

The Parish of Falconwood



2023 Annual Reports
for APCM 2024

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People

"O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things." (Isaiah 25:1)

Gathering for public worship is the central act of the Christian church, which flows from all else we do at Bishop Ridley Church—fellowship, ministry, and mission. Given the centrality of gathering together, it was a joy that last year, the worshipping community was back to numbers as before the pandemic, and new faces have joined Sunday services and special occasions.

Our Sunday services involve a lot of people in numerous different roles. Many of our members rotate through all these positions monthly or bi-weekly. Many people are involved in making our Sunday services happen each week! So, we all need to give a big "Thank you" to all involved in these various roles, such as the vital coffee rota.

As a church community, we remain committed to serving Falconwood with various activities. One of the events is Messy Church, which we would like to have more during the year, volunteering permitting. At the last minute, I am always astonished at how many people are committed amazingly to making those events work.

Another highlight was the new Youth Café, established by members of different churches and organized by Julie and Richard Tapp. Youth Café runs twice a month and is a great success for local youth.

Last year, we tried a couple of new courses to promote Christian teaching as we should. We ran a Pre-Marriage Course, which was received very well, with many participants asking to attend The Marriage Course, which we will run in the coming year. As a result of The Pre-Marriage Courses, many participants were also parents and had many questions regarding parenting, which led to The Parenting Children Course.

The Parenting Children Course was a good event over five Saturday mornings. We started with coffee and pastries and chatted. The course consisted of watching video clips and engaging with a booklet with questions based on the video material. The booklet's questions facilitated great conversations about parenting, and the participants felt supported.

I want to thank the congregation for helping with all the regular events which require a lot of energy throughout the year:

- Agape meal
- Carols on the Green
- Christmas Community Lunch
- Luncheon Club (once a month)
- Bishop Ridley Prayer weekend
- In Loving Memory Service
- Women's World Day of Prayer
- Lent lectures
- Advent reflections

- Instant Nativity
- Holy Week reflections with communion

I can confidently say that the year's highlight is Carols on The Green, which is by far our best-attended event over the years.

However, one event that stood out this year was the King's Coronation and the subsequent King's Coronation parade service, which had uniformed groups in charge of the service. The Bishop of Rochester, Jonathan Gibbs, came and participated in different service parts, which was well received. Numerous people from the Falconwood wider community and the Church family attended the service. I think that the Coronation's Parade service was the Sunday service that was best attended in the church building since, after the pandemic, the building was packed. The church received lovely messages from those who usually don't attend church and how much they enjoyed participating in the celebration. I think that Bishop Ridley Church's strength is to show the community the love and excitement of God.

We also had sad occasions that touched our entire church family. Our Verger Joe Powell went home to the Lord. The funeral was a sad occasion, but during the funeral, we were reminded about the love that Joe shared with his family and church.

I also want to mention that many months after Norma West died, the church became aware of a generous legacy from her estate. This has come at a very timely moment, with the church giving being affected by congregation members having moved on or died over the last five to 10 years. Norma was deeply fond of Bishop Ridley Church; the legacy will help us with the church's finances. We thank God for the memory of Norma and for her great kindness in leaving such a generous gift.

There are a few people I want to thank particularly. Our churchwardens, Stan and Pat, have worked incredibly hard over the last year, and I am so grateful to them for their loyalty, encouragement and wisdom.

The PCC has also worked hard, and I wish to thank Karen Freeman, who keeps everything in order as our PCC secretary. Neil, our Treasurer, has continued to do a fantastic job overseeing our accounts in challenging times. In addition, I want to thank Letitia, who is looking after our safeguarding procedures.

Our vision as a church must be to continue reaching out to the community we serve, to be better at sharing our faith and our life, and to make the most of our building so that we can bring the abundance of God's life to those amongst whom we live and work. In this way, we play our part in our church's long history as witnesses to God's presence and activity in this place.

I believe that our willingness to rise to life's challenges has been the gift of our faithful Lord Jesus who stands with us in every season. We go forward with courage and hope, praying that as we move to know and enact God's vision for his people in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the unquenchable light of Christ.

