

St Thomas, Wells with the Horringtons

Minutes of the meeting of the Parochial Church Council held on

Wednesday 30th July 2025 in the Community Room

Present: Revd. Claire Towns (Chair), Katie Steadman-Towns, Judy Penhaligon, Gill Tucker, Chris Jenkins, Ann Edmonds, Michaela Cross, David Kennett, Charlie Sutton, John Samarpi, Ian Ames-White, Mike Tolley, Christina Baron

Apologies: Barbara Calverley, Rachel Thomas

No PCC meeting was held in June as there were not enough members able to be present.

1. Opening Prayer

Ann opened the meeting with prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

As above.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 28th May 2025

It was unanimously agreed that the minutes be signed as a correct record.

4. Matters arising

4.1 Lone Working for Administrator – Chris has purchased a doorbell with a loudspeaker and a monitor. Once installed, they would allow Caroline to have the door locked whilst working. Chris will continue to research this.

4.2 Church Telephone – Chris is still chasing. Barbara offered to help (which was appreciated) but as Chris is the nominated person for St Thomas, he will persist. Telephone contracts (with BT) run until early 2029, so a fee for exiting was given as c£4,000. Chris will continue progressing this and the PCC will further consider whether it's worth paying the exit fee to save money in the long run.

4.3 Survey of Hall - Chris located two surveyors from RCIS. One surveyor suggested the hall would be listed as a commercial premises and in this instance, a survey would cost £1,100. The other surveyor said there is a possibility of asbestos and if that were the case, it would be better to knock the hall down and start again. Chris will speak to an architect to ascertain which direction to go with the hall. Concerns expressed generally re level of asbestos and potential cost of its removal.

4.4 Chalice Assistant Training - Katie, John, Barbara, Christina and Ann have been trained and a rota has been drawn up for these volunteers, starting from 27th July 2025.

5. Prayers for next meeting

Gill volunteered.

6. Hannam legacy update

£50,000 cheque received and paid in. According to the solicitors there is still a final small amount to come, but they don't currently know how much or when.

7. Financial Update inc. Treasurer role

Christina suggested spending some of the legacy on outreach, for example a Youth Worker or Family Worker to increase congregation.

Claire suggested PCC needed a Planned Giving/Stewardship Secretary for the PCC - they would be responsible for encouraging more giving and monitoring levels of donations.

NatWest access for Judy, Chris, Caroline and Ian – in the process of being granted. Will allow access to the online account.

Chris asked whether Fiona can obtain details of what has been donated via the Sum Up (card) machine. Ian will ask Fiona and report back.

The remainder of the notes in Section 7 come directly from Ian:

Financial Summary:

You have summary sheets for May & June and you will see that we are still running on or around a £3,000 deficit per month. So, we're effectively running a deficit budget.

Bank Balances are also on the sheet.

A new Account has been set up with CCL to hold the Pye Legacy of £252,987. This will attract interest at currently 3.75%. Interest will be paid directly into the account of approx. £9,500 per year. This is available to be used in the running of St. Thomas.

Full monthly Accounts are on the last hook on the right in the office if you want to see full details.

We are about to start monitoring the spend from the main Hannam legacy so that

1. We know how much of the actual legacy we have left.
2. We can also report what we have spent the money on, should anyone want to know.

Remember, we agreed to transfer £36,000 from legacy monies to the current account to cover our expected deficit on a yearly basis – assuming the deficit stays the same.

Treasurer:

Fiona has agreed to continue as our bookkeeper, on a more formal footing.

She will provide an average of 3 hrs per Friday at £25 per hour to record all the incomings & outgoings, bankings, etc. Cost to us is £3,750 per year.

Fiona will prepare & produce the books and keep them in accordance with our current income, for end of year presentation & audit/charity commission (which this year is the simpler form of accounting, due to lower income).

Fiona will not be part of the PCC or attend meetings.

Premises Manager:

Adam has started and will be working 25hrs per week – approx. £19,500 per year including holiday pay, but with NI and Pension contributions on top. Fully loaded costs are generally around 11% higher than gross pay giving a total cost of £21,645.

