

The Abbey Church
of
St Mary and St Helena
Elstow



Annual Reports
to
APCM

2008/2009

The Rector's Report



I am pleased to report that Elstow Abbey is in good repair and is in good heart, during the year the following has happened that I would like to report about.

- At the church's Annual Parish Meeting Mr Colin Albon is planning to stand down after 35 years of service. I would like to personally thank Colin for his long and faithful service to me and to Richard Huband; John Tibbs; Michael Norton and Peter Hartley. All very different characters and Colin has shown immense loyalty and commitment to each. He has, over these years stepped in and helped with many a difficult situation. His legal and administrative knowledge will be sorely missed. I hope that he and Rosemary have a well-deserved break from Elstow Abbey and that we see them in a couple of weeks time!
- Rosemary has also served the Church with immense commitment and insight. She has consistently carried out so many tasks behind the scenes that have helped the

smooth running of this church e.g. wedding registers, wedding returns, bereavement care; soup; baptismal forms to name but a few, and with her home Communion and visiting gifts she will also be very sorely missed.

- I cannot move on without also saying a big thank you to Barbara, as Co Churchwarden, with all that she gives of her time to Elstow Abbey Church and to John and Tracey Hinson and their tireless contributions. I am also leaving out so many others who deserve a great deal of thanks, year on year.
- The service time changes with the increased Sunday School and new service books seems to have made a big difference in the welcome and consistency of Sunday worship.
- The electricity system and sound system has been updated; also the front gates of the Abbey are very soon to be replaced.
- The Abbey seems to attract many weddings and christenings, and thankfully fewer funerals of late! We remember with fondness Betty Finch, Norman Thompson, Rene Mallett and many others from the Church family who have passed away over the past year.

Worship

For me leading Christmas and Easter worship is an immense privilege, and I am delighted that the services were well attended. We have enjoyed a month of Baptisms during the main services, which were very special. I found Harvest especially moving as many parts of the community came together to try and bring back the traditional decorations, this was also well attended with the brownies becoming a regular feature.

Food has to feature highly in our worship and we have celebrated Murial's birthday in Bedford Hospital; Chistian Aid Week; Harvest; the Hog Roast; Christmas, most nights, 'and Holy

Communion every Sunday with the spiritual food. For me Christianity is very strongly linked to the sharing of a meal together. I would like to thank the catering team for the tremendous efforts they have all made in providing for so many events over the last year –here's to 2009!

Fresh Expressions of Church

- The May Festival last year was a wonderful event at bringing many of the community together and it is my hope that on May 9th 2009 it will also be very well received.
- The Youth work within the Benefice continues to flourish with the help of Captain David Wells and his team of volunteers.
- On Wednesdays between 11.30am and 1pm in the Church Hall we provide soup for older members of the parish and it attracts many but we could cope with more if folk could pass it on.
- Mums and Toddlers on a Monday attract between 20-30 mums per week. My thanks continue to go to Rita Haines; Barbara Routledge and Michelle Tuck.
- Could 2009 be the time to start an Old Time Dance Group in the Hall?
- I have been very proud of the commitment to young people over the last 12 months. Highlights were the Summer Holiday Club which again was excellent and attracted an average of 60 children each day; the Bonfire Night, with our second attempt at preparing the bonfire after the first one caught alight; the Panto, which took even more nagging this year than ever before, such that I finally decided that I needed to offer to be the front end of the cow!

The Future – a few highlights:

- On 21st June at 3pm in the Abbey there is planned a FEPOW service after a gap of 7 years.
- In July the Women's Institute will be celebrating their 90th Anniversary, with a major flower festival and a joint service to celebrate all that they have contributed to the Bedford Community.
- Scripture Union are taking over the Abbey and Hall to work with many of the local schools in providing up to date religious education.
- The next Holiday Club; a Trip to Taizé and the Parish Holiday will keep us busy in August!
- The New Church Hall is very nearly ready for the application for planning. I do hope that I achieve this before I turn 45!
- I am planning a trip to Ireland in 2010, as I think after this year's we will have had enough of the Isle of Wight!

