

The Parish of St. Thomas of Hereford, Weobley and St. Bede's, Kington
Financial Report for Parish AGM 23rd June 2025

The Parish Finance Committee comprises Charles de Rohan, Peter Hereford, Father Simon, Pat Roberts, Patricia Stuart and myself as Chairman. We have met 3 times since the last AGM in June 24.

I hope you will forgive me for starting again with some background but I think it is important for those who might not be aware of it and useful to remind others, that our parish accounts are inextricably linked with those of the charity that is Belmont Abbey Mission CIO, which includes the 5 parishes which belong to the Abbey. The charity's 2024 accounts are still with the auditors. In practical terms, being part of the Trust means that although we have our own parish current account, into which parishioners' offerings are paid and from which much of our day-to-day spending is made, as soon as the amount in this account goes over £2000, the excess is transferred to the charity's General Fund, some of which is invested. If the current account drops below £2000, it is topped up from this General Fund. As you can imagine, this makes keeping tabs on our finances quite complicated and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Keith White who has again done a sterling job in keeping our books on a weekly basis for 2024. Keith has now retired from doing this and no one has come forward from the parish to replace him. In the meantime, I am handling the day-to-day finances but we are hoping that a new system being introduced by the new Bursar at Belmont will help to reduce the amount of work involved.

A further difficulty in keeping tabs on our income and expenditure comes from the fact that some items do not pass through our current account. Our Gift Aid rebate and investment income are paid directly into the General Fund. Insurance, and a range of professional fees are paid directly from it, as are any large invoices such as that for the recent work on the interior of the building here. And we are finding increasingly that people wish to be paid by bank transfer, which we cannot do from our current account.

We have at last reverted to a financial year that is in keeping with the calendar year after a number of changes, which explains why the Statement of Financial Activities for 2024 also includes the latter 6 months of 2023.

The headings on the Financial Statement, which has been prepared by A. D. Accounts in Hereford, apparently have to be the same for all the parishes and they tend to lump together things which we account for separately so that we can track income and expenditure on different things

Notes on Income:

- 'Collections' here include not only Standing Orders, income from the Envelope-giving scheme and loose plate but also a very generous donation of £10,000, from an anonymous donor, specifically for the redecoration at St. Thomas's. It also includes Gift Aid rebates, though I'm not sure for which year – or years. They always seem to come considerably in arrears though they are submitted on time and thanks must go to Pat Roberts for doing this so efficiently.
- As you can see, we have had an extremely generous legacy which was from Robin Williams. Robin left his property to be shared equally by the parish and the British Legion and we are very grateful to him for this. There has been quite a delay in the administration of his estate but the house in Almeley has now been sold and we have an interim payment of £100,000. Robin also owned a property in Cardiff which will eventually be sold but the executor (the solicitor handling the will) has changed firms and is not responding to letters from Belmont's solicitors. We and Belmont are continuing to pursue this.
- Special Collections explain themselves.
- Fundraising relates to the Charity Shop in Kington and also the Strawberry Tea.

- We are now receiving £500 per annum for the allotment field, which started in December 23. I don't know where the accountants have put this!

Notes on Expenditure

- Wages are those paid to Jenny Macklin who cleans the flat and parish rooms each week. She is paid the hourly rate for the Real Living Wage and this is updated regularly.
- Church maintenance here is what we list as Church expenses and includes things like candles, wine and altar breads but also services such as window cleaning and gardening. We now have a contract with a local firm to clean all the windows every 8 weeks.
- I'm sure you won't be surprised by the cost of Light and Heat (which includes energy costs for the flat)
- House Expenses includes Housekeeping costs for the parish priest. From March of this year, £340 per month is being paid to the parish priest for housekeeping, paid into what is known as the No. 2 account which is for the priest's personal expenditure. This has provided a very welcome reduction in keeping accounts for lots of small payments – and in chasing the parish priest for receipts!
- The amount for Papers and Books is high, due to the purchase of the new Lectionaries and also missals for parishioners. I am pleased to say that most of these were eventually bought by parishioners. We have reduced the copies of the Tablet to one per week but they are still not being sold, which represents quite a drain on parish funds.
- The Levy is paid to the Cardiff Archdiocese. Mainly it our contribution to diocesan funds but it also includes insurance for St. Bede's church and something called the Health and Safety Toolbox which is an online programme to assess this and produce a report. Here the heading also includes the priest's salary, which is paid to Belmont, not to the priest!
- As you can see, Repairs and Renewals tend to be our biggest expenditure, with 2 aging buildings to care for. We have regular inspections and servicing of gas, electrical and fire appliances. In 2024 there was a survey of the buildings at Kington which revealed a number of major works that needed attending to, including a new water heater and some new flooring around the altar and in the sacristy. Also in 2024, there was work renewing the outside lighting at Weobley and electrical work inside the church as part of the redecoration scheme, and the replacement of the parish lawnmower. Many thanks are due to Frank McNally and Andy Palfreman for all the time and energy they have put into initiating and monitoring these various projects, getting quotes from contractors and for carrying out various small repairs themselves.

