



Stockton Country Parish
Annual report on the year 2025
St James Church
12th April 2026

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Structure, Governance, & Management

Aims and Objectives of the PCC

Stockton Country Parish is currently in its third year of vacancy. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of ensuring the parish continues to sustain and promote the mission of the Church and also maintain our 4 church buildings and 3 churchyards.

- St Cuthbert's church in Redmarshall
- St James church in Thorpe Thewles
- St John the Divine in Stillington
- St Peter's church in Bishopton
- The churchyard of All Saints, Great Stainton (the church is now closed and in Diocesan care)
- The closed churchyards of St Cuthbert's and St Peter's are in the care of the respective Local Authorities.

Objectives and Activities

The PCC remains steadfast in our efforts to maintain the mission and ministry of the Church during our continuing vacancy and have met 9 times this year. Regular worship has continued throughout the year thanks to the ongoing willing and caring support of the retired vicars and clergy of the Deanery. Our sincere thanks go to Revd Phillip Bishop, Revd David Munby, Revd David Lucas, Revd Robert Cooper, Canon Tim Ollier, Revd Daniel Ackerley and Revd Caroline Ferguson and to Rev Cameron Abernethy who led our Celtic Communion services twice per month at St Cuthbert's. Their support and care is deeply appreciated and has enabled regular Sunday worship, special services, baptisms, funerals and burial of ashes to go on as usual, together with pastoral care. Reverend Ian Crofts continues his much valued work with the two Church schools in the parish - Bishopton / Redmarshall CofE Primary School and William Cassidi CofE Primary School in Stillington.

Special thanks go to Reverend Paul Neville, Area Dean, who has guided and supported us throughout the year and has, latterly, arranged for us to have some very welcome extra help. We are delighted to welcome Reverend Sylvia Wilson whose sympathetic understanding of our situation together with her support and care has helped considerably to strengthen and encourage us. She has taken on many of our services and broadened our worship opportunities.

Our congregation remains faithful and supportive and our thanks are due to church members who, week by week, read lessons and assist at the altar. Particular thanks are due to Angela Ridley who prepares and leads all our intercessions. John Wells and Sally Barker, as organists, continue to enrich our worship and we are grateful to them.

The work of the parish could not properly function without the contribution of our Parish Administrator, Joyce Hewitt. Her efficiency and commitment are invaluable. As well as her role as Treasurer and Wedding Coordinator, she also ensures that we have ministers for all our services, including baptisms and funerals and she provides constant support to the PCC.

Significant developments

In August the Country Parish was invited to Cuthbert House to take part in the Diocesan Vacancy Audit Process (VAP). This programme is designed to support churches as they come into vacancy and to help PCCs prepare for future ministry by assessing our current position and identifying strengths and areas for development. Members of the PCC met with the VAP Coordinator, Rev Canon Stephanie Clark, and her subsequent report recommended that an Interim Change Minister (ICM) be appointed as a matter of urgency to lead, support and guide the missional revitalisation of the Country Parish. Progress will require action to encompass the need for the reduction of church buildings to meet the considerable challenge of unsustainable financial costs, to consolidate the worship pattern and to target work with children and young people. This work is ongoing.

Attendance/Electoral roll

In 2025 there were 71 on the electoral roll and average weekly attendance in October was 22.

Our weekly congregation remains constant, and increases significantly for special services.

Worship and Mission

We continue to worship in 4 churches:

1st Sunday: Holy Communion at St John's, Stillington

2nd Sunday: Holy Communion at St James', Thorpe Thewles

3rd Sunday: Holy Communion at St Cuthbert's, Redmarshall

4th Sunday: Holy Communion at St Peter's, Bishopton

When there is a 5th Sunday in the month it is held at St Cuthbert's, Redmarshall and may be a Service of the Word if a vicar is not available.

A Celtic Communion service is held at St Cuthbert's twice a month on Wednesdays at 12 noon with an average attendance of 12.

As well as Sunday worship listed earlier, we marked the beginning of Lent with an Ash Wednesday Taize service, and there was a service of Remembrance at St James'.

At Christmas we ensured that all our churches held services, beginning with Remembering Loved Ones at Christmas at St Peter's. There was a very well attended Service of Light on Christmas Eve at St James' then Christmas Eve Eucharist at St Cuthbert's and lastly a Service of the Word on Christmas Day St John's.