Thank you:

- Thank you for keeping the Abbey beautifully maintained, clean, with beautiful flowers and decorations. Thanks also goes to those who have helped with the fund raising events i.e. the May Festival; Christmas Bazaar; Winter Table Top; and the Car Washing Experience!
- My next community project is a Christmas Tree lit on the Moot Hall Green, I didn't manage it for last Christmas, but I started nagging the Parish Council from early February so I am hopeful for 2010!

Rev Jeremy Crocker
Team Rector Elstow Abbey

THE CHURCHWARDENS REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE FABRIC AND CONTENTS OF ELSTOW ABBEY.

APRIL 2009



The report this year is helped knowing that Bruce Deacon carried out his quinquennial inspection last May. His report shows the Abbey to be in good order with the majority of the fabric in good repair. There are a few areas that need attention. Repairs to some of the lead work and the re-pointing to sundry areas of masonry and in particular the South Clerestory wall, repairs to the churchyard boundary walls and in the longer term the rebuilding of some of the defective leaded light glazing. Decorating the cast iron rainwater pipes and the gilding of the clock

are also longer-term projects. The replacement of the wooden churchyard gates is in hand; this is thanks to the bequest of the late and much missed Norman Thompson. The framework of the gates is complete in the carpenter's workshop and they should be ready for hanging in a few weeks time.

The churchyard wall on the left as you enter the main gates has received a considerable blow and some of the gravestones behind it have been pushed off the wall. The wall is in urgent need of repair and the Parochial Church Council should consider making an insurance claim for this work as quickly as possible and before next of kin complain about the damage. The work will need to be carried out by a competent mason under the supervision of the Abbey architect.

The contents appear to be satisfactory showing no major damage. The carpet has suffered during the year as have the pew cushions by the careless use of candles and the distribution of wax which is so difficult to remove. The brasses in the south aisle should be protected better and the old carpet over them removed. William Lack who repaired the brasses in 1995 made mention that we were causing damage to these historic brasses by covering them with carpet, we did subsequently protect them with movable posts and a cord barrier but have now reverted to the carpet, thus causing damage. It is suggested that the carpet be binned so that the temptation to use it is removed and the posts and cord reinstated. There are also some lights that are not working including that over the pulpit and the altar lights, the latter of which need rewiring. The Abbey wiring was tested in the autumn last year and a certificate was issued.

Some concern was expressed over the Easter period about the safety of the chairs in the church hall, those we obtained from a local school are not suitable for the use of older people, they are too small for use at the tables and several are unstable. If an accident occurs then the Parochial Church Council will be liable, the sensible thing would be to dispose of them as quickly as possible.

As usual we are grateful to those who care for the Abbey and the contents and in particular our gallant band of cleaners who vacuum and dust and tidy. This year sees the retirement of three of our regular cleaners and if the Abbey is to remain looking cared for then further help is needed.

Colin Albon

BEREAVEMENT CARE



The co-ordinator of the Bereavement team is notified of a person's death and next of kin, the information is followed up by -:

- A card given by the clergy when making the funeral arrangements.
- A telephone call.
- A card sent at "years mind".

There has been very little response from this system although several visits have been made.

The most positive feed backs have come from the Wednesday soup lunch, the annual service of remembrance on the first Sunday in November and the Easter Lilies.

The Wednesday soup lunch offers the opportunity for people to chat and enjoy each other's company and we also invite visitors to come and join us.

The Bereavement Team have had the opportunity of attending lectures at St. John's, Moggerhanger which have been funded by the Parochial Church Council.

Rosemary Albon

MISSIONARY GIVING



A tenth of our income is given each year to charities that are involved in third world missionary work. We also give to local charities.

Our aim is to give to local charities that provide care for the homeless, domestic abuse, the disabled, prisons and children.

In our third world giving we hope to provide help with those who have practical needs to enable them to maintain their own independence.

Our average giving is £5,000.00 per annum which is divided into two thirds to main charities in the third world and one third into five local charities.

Rosemary Albon

Christian Aid

Each year we hold a door-to-door collection around the parish of Elstow for Christian Aid. This is during Christian Aid Week and is from 10th – 16th May 2009. It is carried out by a number of volunteers and means that people not connected with the Church are able to donate cash.



Sheila Batiuk

Pastoral Care



As a church family we care for our members who, for many reasons are not able to come to Church. We keep in touch and visit them in their homes. We are often asked if we would take them Holy Communion, which for us is a privilege to share Communion with them in their homes.