As I draw my report close, I am moved to extend my deepest gratitude to every member of our church family. Your unwavering dedication, tireless work, and

boundless generosity have been the bedrock upon which our accomplishments this year have been built, always with our eyes fixed on the higher purpose that Guides us. It is fitting, then, that we look to the words of Isaiah as our guiding light: "O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things." (Isaiah 25:1). This verse not only reflects our gratitude for the blessings we've received but also reinforces our commitment to praise God in all we do. As we move forward, let us continue to exalt His name through our actions, worship, and community service, embodying the spirit of thankfulness and dedication that has been the hallmark of our journey together. May our efforts be a testament to His glory as we strive to do beautiful things in His name.

Revd. Mark Tariq
Bishop Ridley Church

2023 has been a busy year but thanks to God's graciousness and a dedicated team we have achieved much. It was a shock to us all when Derek had a heart attack in March 2023 but after successful heart surgery and recuperation he is almost fully recovered. We thank him for his stewardship, together with Pat in looking after Bishop Ridley over the last five years.

Stan was sworn in as Warden with Pat at the 2023 APCM. Letitia, as always, has been a diligent colleague throughout the year as Deputy Warden. Thanks also go to all other members of the PCC for their input and to Peter Robinson for his assistance and guidance on building issues.

A big thank you to our sides-people, chair movers, tea and coffee servers, lift givers and cleaning team, often 'unsung heroes' on whom we depend for the smooth running of the church. Not forgetting all those who have come along to working parties during the year. Thank you for your stalwart efforts in carrying out a variety of jobs in and around the church. As well as the jobs completed, such as minor repairs, maintenance and upkeep, cleaning, gardening, decorating the church for special events, it is a time of fellowship and sharing our time and gifts for the benefit of the whole church and community. Additionally, it helps to keep running costs down whilst ensuring the church is clean, tidy and welcoming. A specific working party was organised to clear out unwanted items to both tidy up the Store Room (Vestry) and ensure fire exits remain clear of obstruction and meet H&S regulatory requirements. This must be managed and maintained from now on.

During a comprehensive Review of the Church Building a test was carried out of the Emergency Lighting System which was found to be faulty. As a result a new system had to be installed. Whilst this work was being done, the electrical contractors discovered a major problem in the circuit between the vestry and kitchen which required remedial works. The Review has highlighted the need to organise a rolling programme of maintenance / redecoration works in the church to be prioritised over the next five years. Bearing in mind the likely cost involved, enquiries are being made to the Diocese for possible grant applications.

Attempts to discover the intermittent leaks in the church roof continued throughout the year with a number of roofing contractors carrying out inspections. In March 2023 a roof gulley was recrimped and sealed. Leaks have been less frequent but nevertheless reappear on occasions.

Quotes were obtained to repair and redecorate the toilet ceilings with a view to completing the work during a school holiday period dependent on the availability of contractors.

With a Quinquennial Inspection (every five years) due 2024 and a Triennial Inspection (every three years) due in 2025 we need to ensure that all is in good order. So if you can spare a few hours at one of our forthcoming working parties we would love to see you.

We have also been looking at ways to reduce our energy running costs resulting in switching supplier to reduced tariffs and researching what grants are available from the Diocese for energy saving measures.

It was sad to lose Joe Powell as Verger, a dear friend and 'loyal servant' to the church, who passed away after a prolonged illness but many were able to bid a fond farewell at his funeral in December, an uplifting service of thanksgiving for his life.

The job of a Warden doesn't just concern the Church Building, it also encompasses the welfare of the Church Family and it is with this in mind that in 2024 we want to refocus on God's Vision for Bishop Ridley and the part each of us can play in contributing our gifts and talents.

Some of the highlights during the year have been when we see a full church at full voice with ages spanning at least three generations and representing the whole family and community in which we live:

- Our parade services - aren't they special and we learn so much from our children, especially how talented they are as they learn new skills and participate in the services. Many thanks to their leaders and parents.
- Our links with Bishop Ridley School - it was brilliant to see the school children participating in services at Easter and Christmas, especially their angelic voices at full gusto with parents and grandparents looking on admiringly from the balcony.