Budgeting:

Back to our deficit. With the above 2 additions we can expect to run at an increased deficit of £23,395 per year or an additional deficit of approx. £2,100 per month. This increases our total monthly deficit to approx. £5,000 per month or £60,000 per year.

What are we going to do about this/how do we feel about it?

A few points to consider:

The deficit is obviously not going to be covered by asking the congregation for more money.

We should probably review our Quota payments to the Diocese and the current demographic of the church – and resulting payment grade and size of the congregation, from which the quota is set. This may produce a reduction of the £7,542 we currently pay per month. The last time the congregation were asked about their view on our demographic grade (this is an A,B,C,D,E perceptions/assessment on the wealth of the congregation) it came out as a bit of a Brexit vote – 51% for grade D (wealthier) and 49% for grade C (average wealth). For comparison, St. Cuthberts came out as Band C.

We must also consider that our Quota supports less fortunate churches in the Diocese.

We should also bear in mind that as St. Thomas (2 Churches) will shortly be without a Vicar, St. Cuthberts (2 Churches) will shortly be without a Vicar, Croscombe (4 Churches) don't have a Vicar and nor does Oakhill (6 Churches – 14 Churches in total). The Mother Ship in their wisdom, are likely to very closely review how they run all these Churches and the associated costs. One must assume that a number will be at risk – Ashwick, Ston Easton,

Dulcote, North Wootton – who, on the occasions I play there, often have congregations of less than 10. This will affect the income of the remaining Churches and the Diocese. How this plays out is anyone's guess. On a somewhat positive side we have legacies that are supporting our income – until we start spending that capital.

We should currently receive in the region of £46,000 from Hannam and £9,500 from Pye – totalling £55,500 per year. £5,000 short of our projected budgetary shortfall.

In addition, we hope to see some additional increase in the use & income from the Church Hall, Community Room & Church as a result of employing Adam.

So all is not lost – BUT – we need to do something with the money rather than just sit smugly on it and let it pay the bills as it will quickly disappear without trace.

We, as a PCC decided a little while ago to have a number of small projects underway or under investigation. These were:

1. Lighting.
2. Sound & Visual (sounds system/projector & screen in church).
3. Shed replacement.
4. Church Hall - Surveyor report.
5. Employing a Premises Manager.
6. Re-ordering the Choir Vestry & Community Room.

As you know, some initial estimates have been received for Lighting, Elements of Sound & Visual (however, if we're looking at audio visual then in my view, this room should be kitted out with decent audio/visual conferencing capability – which will make it a much more attractive rental option).

Chris is hoping to meet with a Surveyor to assess the Church Hall's condition.

The shed has been replaced (£823).

The Premises Manager has been employed and

One of Adam's tasks will be to re-order the Vestry and review Community Room.

So great progress is being made.

What next?

It is the recommendation of the Finance Team that we create a small Projects Sub-Team that reports to the PCC. I say small, primarily because big Teams/Committees are known to not work for innovation and moving forward. We are looking to build a horse but risk designing a camel.

We feel this Team should have no more than 5-8 active (& I use that word deliberately) members made up from – Church warden, Vicar (if or when we have one), Finance Team, Social Team and AN Other member (possibly from the congregation) who feels they have the time, vision, excitement, environmental awareness, etc. to explore in more detail the bigger areas we should be considering & where we can/should invest some of our legacy monies.

These investments must adhere to our 'Rules' that we developed some while ago, while preserving the legacy of St. Thomas Church for future generations, while also taking us forward and enabling additional income streams to support us once the legacies are depleted.

The Projects Sub-Team should also look at some of the projects already noted – to ensure that we don't end up re-visiting work. Just for example - addressing the lighting and not doing a deep clean while the scaffolding is up in the roof.

Or not doing all the re-wiring needed for new lighting and sound at the same time. What about a fully specked sound desk & combined lighting desk for concerts/recordings (like St John's, Yeovil)? Where should that be located?