When a person has to go into hospital we visit them and with the Church's prayers and support hope we make them feel that they are not alone and that we are there to help in any way we can.

Sometimes when someone is no longer able to look after themselves and need extra help and has to go into a residential or nursing home we continue to visit and support them with our friendship and love on behalf of the Church Family.

The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that come to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship.

Barbara Routledge

Bellringers

We ring for evensong on Sundays and for weddings when required. Practice nights Friday 8-9pm when we are joined by ringers from other towers.

We enter the Bedford District Striking Contest and have won the competition for "Well struck Rounds" on several occasions. The bells were augmented from 5 bells to six in 1908 and the 100th peel in 100 years was rung on 17th December 2008 – the 1st being rung on 17th Decemebr 1908.

Anyone interested in learning to ring – aged 11 years upwards – should come to practice night on a Friday.



Miriam Clark

Churches Together in South Bedford

Representatives from a variety of Churches in South Bedford meet four times a year in order to co-ordinate activities, be aware of what others are doing and generally attempt to work together. The Churches include Anglican, Baptist, Elstow Bunyan Christian Fellowship, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Salvation Army. Members meet together for prayer also. A recent meeting included a fish and chip supper.

Sheila Batiuk

THE WEDNESDAY BIBLE GROUP



The **Wednesday Bible Group** started in September 2007, and arose out of the several Alpha Courses that had been organised at St Mary's Cardington by Irene Mills, and at which I assisted. Some of those who had participated in Alpha expressed disappointment that the course was finishing; they had become used to both regular Bible Study and the fellowship of a small group, and were keen to continue. Both Irene and myself felt that there should be a follow up to Alpha and after considering another set course, finally decided that we preferred the freedom of planning our own Bible Study.

Our starting point was to be St John's Gospel, which differs from the Synoptic Gospels in that it explains the meaning behind what Jesus said and did and tells us about the great mystery that Jesus is fully God and fully man - a necessary grounding for any Bible student.

Irene and I lead the group on alternate weeks. We meet together beforehand to read through the Scriptures and discuss those passages which might give rise to difficulties. We ourselves have learned an awful lot from the research we have done in preparing the studies. Each member of the group has the opportunity to read part of the Scripture, and then the leader will attempt to explain any verses not easily understood. We meet problem texts head on, laying before the group the different schools of thought, thus promoting discussion. We like to let Scripture explain Scripture, and all references in other parts of the Bible are followed up. Every member of the group is now confident when finding their way to the different books of the Bible. Everyone is free to take part in the discussions or not, there is no pressure. To make the study as informative and interesting as possible, we make use of maps, genealogy charts, diagrams etc., and notes are provided.

We have recently completed the Acts of the Apostles, and by demand from the group we have now started Genesis. There is surprise at how much the Old Testament features in the New, and they want to learn more. Genesis is not an easy book to study due to its highly controversial nature, but nevertheless, we feel that the group is now strong enough to deal with this.

There are currently eight regular members and we would welcome anyone wishing to join us. **We meet every Wednesday in the Centenary Room, St Mary's Church, Cardington, at 8.00pm.** We start off with tea/coffee a biscuit and a chat. We then pray for the Lord to lead and guide us in the understanding of His Word. We also pray for those in the Benefice in need of healing and for any others facing problems at this time. The meeting finishes at 9.30pm with a short prayer and the Grace.

We have a social evening every now and then, when members of the group bring their spouse or a friend.

Ann Knight

Readership.

I have now been in training for Readership for a little under two years and by the time you read this will hopefully be well into my 6th topic for study. So far I have studied Mark's Gospel, the Book of Amos and looked at the development of the Communion Service from 1st Century AD to the modern day. I have also argued all sides of the Creation / Evolution / Big Bang debate and looked at the achievements of Martin Luther *et al* during and after the Reformation. I have recently had a change of Tutor and am keen to move on with other topics as fast as possible. – Topic 6 is the whole of 2 Corinthians.

For each topic I have to produce a 3000 word essay plus a personal and theological reflection on what I have learned plus a practical demonstration of the subject. The practical “bit” can be a service plan I have prepared, a magazine article, a sermon or anything else I can produce to show the examiner that I have benefitted from the study and can put the knowledge to a practical use. Because I have to formally show what people are thinking about what I am doing I have to ask, on each topic, for feedback. If you are in Church and I approach you for comments on a sermon please don't be alarmed. I am the one being tested – not you! If you think what I have said is rubbish I need to know! If you haven't understood what I have said it is bound to be my fault by not explaining something properly and I need to know!