Our links with our community:

- Such as Christmas Carols on The Green - what a great get-together! We need more such events.
- Our annual 'In Loving Memory' service when both church family and members of the community come together to remember and celebrate the lives of loved ones.
- Baptism Services - when we see again the joy of little ones joining the worldwide family of God and at which we reaffirm our vows and support to the respective families.

Our gift of 'Giving' to charities both at home and abroad throughout the year to aid those in most need.

Stan Tither and Pat Waters
Church Wardens

PCC Secretary's Report

Once again, my thanks to my church family and the PCC for their love and support during 2023. The year got off to a difficult start with the illness and death of my uncle but when you know you have people praying for you, everything is so much easier to bear.

I feel church life has now returned, more or less, to what it was BC (Before COVID) and it feels strange to think that this time four years ago we were in lock down wondering when this dreadful disease will stop haunting our lives.

At the last APCM, Stan Tither rejoined the PCC after a year's hiatus, and Kim Charlwood's PCC tenure ended. During the year Adrian Haughton stepped down from the PCC and Toni Hoskins resigned from the PCC following her move to Margate.

Elected officers for 2023-2024 were: Secretary: Karen Freeman; Treasurer: Neil Jost and Vice Chairman: Patricia Waters. Stan Tither and Patricia Waters were elected as Churchwardens.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) met six times in 2023. The meeting in November was cancelled. All meetings were held in person. Our ordinary meetings began with a scripture reading and a time of prayer. The main subjects for discussion included: the use of the church building by the Youth Café; Christmas services; Diocesan and Deanery Synods; Churches Together in Welling; charity giving; Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults; building and maintenance; Bishop Ridley School; leadership teams; the sound system and church finance. Jayne, our Church Communications Officer and Administrator, has kept the PCC up to date with her proposals for the development of the church's digital presence. Love it or loathe it, our web pages and social media pages are important ways for us to connect with our community and has been an important source of enquiries about baptisms and weddings. To enhance the reach of our social media profile please ensure you 'Like' and 'Follow' our Facebook page and 'Like', 'Share' and 'Comment' on our posts.

Again, my thanks to my PCC colleagues for their support and encouragement during the year.

Karen Freeman
PCC Secretary

Ministries

Prayer Ministry

The prayer circle is still going strong, with lots of requests coming in all the time. We don't get many follow-ups, I'm afraid, but we do have answers to prayer.

Prayer after services is still not practicable as there aren't enough people comfortable with praying aloud for others to be able to arrange a rota.

The prayer triplet with Grace, Jeanne and me is rather sporadic recently, what with illness, hospital appointments and other obstacles to our meeting. It would be wonderful to see more prayer triplets set up; all it needs is for three people to get together for a cup of tea on a regular basis and pray. There's certainly a lot to pray about!

Come on folks, form a prayer triplet with a couple of friends!

Margaret Robinson

Church Life

Open Door Lunch Club

The Open Door Lunch Club is now in its 14 year. Overall numbers are now steady with a regular attendance between 20 - 25. It has been a progressive build up since COVID during which we sadly lost several members who died or moved into care. Its purpose is to provide a safe and warm environment in which those living alone in the community can come together and make new friends to overcome loneliness and isolation.

A three course home-cooked meal (£1 starter, £3 main, £1 dessert) including tea or coffee is provided on a monthly basis. Price levels have remained unchanged since last year. Lifts are available for those not able to travel on their own and on occasions when members are unable to attend, meals have been delivered to their homes.

Attendees usually arrive at 12:15 for a 12:30 start for the meal and are welcome to stay until 14:30 with fellow guests to share a laugh and a chat together.

Thanks to all our helpers throughout the year who assist with setting up, waiting on tables, kitchen preparation, clearing up and providing lifts to and from the church.

The Christmas Outreach meal and entertainment attracted 45 guests at no cost and thanks go to the lovely team of helpers who made the occasion really special for those attending. Please feel free to supply any new Christmas jokes for next year. Christmas carols sung at the end, as always, added to the festive spirit. A fellowship meal laid on for those helpers who wished to relax together afterwards was much enjoyed.