PCC members are participating in the pilot scheme of the Children's Ministry Network in Stockton Deanery exploring the potential for developing the children's ministry within the parish and connecting with others to share ideas and resources.

Schools

Report on work at William Cassidi and Bishopton Redmarshall Schools

It has been my privilege to continue as Chaplain to William Cassidi and Bishopton Redmarshall schools. I have led acts of worship in both schools on a monthly basis as well as services for special festivals such as Harvest, Christmas and Easter and at the End of year service. The services are held in St John's Stillington but in the school hall at Bishopton Redmarshall due to the lack of disabled access to St Peters church. I am ex officio governor for both schools.

At William Cassidi School the headteacher Mrs Jo Campbell and the governors wanted to embed the new vision in every part of school life. The vision is based on John 10:10 "Life in all its fulness" with a main value of love and other values of Respect, Service, Courage and Resilience. To take this forward I was invited to chair the Ethos Committee and we are thankful for the way the vision has developed.

This term we have had a SIAMS inspection and an Ofsted inspection. We are one of the first schools to have an Ofsted inspection with the new framework. We are still waiting for the reports to be published and they will be available via the school website. A few weeks ago Mrs Campbell shared with us that she would be resigning to move to a new position. We are very grateful to Mrs Campbell for all she has done to develop the school including its Christian ethos. The governors have agreed a revised job description and an advertisement has been placed for a new Head Teacher. We are hopeful to have that person in place for September 2026. I have been invited to be on the interviewing committee. We have made arrangements for the school to have 2 people as acting Headteachers during the Summer term.

At Bishopton Redmarshall school the Ofsted and SIAMS inspections were carried out in 2024 and the governing body has continued to meet regularly to provide strategic leadership, accountability, and oversight to ensure the best educational outcomes for pupils.

At both schools those who were leaving were presented with a Youth Bible thanks to the generosity of a trust that supports work with children in the Country Parish. I am glad that the children of our schools will have easy access to God's word and the helpful articles in the youth bible.

I am very grateful for the support I have had from the Country Parish in my work in the schools.

Revd Ian Crofts

Pastoral Ministry

Baptisms

It is encouraging that families continue to come to us to arrange baptism for their children. Since the last APCM 11 children and 2 adults have been baptised and it is a joy to see our churches often full, almost to capacity, to welcome them into God's Family. Most of the families are resident within the parish and the remainder have strong, long-standing connections to it. Preparation sessions take place on a one-to-one basis and then parents are invited to bring along their child to at least one of the regular Sunday morning services, when a prayer of Thanksgiving is offered for the child. This is also an opportunity for the congregation to meet with, and welcome, the family. Unfortunately it remains the case that few families maintain regular contact with the church. Most baptisms take place at 12 noon on Sundays, with an occasional one taking place within the 10.30 service. We are most grateful to those clergy who are willing and able to conduct baptism services in the parish - often having led a service elsewhere, they come on to the Country Parish for 12 noon. We are indeed blessed.

Weddings

The majority of weddings taken in the parish are at Wynyard Hall chapel and are conducted by retired or self supporting clergy. In 2025 ministers were: Rev Daniel Ackerley, Rev Caroline Ferguson and Rev Glyn Holland. We are deeply grateful for the time and love they put into supporting the couples through this ministry.

The majority of those marrying in the Hall need to qualify by attendance, over the course of six months. As we are in vacancy the monthly service we used to hold in the Chapel has been cancelled as it has been difficult to get a minister to cover this service. Couples are invited to worship with us on Sunday morning. We enjoy welcoming them.

In order to sustain the Wynyard Hall ministry, with the large additional administrative burden, we employ a dedicated Wedding Coordinator. The Hall makes a £100 donation per wedding to support the Wedding Coordinator and the wider work of the parish - which needs to exist in order for them to have chapel weddings. Going forward we have negotiated an uplift in the donation per wedding from Wynyard Hall to £125.

Last year it was decided that the majority of couples marrying at Wynyard Hall would be married by Common Licence. This has simplified the process for the couples who are no longer required to arrange to have Banns read in their local parish. Rev Daniel Ackerley has been trained and acts as our Surrogate Registrar to facilitate this change.