Many thanks to everyone who has provided feedback so far!

Hopefully it will soon be 6 down only 8 more to go!

John Hinson
Reader in Training

Youth Workshop



We have held our monthly Youth workshops for more than ten years. The registers show a vast number of young people have shared in the activities with us. As the children have grown up, moved on and the next generation arrived, we became increasingly aware that the format that we had always used so successfully in the past was becoming a little tired and not as effective.

We have spent the last few months trying out new ideas in the workshops, trying to bring them more into line with the holiday club activities that have proved so popular with the children. We have maintained the craft activities, but have added games, Christian teaching and music to our Saturday afternoon sessions and have tried to link the workshop more closely with the service on the next day.

It is our intention to launch a “new and improved” workshop after the Holiday club this year. Hopefully we will be able to maintain links made with the children of the community during that week and build on the teaching they receive. We are very keen to use the workshop to encourage families to attend the Youth service by including aspects of the children's work and singing some of the songs in both workshop and service.

Tracey Hinson

Youth Service

Between us Tracey and I have been involved in the Youth Services at Elstow for some 20 years. The format of the services has become quite well established but we still like to throw in the odd surprise or two to keep the congregation on their toes. In one service, where the theme was getting more people involved in Church life, the Hinsons left *en masse* to see what would happen. Sorry if you were worried for us!

The services are, deliberately very relaxed and informal – I love it when you heckle from the pews – I blame Tracey’s dodgy United Reformed Church background. It is absolutely essential to us that people must be happy in their worship and that children should be encouraged at every opportunity. For the “non churched” it is an easy service to come to as we do not have any rituals or “traditions” that are hard to follow. Even though the emphasis is on having a bit of fun during the worship it is always bible based and there is a “preaching” slot that is aimed at such a level that everyone both young and old can get something from it.

The services have always benefitted from the talents of the band members – Ken on Drums, Marie on violin or flute, Claire on recorder and Tessa on Piano. They have also had to put up with Tracey and I on guitars – sorry again.

Our future plans are to involve more people in the planning and delivery of the services so that new life will be breathed into the church family here at Elstow. (And so we can go off for a weekend without feeling guilty)

John Hinson

Elstow Abbey Holiday Club 2008 Junior Heroes

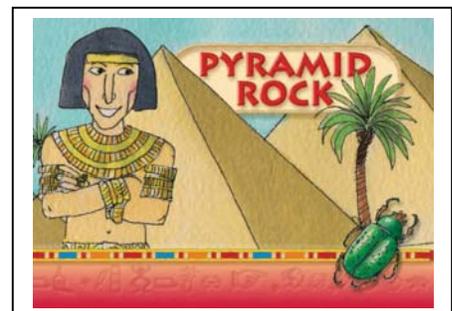


If you had entered the church hall during the first week in August 2008, you would have been forgiven for thinking that you had stepped into a comic book. We created our version of Gotham city; complete with “Batty” Batman and “Betty” Batgirl. Over the week more than seventy children learnt about the greatest superhero of all – Jesus Christ. Superman flew in regularly and we all learnt how to become Superheroes for Jesus.

As leaders we faced our worst fear – the weather and learnt that rain was not the disaster we dreaded, but a minor inconvenience.

We ended the week with a special service to say Thank you to all our helpers for their hard work and to give prizes to all our Junior Heroes. We packed away our costumes and restored order to the hall – and started to plan for...

....the Holiday club 2009 when we will be going on a journey to the land of the Pharaohs. We pray for inspiration as we make our plans and the strength and stamina (and bravery) to carry them through. We pray for leaders to come forward to support and help, and the money to make it all happen. And of course we pray for the children of our community, who we want to reach out to. We ask for your prayers and encouragement as we begin plans for our fourth (and biggest yet) Holiday club



Tracey Hinson

Sunday School



The Sunday school has benefitted from the service time adjustment, with regular, appropriate teaching for our younger church members. Families know that there will be something happening at Elstow for them on almost every Sunday at 10am. We have three groups, with anything up to 15 children attending. Margaret, Rita and I rely on the Scripture Union "Light" resources for material to use, but are increasingly aware that the ideas are often repetitive and do not always fit with the readings set in the lectionary used in the service. We are seeking other resources.