It is with a tinge of sadness that Pam advised towards the end of 2023 that she wished to 'hang up her apron' and 'retire' since when we have been exploring a number of options to recruit a small team of cooks on a monthly rota basis on both a volunteer and paid basis subject to funding via charitable trusts and through the Diocese. She will be a 'hard act to follow' in terms of dedication, commitment and of course cooking skills.

Pam White and Stan Tither

Bishop Ridley Church Celebrates the Coronation of King Charles III



Safeguarding

Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults

For the second year the Diocese of Canterbury and the Diocese of Rochester worked together to host the Annual Safeguarding Conference the theme for which was Partnerships in Creating Safer Churches. Speakers included a professor on, "What can Science tell us about Trauma", and a Team Manager for the Kent LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) who spoke about the role of the LADO. There were also contributions from Bishop Rose and Bishop Johnathan. The conference, via Zoom, was open to all involved in safeguarding, and it will perhaps come as no surprise that with so many attendees there were several technical issues. That aside, it was good to have the opportunity to meet with fellow Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) and to hear from professionals in the safeguarding field. It is my understanding that these conferences have been deemed a success and will continue.

PSO Meetings continued throughout the year on a quarterly basis, and in my view are beneficial, they provide clarification and an opportunity to ask questions and be a part of relevant discussions.

The NST and The Clewer Initiative ran three courses in February and March 2023 on Modern Slavery which PSOs were required to attend; I attended the first course on 13th February. The content was in some cases surprising and, given that PSOs attended from rural and urban areas, their experiences differed and provided a varied and valuable insight. I have opted to receive their Newsletter, and this continues to shed light on a disturbing factor in our society today.

Domestic Abuse continues to be another area of concern, and for many within the church their role requires them to undergo Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse training. As PSOs we are also encouraged to offer this training to others, and I have tried with some success, but not enough. Domestic Abuse is horrendous, two people every week die as a result, so we must do everything we can to raise awareness. If anyone feels they would like to do the training, please do speak to me; it is done online and in the comfort of your own home and takes no more than a couple of hours.

Regarding Safeguarding Training, the Church of England requires safeguarding training to be 'refreshed' every three years, but only at the highest level of the required training. The version of the Leadership Pathway that was first delivered in July 2020 meant that those who completed then would be required to renew this in 2023, consequently the format has been revised. My renewal is not due until May 2024, so as yet I cannot comment on the extent of the changes, though I do understand it still comes in two parts and takes a minimum of 7 hours to complete.

During the year thirty-one eight announced a new service, Digital ID Checks for DBS Applications. This is a new way of completing the ID check and would involve an applicant uploading photos, documents, and a selfie, which would be independently verified by ID technology and humans. Needless to say, there has been a few teething problems and as this comes at a cost to be met by the parish, we have elected to continue using the manual system until such times as we can be sure that the changes are working effectively and the cost issue has been resolved.

The Church of England has always required all DBS Enhanced Certificates to be renewed every five years, but to bring the church in line with other organisations, this has been reduced to every three years. Given that this would take time to put into effect, Lead Recruiters were given until 3rd January 2024 to make this happen. With one exception, we managed to achieve this, but that one last application was exceptionally held up in the system and took more than two months to process, stuck in someone's in tray, I believe. Normally the whole process can be completed in days and can often come through on the same day if the timing is correct.

At the start of the calendar year as we begin to prepare for the APCM we remind ourselves of the principal issues and responsibilities the new PCC will have to commit to in order that we fully comply with the House of Bishops policies and guidance. Most of you are aware that the PCC is responsible for all aspects of safeguarding in relation to children, young people and vulnerable adults and is required at the first meeting of the new PCC to reaffirm its commitments to the Church of England policies and guidance, evidence of which must be displayed on the Safeguarding Notice Board in the Narthex alongside other important and relevant safeguarding information. As trustees, all members of the PCC must be DBS checked and under the new safeguarding training requirements which came into force on 4 January 2022 must now complete Basic Awareness, Foundation Level, and the new Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse training. Everything relating to safeguarding must go before the PCC for approval and I am grateful for their diligence and support. A particular thank you to Rev. Mark, Karen, our PCC Secretary, our Church Wardens, Pat, Derek initially and Stan from the APCM. Finally, may I also take this opportunity as I often do to remind everyone that safeguarding is the responsibility of us all.

