

## St Andrew's Cleeve Prior March 2025

### From the Rev Jo Fielding, Priest in Charge, East Vale and Avon Benefice

St Andrew's is a much-loved church standing at the centre of Cleeve Prior village. For centuries local villagers have been christened in its ancient font, received communion at the altar rails, or have walked down the aisle to be married, and finally laid to rest in its quiet grassy tree-lined graveyard. The tall square pinnacle tower is the first sign of the village through the trees as you approach from South Littleton, and a faithful team of ringers ensure that the bells are still rung for our Sunday services, weddings and other significant events. As one church in the Benefice of 6 churches (5 holding regular services) with Jo Fielding as Priest in Charge, Cleeve is usually able to hold 2 services each month, one Eucharist and one Morning Praise service.

However, Cleeve Prior has never been a large community and so the numbers of the congregation – as for the school population – have never been particularly high – and continue to decrease. As numbers on the electoral roll have fallen, so too has the income received, whilst the costs of maintaining this ancient and beautiful building keep increasing. A crucial piece of information not well known is that the building is not owned by “The Church of England” – but is a community asset – built by and for the local people, and is held in trust by the PCC for the people of the community - for you as your church, with the doors open each day for anyone to come in. \*\*

To enable the church to remain open – whether daily for visitors or for services and other events to continue to take place, we need to meet significant costs. Our running costs for the building include paying for insurance and electricity bills, (these 2 alone come to over £3,000), and our own contribution to paying for our Benefice priest in charge, this year came to over £13,000. (The approximate cost for a priest is about £70k p/a which we cannot even meet as part of the group of 6 parishes). To this we have to add on maintenance costs (roof, grass mowing and general maintenance) for an additional £2,000.

We do receive income from fees for special services (funerals and the occasional wedding) – but have to pass a significant proportion of this income on to the Diocese, which has its own financial problems. Our total income this year was £16,223 pounds, but our expenditure came to £21,653, giving a shortfall of about £5,000.

The church does have some investments/financial assets of about £60,000. However, these are held in investment accounts, most of which are ringfenced for specific purposes, so that even the interest (income) from those investments has to be spent on those things. To enable the doors of the church to remain unlocked and services to continue, we have had to draw on reserves, but we will not be able to do this in the long term.

Meanwhile, the roof still needs regular repairs, trees in the churchyard fall and need to be made safe – and the interior of the building needs updating in order that it can continue to serve the community.

One long-standing intention has been to complete the installation (begun some years ago but never finished) of a proper PA system. We would like to install some unobtrusive speakers to allow our readers/service leaders to be heard (particularly needed when the school children are taking part in services) and our music to be amplified properly. The total cost will be just over £2,300. We are grateful for the grant from the Diocese of Worcester of £1,000 – but this still leaves us with a shortfall of £1,300.

Where do we go from here in order to safeguard the future of St Andrew's for the next generation?

**- Start a "Friends of St Andrew's" community group.**

This would require some careful work around setting up, but once in existence, would enable us to get information out more quickly and easily to the local community about events that we are holding or special services. It would also be a great way for people to talk together and plan events that would enable some much-needed fund-raising to take place or mobilise volunteers to help run events or give a hand with e.g. the churchyard.

More immediately we need to start a fund-raising campaign that will enable us to meet the cost of our much-needed new speaker & amp/ loop system. If you would be interested in sponsoring a PA Speaker or part-sponsoring one (£200 each), please contact me as soon as possible, or our Treasurer, Mrs Annette Carless.

On behalf of the PCC at St Andrew's Cleeve Prior, thank you for your support.

**If you would like to be involved with this new Friends of St Andrew's group, please let me know.**

*The Rev Joanna Fielding*

Priest in Charge, East Vale & Avon Benefice

(Cleeve Prior, N & M Littleton, South Littleton, Offenham, Bretforton and Badsey parishes)

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**\*\*** The church does not have property deeds as such; most churches do not, as they date to times long before such things were thought of. The legal position is that the ownership of a church - [including St Andrew's Cleeve Prior] is generally vested in the incumbent and held on trust by the PCC for the parishioners, while the contents are the distinct responsibility of the churchwardens who hold them on trust for the parishioners. However, final control over the church, contents and land rests with the chancellor of the diocese, acting on behalf of the bishop.