We look forward to having a bigger hall – the noise generated and the activities suggested do not always lend themselves to such cramped accommodation. Working with the Church children is such a privilege. It can be frustrating, very demanding and sometimes exhausting but never boring. We (I) never have enough time to do all the things we would like to accomplish, but we pray that the seeds that we sow in the children of today will bear fruit as they move into adulthood.

Tracey Hinson

Youth and Community Worker's Report.

This is now my second year as Youth and Community worker for the Benefice of Elstow (Part-time). It has been a good year with encouraging signs in the growth of Children and Young People. I try to be involved in the life of all three churches in the Benefice. This involves helping out at church events such as sales and fund raising events, visiting and running Sunday Schools, helping at the monthly workshop at Elstow, playing a villain in the pantomime, occasionally leading and preaching in church. However since last year I have been involved in the following projects.

- A Weekly Youth Club based in Elstow. (A Weekly after School Club for Children based in Barford Ave.
- Summer Holiday Clubs in Elstow and Cardington and at St Michael's Barford Avenue.
- Working alongside the Borough Youth Service, to start a youth club in Shortstown Village.
- Running a Youth Alpha course for the benefit of the Youngsters that are in our churches.

The Benefice Youth club



In Elstow the youth Club runs every Wednesday. We have around fifteen to twenty youngsters each week, aged between nine and fifteen years. One of the joys of this club is that, although it generally meets at Elstow it involves young people from ALL the churches in the Benefice and several others who are not members of the churches. The club is open to all young people. We have a varied programme, from playing football, to treasure hunts night hikes, beetle drives, and games evenings. A lot of what we do seems to involve food! This year the young people selected two charities (Cancer Research and Keech Cottage) and we have been raising money for them by sales and car washes and we raised £132.

We even slept one night in the graveyard. Although not much sleep happened.

On January 7th we launched the Junior Youth Club, which is for Youngsters between the ages of 8 and 11. It runs earlier on Wednesday evening before the senior group and the two groups cross over for half an hour for a tuck shop. We did this to give the younger members an opportunity to enjoy activities at the Youth Club without the older members overshadowing them. Also it gives the older members a chance to enjoy activities which are more mature and engage their interest. This change has meant our leadership team is stretched and for some activities we run as joint clubs, but it seems to be working. We have also had joint activities with the Elstow Brownies pack. The target for the coming year is to get the young people more involved in the running of their club.

St Michaels and the Tuesday Club

We started "Tuesday Club up at St Michael's in April 2008. We had twenty-six children on the first day. The club is for five to ten year olds. The Children come from the locality around the Church. For the first hour we give them drinks and biscuits and they play games and do crafts. In the last half an hour, we give them some fruit, then I tell them a Bible Story and they do a worksheet.

Last February half term we ran a Holiday Club at St Michael's Church called "The Victory Crew", The teaching material was especially written by me, to tie in with the Trafalgar story but also to tell the children about the biblical characters who all had important sea journeys. Twenty children aged 5 to 12 years attended the club and a good time was had by all. The target for the coming year is to try and make links between the successful children's work and the Sunday worship at St Michael's



Youth Alpha



Youth Alpha ran at my Cottage on Monday evenings from January to March this year. The aim was to provide an opportunity for young people to explore their faith and grow as Christians. In the end six youngsters came to the course. Like the adult Alpha course we always started with meal together then we would spend time thinking through an aspect of the Christian faith from "Who was Jesus?", to "What is the Church?". It was great to see the enthusiasm that the young people had for their faith and in later weeks we always ended with prayer.

Some of those who came will be confirmed later on in June. During last summer I was involved with "Junior Heroes" at Elstow and "Starship Discovery" at Cardington. Both holiday clubs attracted a good number of children and young people. Also I have, as part of my ministry in the Cardington Parish, been helping with the setting up of a youth club by the Borough Youth Service in Shortstown. In order to do this youth service has insisted in me becoming one of their voluntary leaders. This has meant me being CRB checked by them and being involved in their on-going training. Before the summer the Youngsters were involved in a drum workshop for the Bedford River Festival. Since the summer, I have run a series of drama workshops in the Club. Unfortunately the Club runs on a Wednesday afternoon, so I have to dash from Shortstown to Elstow every week.