Letitia M Ashcroft
Parish Safeguarding Officer and Lead Recruiter

Children and Young People

The Youth Council meets on an ad hoc basis, the aims are:

“To gather together all youth and children’s leaders and helpers within and connected to Bishop Ridley Church in order to support one another and to share common concerns”.

These aims have been in place a long time and I have been reflecting on them with a view to change and I will be discussing my thoughts at the next Youth Council meeting, which hopefully we can arrange shortly after the Easter break.

In my report last year, I mentioned that one or two uniformed groups were experiencing financial difficulties due in part to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and at the suggestion of our Treasurer and the agreement of the PCC, the Youth Contingency Fund, was topped up as part of Lent Giving in 2023. Details of any requests would obviously be confidential, but I feel sure Group Leaders took great comfort knowing that there was a source of financial help available should the need arise.

I say this every year in my report, but I make no apology for doing so, our young people and their leaders are amazing at raising money for charity. Over the years from selling cakes after Parade Services and being great supporters of our various Ridley Bear Appeals their enthusiasm is always there. In 2022 we became aware of the Bed Poverty Charity which responds to the plight of those thousands of children in our country who do not have a bed to sleep in, so Youth Council nominated this charity to support from the sale of cakes and together with sums received from members of the congregation, we were able to make a donation to this deserving charity. Despite donations from groups like us, individuals and big businesses, the number of children still in this plight remains staggeringly high, and so with the support from the sale of cakes and again generous donations from the congregation we were able in 2023 to donate £900, which we believe bought five enhanced bed packages, including the bed, bed linen, pyjamas, and some additional items, possibly food. We can only imagine the face of those children lucky enough to receive one of those bed packages. The need continues and until Youth Council decide otherwise, our support will too.

Bishop Ridley Church, we understand is different in that it holds more Parade Services than other churches and has more active involvement from both young people and leaders. This report affords me the opportunity to say thank you to everyone involved in the Parade Services, those Reading, Praying, helping with Sides Duties, Refreshments, volunteering to take part in the talk. Also a big thank you to Leaders of all the Uniformed Groups and Sunday Club for everything you do week in and week out, your dedication and commitment is amazing. Thank you.

Letitia M. Ashcroft

Sunday Club has had another busy year! From celebrating the King's Coronation to producing displays for Harvest and Remembrance, icing biscuits for New Year and making an Easter Garden.

We re-structured the Sunday Club during the year. As attendance can vary greatly from week to week, and there are more children in the older age group (8+), we have decided to have one all-age group. We meet in the small hall of the Community Centre. This means we have young people from 3 to 13 being taught together, which is a challenge! However, we have been trialling some new material from 'Energize', which has given us a wider range of activities in which to engage the children. They have made animals out of play dough (The Creation), played 'Musical Statues' (New Year 'Party'), been in our own improvised 'Noah's Ark', and made 'palms' for Palm Sunday.

We decided that it was not possible for the Sunday Club to present the Nativity on their own this year, due to fluctuating numbers. However, with support from members of the congregation, the children were able to take part in an 'instant' Nativity, without rehearsals. People just came to church, dressed up, and joined in! It was very well received and enjoyed by all.

The Sunday Club continues to meet about twenty times during the year. We have tried to plan it so there are one or two sessions a month, except in the school holidays, alongside Parade services. The leaders (Trudy, Kim, Pam and Jean) are now working together in pairs, assisted by our very able helpers. Tracy has joined Letitia and Sally in this role. We thank them for their support. Let's look forward to more fun as we learn about God in the weeks and months to come!

Jean Jost

Bishop Ridley Primary School Bible Club

Our school Bible club is going from strength to strength, we have between 19 to 24 children who attend our weekly after school club.

We have fun in an enriched environment, lots of craft, bible readings, singing, games, prayer and learning about God.

