 14th year of our Christmas Tree Festival, and it was once again a very successful weekend. Our trees 'sold out' in record time with a wide range of local organisations and businesses sponsoring and decorating the 75 trees. The Prayer and Remembrance trees, including one for children, were particularly significant with around 850 prayer requests and memorial messages written by visitors, each of which will be prayed for by the Team over the course of 2026.

Our programme of live musical entertainment was developed with two café style evenings of local singers and musicians made possible through a new partnership with 'Bicester Live'. Our fabulous cakes and refreshments were as popular as ever, as was the small bar opened each evening.

Visitor numbers were up 14% on 2024 with 4018 people coming through the doors between the Friday morning and Sunday afternoon. The *Carols in the Trees* service on Sunday evening, which closes the Festival, was also up in attendance with 246 people taking part (34% up on the previous year). Along with the many positive comments received from the public, these numbers confirm how important the Festival has become for our community as a calendar fixture in the run-up to Christmas.

All this would not be possible without a very dedicated small planning team and the more than 60 people from St Edburg's, St Laurence's and the village churches who volunteered over the weekend. Once again, we were indebted to soldiers from Bicester Garrison who came to help with set up.

Extraordinarily, a surplus was made for church funds of over £8,700.



Events Committee

The purpose of the Events Committee at St Edburg's is twofold:

1. To facilitate church fellowship, by planning and holding a variety of entertaining events which build the social life of the church.
2. To make the church widely available, in a relaxed and welcoming manner, to those in the community who are not members of our church.

In 2025, our programme of events included:

- Quiz Nights
- Easter Bonnet competition and tea
- Summer Barbecue with quiz games (16th August)
- Tea Dance in the church hall (18th October)
- Augmented Coffee Morning, organised by the coffee morning team (1st November)

- On 1st March the Events Committee, together with the Choir, organised a Concert for Maggie's Place (the unit in the grounds of the Churchill Hospital which supports cancer patients.) This concert was a wish of former member of St Edburg's, Meg Thomas, who benefitted from Maggie's Place. Thanks to the support from many members of the congregation, both as supporters and donors, and especially the choir, a substantial sum was raised. Meg's family attended.

Later in the year the committee may ask members of the church to contribute ideas for future social events, for consideration and possible implementation.

I extend grateful thanks to committee members Jane Clements, Gill Cornes, Maureen Langston, Peggy Adamson and Sarah-Jane Douglas for their ideas, and for their commitment and drive. Each member plays a pivotal role in making these events a success. Grateful thanks also to Mike Cornes and Matthew Clements for their help and support at all events.

Marina O'Callaghan