Youth and Children's work does not just happen, it involves people giving up time and effort to run these activities. None of these groups would be possible without the help, leadership and encouragement from those volunteers that give up their time, often sacrificially, on a regular basis, I wish to use this report to thank them. I would also like to challenge you to be involved, by praying for the work, be encouraging the helpers and by volunteering yourself.

David Wells

Parish Holiday



2008 saw a return visit of the Elstow benefice (and others) to the Isle of Wight. Staying once again in Sundown we soon felt “back home” and relaxed into the week. The Carlton Hotel is about 10 yards from the beach and with most of the rooms facing the sea it is idyllic.

The staff at the hotel allow us plenty of slack and we take over the dining room – o a part of it – each night.

We compete with the bingo and visiting performers and stage our own quiz night, games night and talent show. There is a sandcastle competition almost nightly visits to the pier and by the

end of the week Jeremy can tell you where the best chip shop is located.

The week ends with a communion service for us all.

It is a great opportunity to spend time with each other away from the pressures of our normal busy lives. The week has been booked for 2009 and next year Jeremy is keen to get us over the seas to Ireland.

John Hinson

Pantomime 2009

Following the critically dismissed *Snow White and the 7 Gnomes* in 2008 Alastair Laverty was persuaded to pick up the reins and gallop along with *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Being a drama teacher he was not worried that he didn't have a “Jack” and so “Jackie and her Beanstalk” was born.

Scenery was colourful (and tall) and held in place with about 2 miles of sticky tape, two chairs and a piano. The beanstalk grew thanks to 7 miles of ribbon and heaven knows how many helium balloons.

The dame's dress was made of bin bags and will be

on sale in London Fashion week shortly. The jokes were awful (oh yes they were) David Wells was the wicked baron (and enjoyed himself far too much yelling at the kids) and Jeremy played the front end of the cow. He would formally like to apologise to Alastair who was the back end but they are at least talking to one another now.

On a serious note, it was a great afternoon. The entire cast excelled themselves and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. This is all part of the new idea of “Church” which isn't confined to formal worship but tries to reach out to all people in the community. It is certainly something that all of the kids will remember for many years.

It appears that the life of a director is not quite three score years and ten. No director has yet made it to a second year. A word of warning, Jeremy is already talking about “Next year”.....

John Hinson



CHOIR – MUSIC – ORGANISTS

CHOIR

- In this past year I have split the choir into two distinct bodies.

JUNIOR CHOIR

- A junior choir made up currently of 7 girls who all have some music reading ability. They have their own choir practice for thirty minutes before the adults join them. This enables me to spend time improving their singing ability and as well as building a team spirit and an element of fun and free thinking that I believe is essential to developing their talents.
- I have appointed three senior head girls who are responsible for keeping things in order, ensuring hymn boards are done and that all the choir have everything they should have for each service. The head girls take it in turns to lead the choir into the Abbey.

ADULT CHOIR

- This choir is made up of 6 women and two men plus three mothers of the junior choir who augment the choir at Christmas, Holy Week, Easter and Weddings.
- The adults join the junior choir for a further 45 minutes, which follows straight on from the Junior practice.
- The whole choir has benefited from this new practice plan, with improved singing and general leading of services.

ORGANISTS

- I continue to be ably supported by a team of excellent organists for which I am most grateful.

Dr John Crookall

- John has now stepped down from regular rota duties, but will still play for the occasional wedding, funeral and very occasional Sunday service from time to time. I am very grateful to the support John has given me in my 2 ½ years here

Michael Hammond

- Michael gives unstinting support and regularly plays at the Family Communion and Evensong once a month usually the first Sunday of the month.
- I was particularly grateful for the Michael stepping into the breach and arranging that the Kingshott school chamber choir and the Hitchin Town Concert Band Ensemble laying on an excellent pre Christmas concert where the Kempston Musical Society had done so for many years

Bill Fudge

- Bill stepped up to help when John became ill in the year before my arrival. Bill who plays for one service a month will be stepping down from the rota in July. Again I appreciate the support he has given me.

Sue Sims

- Organist at Flitwick Parish Church – Regularly plays at one evensong a month.