We are so thankful to Adrian who donated children's bibles to the club a few years ago. They are loved and very much used.

Last term we learned about Temptation, chocolate was involved. It was a great and rewarding lesson. We ended the term with making an Easter garden. We enjoyed it when Rev Mark came for a visit.

The impact the club has had on the children has enabled them to learn about God and make new friends in a calm and Christian setting.

Beverley Smalley, Kim Charlwood and Sue McGaughey

We are now up to 26 Brownies, which is great.

We had a 'sparklers and chips' evening in November.

We celebrated the Chinese New Year by making and decorating cakes with dragons etc.

On 'Thinking Day' (Robert Baden-Powells birthday), we celebrated by 'Lighting up the world' with candles and singing, we also learnt 13 different ways of saying thank you from countries all around the world and tasted food from some of those countries.

We did a 'bounce' badge for leap year. Two of the girls joined in a guide evening to experience an 'older girls' group. They really enjoyed the evening and it gave them a taste of things to come.

We are going on a pack holiday to Wilberforce Scout Centre for four nights in April. We have 17 girls coming and another four coming just for one day. Some of the Trefoil ladies are also joining us on the visitors day to help with 'sewing'.

In May along with lots of other Rainbow, Brownie and Guide groups, we are off to Leeds Castle for the day.

We now have use of the outdoor space behind the Community Centre, which is great in the summer months now we have such a big group of girls.

The girls are busy and happy earning badges with lots of different activities, which is good to see.

Shirley Page
Brown Owl

In 2023 the Guides started the year with 25 Guides, which is one of the largest units we have had in nearly 10 years, so we were pleased to see that more Brownies are moving into our unit as well as girls from outside guiding joining us. In 2022 we lost one of our long standing leaders which everyone was sad to see leave. At the beginning of 2023 we welcomed two new leaders and two new young leaders to the group, which brought more support and new ideas to the unit which made it a lot of fun for everyone.

We kicked off the year exploring how to support our physical and mental health with activities from the Guiding Programme. This led to us earning a badge and exploring how we can support others as well. We were also lucky enough to use the Church for a movie night and sleep over, where 20 Guides camped out in the church for an evening of movies, pizza and sweets. Yes, this led to a sleepless night for some but was a brilliant way for some of our younger Guides to experience going away with Guides for the first time.

We Celebrated the King's Coronation by taking part in the Girlguiding Coronation Challenge in Bexleyheath high street. We were joined by 12 Guides to take part in a treasure hunt across the high street. It was a lot of fun, got us out into the community and allowed us to hand the reins to Guides to lead the day and follow the clues and challenges. Everyone had a lot of fun and earned a badge for taking part.

We joined a splash day event where the Guides got the opportunity to try different water sports on Danson Lake, even though it was a rainy day this did not deter the Guides who threw themselves (quite literally) into the activities and everyone went home wet, happy and worn out. It is something we will certainly be joining again. We also explore STEM at free F1 event in London where the Guides got to try various games and challenges for the evening including a driving simulator which they all really enjoyed.

We were also lucky that we had five Guides win a Jack Petchy award for demonstrating the values of guiding. This is a prestigious award where the Guides receive a medal, certificate and a grant to celebrate. With this money we were able to take the Guides to Gravity in Bluewater with dinner at McDonalds, an evening of bowling and dinner at Pizza Express and took part in an escape room. These were all chosen and planned by the winners and all the Guides had a lot of fun at each of the evenings.

Along with all these evenings out we worked towards our communicator badge and four challenge badges that Guides chose, including the biscuit challenge badge. They also took part in parliament week where the Guides chose a cause and had to debate why they deserved more funding. This is a brilliant activity that got the Guides thinking about how to put their arguments in a convincing way as well as learning to challenge someone effectively without causing offence.

We ended the year with our leader gaining her 2+ night Going Away With Licence at a camp in Paxwood where we had 15 Guides join us for a three day camp with the theme of flames and sparks where we celebrated Guy Fawkes night around a campfire

with multi-coloured flames, sparklers, glow sticks, smores, burgers and singing. This was a brilliant weekend that went very well and the leader successfully achieved her licence so now we are able to take the Guides away more.