If we were to consider enabling St. Thomas to become a multi venue location, by removing the pews, then we should be doing the re-wiring at the same time – and upgrading the central heating while we're at it - as we can't take out the pews and leave big cast iron radiators sticking out of the floor.

Etc. Etc. It can very quickly, without careful consideration, become an all or do nothing catch 22 situation.

The future of the Church Hall will depend on the report from the Surveyor – can it be revamped or is it on its last legs?

Does it have any asbestos that needs to be dealt with?

If we're revamping – what additional facilities should it offer, which will potentially deliver additional income?

Cinema sound & visual capability?

New kitchen?

New toilets?

Should we also consider a Community/Youth/Family Worker role of some form?

The Britannia:

I know there are some concerns, in the room, on how spending money on the Hall might fit in with any developments with the Britannia Inn. Will we be overlapping, chasing the same customers, wasting our joint money?

As an update and how things currently stand - The Brit is unlikely to reach its targets. If it doesn't, two things may happen.

A local pub consortium will buy it and run it as a traditional pub or it will slowly decay and fall into the ground. At which point the owners will approach the council to clear the site and replace it with a number of houses.

If, through some great act of altruism or the re-opening of specific Gov't funds, to support Community ventures, the Brit manages to rise - like a Phoenix - from the ashes then in my view and the goal of the Brit Team is it will be a non-profit complementary centre to St. Thomas.

Working together we will be able to really rejuvenate the social and community aspects of the East of Wells.

The Church Hall will most likely cater for a different clientele with the Brit having drop in sessions for Community Nursing, Blue light support, Wed to Fri Coffee shop, local produce, evening meals, pensioner social events, etc. A close link will be ideal and benefit numerous aspects of our East Wells Community outreach.

Vacancy:

As a last point. We will shortly be without a Vicar. The time it will take before we get a new Vicar is unknown but is likely to be at least a year.

In that time, we might find out that we will be sharing a Vicar. Who knows – probably everything is up for grabs.

But, in that time we can investigate, report back, get expert opinion, discuss and build the vision of the future, that we believe we are being led towards and have been fortunate enough to have been provided a lot of the means to achieve. This future can & should be part of our Profile – so that we attract a future Vicar who sees where we are going & not just where we are.

For info – St. Cuthberts have asked if we can keep close on this aspect.

The Finance Team see no conflict in broadening our investigations to all the areas above and more, creating a team and injecting some energy - with a view to making sound recommendations on moving forward and starting to achieve something material with our legacies.

In fact it could be considered irresponsible if we don't.

8. Projects

Claire reiterated the will of the PCC to use some of the legacy towards smaller projects, including:

8.1 New Premises Manager – Adam Stewart has been employed.

8.3 Shed – the new shed has arrived.

8.3 Signage – Chris reported that a new noticeboard for the front of church would cost c£1,000. John suggested considering other local woodworkers and signwriters for this, so requested more details and he will investigate.

Consideration needs to be given to other signage around the church. Chris and John will liaise.

8.4 Choir Vestry and Community Room – Adam is looking into tidying the Choir Vestry and modernising the Community Room.

8.5 Lighting in Church – no update, this is still progressing.

Other suggestions/comments on projects were:

8.6 Audio/conference - Ian suggested this set up for the Community Room could make it more commercially attractive.

8.7 Project Sub-Team – see notes in Section 7. Ann enquired more about the details of this and Charlie stressed the importance of energy and relevant experience. Claire will make a notice on this and discuss it with Barbara and Rachel, who have good experience in this area.

8.8 The Britannia – see notes in Section 7. It was agreed by the PCC to 'park' The Britannia and view the Church Hall as a separate entity.

8.9 Vacancy – see notes in Section 7. The PCC agreed on the significance of having vision to be attractive to the new vicar.

Claire reminded the PCC what the community feedback was in terms of the legacy; to be used towards the community, not just the Church.

9. Claire's leaving and future vacancy

Claire's last service is on Sunday 26th October 2025 and her licensing in her new parish is Saturday 15th November 2025.

PTOs a consideration going forward, but Claire mentioned Robert is willing after the 6-month waiting period.