In 2025 there were 27 weddings, down by 3 from 2024, and 1 blessing at Wynyard Hall. In 2026 we currently have 23 weddings booked and 4 blessings although this number could still go up. Hall weddings give us a short, but concentrated, relationship with the wedding couples, parish weddings build our relationship with the community. Sadly there were no parish weddings in 2025 and only one booked for 2026. In 2024 we had 6.

Funerals

The number of church funerals appears to have fallen again on the number for 2024. There were only 2 church funerals in the parish in 2025, down by 1 on the 3 held in 2024. It appears the trend away from church held funeral services is continuing as is reflected in the 9 Burial of Ashes which took place in the parish.

The annual service held to Remember Loved Ones at Christmas is deeply appreciated.

Discipleship, evangelism and outreach.

An invitation from the Methodist Church in Carlton was gratefully accepted, to share in a service on Good Friday. Several members of our congregation attended and participated and found it beneficial. After the service we were welcomed to a splendid supper which gave us a rare opportunity to meet socially with our Methodist friends. We once more shared with them Carols on the Green at Carlton in December.

The annual Toy Service continues and was held at St Peter's this year. Parishioners and the local community, as ever, donated a wonderful and varied amount of toys and other gifts which were received with joy and gratitude by the Salvation Army and by the two children's care homes in our parish. We continue to support local Foodbanks with regular donations and maintain our regular collections for The Children's Society.

The parish of The Upper Skerne has been generous in its prayers for our parish and has shared details of the opportunities for additional worship and spiritual ministry being held in their parish

Social and fundraising events

This year the PCC had decided that we were unable to hold the usual Summer Fair in July. However The Smiths Arms in Carlton very generously offered to organise and run the event for us in their garden. This was a joyful and successful event raising just under £1000 for parish funds, and we are extremely grateful for their kindness and support.

In October, on the stormiest night of the year, we welcomed the Military Wives Choir at St John's. They delighted us all with a varied programme and the tea and cakes during the interval were well received. £271 was raised for church funds.

At Christmas we again joined with Hurworth Brass and Wind Band in organising another joint fundraising concert in St John's at Stillington. Mulled wine and festive refreshments were served and £347.92 was raised.

The 500 Club continues to be our main source of income, generating £2300

Communication and Publicity

Weekly Facebook postings and the new notice boards outside each church are used to publicise church services and events. Details of our services are also available on "A Church Near You" website.

Finance

We work towards continuous improvement in terms of monitoring and understanding our finances, and continue to benefit from streamlining our accounts management. **Full audited accounts are at the end of this document.**

The State of Our Finances

From our Audited 2025 Accounts (Main Accounts including Wynyard)

Gross income £54,844

Gross Expenditure (£70,899)

Loss (£16,055)

Income from giving has risen from 17% in 2024 to 25% in 2025. This figure is the total of all donations, standing orders and plate donations. We are always grateful to those who are able to make donations.

Further to our quarterly Gift Aid claims we also reclaim Gift Aid on plate donations through the GASDS scheme. Total income from Gift Aid for 2025 was £3477 (£355) of that total being received in January 2026). The GASDS claim is made once a year from April to the end of the following March.

A breakdown of our expenditure:

2024 2025

Salaries & Expenses		13%		15%
Parish Share		25%		17%
Buildings & Maint.		29%		7%
Insurance		5%		10%
External Charities		0%		0%

At the end of 2025 the total balance held in our bank accounts was £87,762 of this balance £35,500 was restricted, which means these restricted funds can only be spent on the buildings the money was raised for. The bank balance is down on that held at the end of 2024 which was £124,089. This means the money we currently have in general funds i.e. £52,500, has to pay all our bills and Parish Share.

Looking forward:

We have, and continue to address our major areas of expenditure - staffing, utilities, insurance, and continue to pay a parish share figure that we feel we can responsibly manage. However, we did not pay the full amount we are asked to under the guided pledge scheme. The greater amount of this coming out of our savings account which greatly diminished our general funds. We were asked for £48k parish share in 2025, but after much discussion and prayer it was decided that we would offer the sum of £12k, as to pledge an amount nearer to the figure we had been asked for would mean our funds would be greatly depleted and thus put the future of the parish in real jeopardy. The Diocese asked us in late 2025 to make our Parish Share pledge for 2026 - having carefully reviewed our financial position and the fact that we continue to be in vacancy we have once again pledged £12k for 2026.