Stephen Chilvers

- Previous Director of Music at Elstow Abbey over 30 years ago. Steve helps me with Evensongs, weddings and funerals. He has moved from Olney to Tranfiguration Church Kempston after 20 years at Olney Parish Church.

Tessa Wood

- Well known as the pianist at the Young Peoples' service. Now playing at Mattins and from July the fourth Sunday 11.15am Communion service.

THE ORGAN

- Thanks to The Friends of Elstow Abbey who have spent £2000 to carry out essential work which was beginning to effect the playing and overall performance of the organ. More work needs to be carried out costs awaited from William Johnson



MUSIC FESTIVAL

I helped the Friends of Elstow Abbey organise and hold their first ever Music Festival across the winter, which realised over £1000 towards the costs spent on the organ. This consisted of four concerts from an organ recital to three choirs including a brass band ensemble with one of the choirs.

ORGAN TUITION

- Two people are currently having tuition. Amy Lammin a junior member of the choir has recently started organ tuition that runs alongside her piano tuition.
- Tessa Wood a highly accomplished pianist and musician is currently studying the rudiments of organ playing with me as part of her role playing at Sunday services.

Stephen McDonald
Director of Music.

The Friends of Elstow Abbey

"In May 2008 I was elected as Chairman of the Trustees of Elstow Abbey following the retirement of Colin Albon.

We needed to raise some funds for organ repairs, so we decided to run the first ever Elstow Music Festival with 4 different concerts through the Winter Season. Our first concert, The Flitwick Singers was held on Saturday 1 October, but was unfortunately not well attended, partly because of the dreadful weather, and also because it was at half term. Our Christmas Concert on 1 December was performed by the Kingshott School Choir and Hitchin Concert Brass Ensemble and was a great success. In January we had the Bedfordshire Organists Association performing and on 28 February the Luton Male Voice Choir. In total we raised £1,000 and the concerts were all excellent, but we could have made more money if there had been a better attendance.

Sadly Colin and Rosemary Albon have now decided to retire after many years' service and they will be sorely missed. Also Derek Norman plans to retire in 2010. So we are looking for some new blood, and in particular someone to take on the role of Membership Secretary. If anyone with access to a computer would be willing to take this role on, please contact Lynne Faulkner or Jeremy Crocker.

The Flitwick Singers have agreed to return to the Abbey on Saturday 16 May at 7.30pm, so we hope you will all put the date in your diaries. Also there will be a special Family Organ Workshop Day 11am - 4pm on Saturday 13 June as part of the Bedford Jersey Arts Festival. "

Lynne Faulkner

Christmas 2009

Christmas is a very special time for the church.

For me, Christmas starts at the beginning of advent with the Christingle service. This year we had a full church and raised over £113 for the work of the Children's Society.

The excitement builds through December for all ages with parties for the "Mums and Toddlers", Youth Group, Workshop Children and Wednesday Soup Group.

The Youth Group went Carol singing to Elstow Lodge, the post office and around Bunyan's Mead (we might have visited both Pubs too!) taking the true meaning out into our community.

The Crib service, on Christmas Eve helps us to remember the true meaning of Christmas, and proved once again to be one of the highlights of the Christmas services, as the children re-enacted the Christmas story.



The traditional Nine Lessons and Carol service took us back to the Bible and we heard again the story of the birth of Jesus and his place in God's plan for mankind. The church was full and looked stunning in the candlelight.

Whilst we would like the church to be full every Sunday, we should be thankful that at the significant times in the Church's calendar, people are still aware of the importance of their Christian faith and want to join us in worship.

Tracey Hinson

Churchyard

We are very fortunate to have a beautiful churchyard for people to visit where they can remember their loved ones. Our thanks must go to Tony and Margaret who have looked after it so well for so many years, helped by Joe Dicks. Recently this major upkeep has become an onerous task and so as a PCC we have looked at other ways to manage the area and maintain the tranquility of the churchyard. The Parish Council are supporting the PCC by paying to have the grass in the older, more difficult areas of the churchyard cut. We are setting up a Young Offenders Project, whereby young people who have been sentenced to do community service are able to put back something into the community. Margaret and Tony also have plans to convert some of the new cemetery into a wildlife area – our own "mini-Eden"

Other Activities

Mothers and Toddlers
Prayer Group
Stewardship Group