Christina explained in more detail the process and time scale in terms of advertising for a new Vicar. This PCC will elect 2 x parish representatives to help select the new Vicar. These parish representatives have a right of veto.

10. Safeguarding update

Mike reported that progress is good, but slow. Most people have done the Basic Safeguarding training now; the next step is Foundation which 50+ people need to do.

Domestic abuse is next which should be handled more carefully, but can be done online which may be more suitable given the nature of the topic.

Claire thanked Mike again for his help with this.

11. Assistant Organist

Gill reported that she has been in charge of music for 10 years now. Derek has helped for the last 6 years, but has other commitments so cannot attend as much at the moment. Gill really enjoys the role and considers it an honour but would like more assistance.

Gill thanked Ian for his help which she appreciates.

Ann thanked Gill for her service and Gill received a round of applause from the PCC. Ann suggested that going forward, a said service might have to be part of worship here.

Gill suggested advertising for an Assistant Organist. She understands that if this is successful, her salary will be reduced.

Claire agreed that she will meet with Chris, Judy and Gill to discuss more specific details and compose an advertisement.

12. Events

It was reported that:

- 19th July Garden Party – a great success. c180 people came and £150 made on the books, plus the money made on the bar.

- Dutch Choir Visit – on Sunday 21st September, singing within the service and after the service. Charlie reported that we will provide a meal (a ploughman’s and a dessert) for 80 people. Charlie requested that the congregation provide the drinks. Charlie has contacted Burn’s the Bread and Tesco for donations and will continue to progress this.
- Christian Aid Gig – on 28th September. Michaela reported that the band is booked and they will use the drinks purchased and leftover from the Garden Party. Claire, Judy and Michaela will meet to discuss this further. Christina reported that Dovidio’s Builders are sponsoring the event with £200 and that it’s important to advertise this sponsorship. Ticket sales go to Christian Aid and sales from drinks to St Thomas. Further consideration to be given to where the tickets are going to be sold, but possibly other churches and tickets on the door.
- Harvest Supper – Barbara is away, so Claire suggests that we don’t have a Harvest Supper now that we have all other events and Claire’s leaving bash.
- Claire and Katie’s Leaving Bash – Steve Abbot offered to play at this in the church hall. Friday 24th October is the chosen date. Claire suggested a fish and chip van which people would have to pay for, although consider subsidising. Claire will look into this and report back.

13 Feedback from Deanery and General Synods

13.1 Deanery Synod – Gill reported that Steve will come to Crafty Church in October. Gill thanked Christina for her presentation on appointing Bishops at the last Deanery Synod.

13.2 General Synod – the remainder of the notes in Section 13 come directly from Christina:

There was an address from Brigadier Jaish Mahan, focusing in particular on the work of Armed Forces Chaplains. In subsequent sessions, Synod made a change in the licensing of these chaplains: in future, they will all be licensed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, so that when they move postings, they do not have to be re-licensed by a bishop every time.

+Michael moved a motion asking the Church Commissioners to distribute more money to dioceses: this was defeated in favour of an amendment asking for more consultation in future. There was discussion of spending plans and a private member’s motion to improve clergy pensions, was passed.

Synod approved two new dates to be added to the liturgical calendar: the Festival of God the Creator and the Commemoration of the 21 martyrs of Libya. Both of these are already marked other Christian churches.

Synod passed a motion on poverty and the church in this country and the work of the Church Urban Fund, committing churches to listening to local communities and working to end poverty.

Synod agreed to set up a Redress Scheme for victims and survivors of church-based abuse.

It was agreed that the document “Issues in Human Sexuality” would no longer be used as part of the discernment process for potential ordinands.

Synod supported a motion from the Bishop of London opposing the Assisted Dying Bill and asking for proper funding of palliative care.

14 For information and suggestions for next PCC meeting

None to report.

15 Dates of future meetings:

PCC: 24th September, 29th October, 26th November, 28th January 2026 and 25th February 2026

Standing Committee: TBC

APCM: Wednesday 25th March 2026

The meeting closed at 9.00pm with the Grace.