We have been very lucky in recent years in having some very generous donations and an amazing legacy but as you can see, these have masked the fact that our regular income does not keep pace with our expenditure. Charles very kindly produced a budget for us and it is clear that we need to think of the legacy not as money to be spent freely but as money to be invested to supplement our income in the years ahead. We all know that prices are rising and I fully appreciate the effect this has on all of us. But I do wonder how many of us – and I include myself – have been contributing the same amount to the parish for many years.

You will be aware that 2025 has already been a busy year financially with the completion of the redecorating of St. Thomas's. I'm sure you will all agree that it looks splendid. Frank is going to give a report on this so I will stick to the figures. The total cost of the refurbishment was £18,408.27, but fortunately we were able to claim a VAT rebate of £2284.64, bringing it to a total of £16,123.63 We had originally budgeted £15,000 for this so we are truly grateful for that anonymous gift of £10,000.

We have had to replace the parish printer/copier which cost £667 and the church and presbytery at Weobley has now been fitted with a new fire alarm system, following our latest fire inspection, at a cost of £4332, a horrendous amount of money I agree, but we have to conform to health and safety regulations. We have also provided another folding table to allow St. Bede's to have one at the back of the church.

Major expenditure being considered relates to replacing the floor at St. Bede's. Andy is going to speak on this so I will just say that the Finance Committee did agree that we have the money to do this and that the quote from Timbers Buildings should be used if it goes ahead, but the final decision is for the PPC as to whether this represents the best use of parish funds. It will cost about £25,000 to £26,000, more if digging up the floor reveals further problems.

Charles and I had an interesting meeting with the new Belmont Bursar, Graham Neal, on the 20th May. He is somewhat overwhelmed at the moment, getting to grips with his new job, which includes not only all the 5 parishes in the Trust but the Abbey as well. He is hoping to simplify things for the Finance Office as well as for us, by introducing some accounting software called Xero, which we are hoping will make it much easier for us to make payments as well as keeping records of our accounts. It would be used by all the parishes and therefore standardise procedures across the Trust. Currently, Terry Bolton who works in the Finance Office is giving us some help but basically, we are doing most of the work still in the parish. The parish owes a debt of gratitude to Julie Gander for taking on the ordering of items for the parish: church and office supplies, central heating oil and cleaning materials. If parishioners note a need for items, they should see Julie about it.

I would like to thank all the members of the Finance Committee for their time and support. It has been great to have Patricia Stuart and Charles de Rohan on board and special thanks are due to Patricia for writing up our Meeting Notes while Peter Hereford is unable to do so.

A year ago, I said at the end of my report that I would be leaving the committee in September! However, I wanted to see through the work on the refurbishment of St. Thomas's and also the introduction of the new system, all of which is taking much longer than anticipated. And someone had to take on the book-keeping... But my plan is still to hand on the Chairmanship of the Committee to someone else.

I would like to end by thanking all parishioners for their financial support of the parish, for their regular contributions, for their generosity when it comes to Special Collections, for signing up to Gift Aid if they are tax-payers. Thank you to all those who helped with our fund-raising events in the year, the Charity Shop at Kington and the Strawberry Tea. Thanks too, to those who are helping to keep us on the straight and narrow by counting the collection after Mass: your help is much appreciated.

Joanna Helme
Finance Committee Chairman