Buildings

The burden of responsibility for four very needy church buildings has been a significant problem for the PCC during vacancy. We have concentrated our energies on sustaining the spiritual life of the parish, maintaining a welcoming atmosphere in all our churches and ensuring that all are up-to-date where Health and Safety issues are concerned. Required certifications for electrical and fire safety equipment and lightning conductors are regularly monitored. We endeavour to ensure that the aged heating systems continue to function. Like our worshipping community we are largely senior in years and more complex issues subject to faculty jurisdiction are proving onerous.

Summary of Work:

All churches had their gutters cleaned.

St. Cuthbert's Church, Redmarshall

No major work other than boiler repair.

St. James's Church, Thorpe Thewles

No major work other than boiler repair.

St. John's Church, Stillington

No major works have been undertaken this year. Unfortunately the church porch attracts gatherings of local youngsters and several windows have required new glazing.

St. Peter's Church, Bishopston

No major works undertaken this year. However the recent QI report flagged up urgent work required for the tower and belfry. It was therefore felt necessary to prohibit access to the tower until the problems could be addressed.

Churchyards.

St. Cuthberts:

The churchyard is closed and in the care of Stockton Borough Council which cuts the grass regularly, otherwise the churchyard is cared for and kept tidy by Church Warden Philip Tingle. Repair work to the damaged area of the churchyard wall is subject to a faculty and is being progressed by the Council. Remedial work is expected to begin soon. The area remains fenced off.

St. James:

The churchyard is open, with a significant number of very large trees. Grass cutting and grounds management is carried out by a contractor. A tree survey commissioned in the autumn of 2024 highlighted a significant amount of work was required. The work on both trees that were highlighted by the report as requiring priority work on the grounds of safety has been completed.

St. John's:

The churchyard is open and grass cutting and grounds management is carried out by a local contractor. The cost of this work was generously met by an anonymous donor. The condition of the churchyard wall remains a major concern, given that we would be unable to meet the likely costs of repair or replacement.

St. Peter's:

The churchyard is closed and in the care of Darlington Borough Council who have carried out extensive work to remove dangerous and diseased trees.

All Saints, Great Stainton:

The church is closed but the churchyard remains open and in our care. A contractor is employed for grass cutting and grounds management on a twice yearly basis.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. The Stockton Country Parish aims to appoint to the PCC, all churchwardens and one additional member of each individual church congregation, to ensure a minimum of two representatives per church. This has not been achieved this year. There have been no representatives from Thorpe Thewles. All those who attend our services are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

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

PCC has met 9 times, with additional sub-meetings for events, finance and special projects. The latter groups are not able to pass any resolutions, but they can make recommendations to the PCC which may or may not be accepted as is deemed appropriate.

Safeguarding.

Following the ill-health retirement of our previous Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) a parishioner volunteered to take on the role. Subsequent to all Safer Recruitment Procedures Mrs Savilla Hickey's application was accepted by the PCC and after completion of her required training she has been officially appointed by the PCC as the PSO for Stockton Country Parish.

Deanery Synod

Mrs Alison Borer is our Deanery Synod Representative. This year several members of the PCC have attended meetings. Of particular note was a suggestion that members of our congregation be given a candle to be lit in the window of our homes each evening during Advent as a symbol of the coming of The Light of the World. The idea was enthusiastically endorsed.

The Stockton Country Parish is part of the Stockton Deanery and Diocese of Durham. The correspondence address is:

The Church Office
St John's Church
Stillington
Stockton-on-Tees
TS21 1JD

Registered charity number EW57869

Incumbent

Currently we remain in vacancy.

Wardens

- Alison Borer (Churchwarden, St John the Divine, Deanery Synod)
- Alan Parker (Churchwarden, St John the Divine) - retired October
- Philip Tingle (Churchwarden, St Cuthbert)
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Elected members

- Paul Sung
- Anne Smalley
- Christine Briscoe
- Christine Tinkler
- Anne Tingle (Lay Chair)
- Mary Burrell
- Nick Brown
- Eddie Hall - Retired July 2025
- Helen Shaw
- Eric Smalley

The post of Treasurer is vacant and the role is fulfilled by Joyce Hewitt, Finance Manager.
Approved by the PCC.

Accounts: Financial Statements for the year ended 31/12/2025

- 1. Receipts and payments accounts**
- 2. Assets and liabilities**
- 3. Notes to financial statements**
- 4. Further analysis of receipts and payments**
- 5. INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT**