We also sadly said goodbye to one of our leaders and two of our young leaders who have exams this year and need to focus on school work.



Another fun filled busy year. We have had between 19-21 girls throughout the year. We also had a Guide helper join our team so now we have four adult leaders/ helpers, one young leader and a guide helper.

We took part in the Girlguiding Greater London Kent Coronation challenge with 500 Girlguiding members in Bexleyheath. During the event we went on a scavenger hunt related to the King, which also got us to learn more about the town centre.

As a unit we celebrated the King's Coronation by helping to decorate the church ready for the Bishop's visit, make a crown and have a tea party with cupcakes and mocktails.

Rainbows had lots of fun when we went to Wingham Wildlife Park with another Rainbow group. We were very lucky with the animals we got to see especially baby meerkats, heard/ saw a lion and a jaguar roar, a moon bear dancing and got very close to ring tailed lemurs. We also had enough time to visit the soft play area, which seemed to revive tired legs and give the leaders a rest!

During the summer term we completed Our Explore skill builder badge by learning to be astronauts, blasting rockets and visiting different planets in space. We even tried some astronaut food - freeze dried strawberries and freeze dried ice cream. We learnt about Valentina Tereshkova first woman in space, Helen Sharman first British woman in space and Mae Jemison first African American woman in space. We also completed It's a Bug's Life Challenge and visited Woodlands Farm for our end of term treat for a mini beast safari. The Rainbows did fantastic to find and carefully catch and release mini beasts in specimen jars and were excited to find: woodlice, ants, spiders, millipedes, and caterpillars. They also saw bees and butterflies. Thank you for the Bishop Ridley Youth Contingency Fund that gave us the opportunity to have a fantastic time during the mini beast safari.

In the autumn term we completed a Seahorse Challenge badge, where we learnt about seahorses, had an imagery day at the beach with an ice cream sundae and learnt Old McDonald had an Ocean song.

In the winter term we completed a Christmas Around the World Challenge badge where we learnt about different traditions and how Christmas is celebrated in certain countries. For China's peach apples we decorated apple slices, in Mexico we made a poinsettia tealight, in France we made a Bouche Noel, in Philippines we made a Parol, in Australia we made a beach bauble and sang Australian Christmas songs and in Denmark we made a traditional Danish heart from Hama beads.

On our third annual Christmas Activity day Rainbows made penguin biscuits, a noughts and crosses game, a snowman advent countdown, Christmas fairy crunchies and star magnets. We also played lots of party games like pin the nose on Rudolph and musical chairs.

We had another amazing visit to the Pantomime at Bob Hope Theatre with 8th Welling Brownies and two other Rainbow units. The Rainbows had so much fun, and one Rainbow was even asked to name one of the characters to her delight. A member of the public commented how the Rainbows shouting 'he's behind you' so loudly and enthusiastically that they were off their seats made the pantomime so much more joyous for him and his friends.

We also celebrated the Rainbows earning the following awards: 4x Bronze awards, 2x Silver awards and 1x Gold award. This is a great achievement as a lot of the work for these awards is done at home and is due to their enthusiasm and commitment and parental support.

Rainbows attended a Historical Heroes event run by Barnehurst Guides. Rainbows really enjoyed the event – they got to make dinosaurs, stained glass windows, mosaic coasters, planted a carrot seed for rationing, cave painting, dinosaur scavenger hunt, had a go at archery and turning each other into Mummies.

We received the Co-op community grant in October and want to say a massive thank you to all who chose us as their charity and helped to raise the money. So far we have used the money for our Christmas activity day and Historical Heroes event.

We will be visiting Leeds Castle in May with the County and planning more trips/ events for this.

Thank you too to BR and parents for your continued support to Rainbows.

Pat, Sian, Sarah, Jess, Millie and Sophie
And 8th Welling Rainbows



In April to mark the Coronation we participated in a Wide Game in Bexleyheath, organised by GLK Guiding, where over 500 Rainbows, Brownies and Guides took part. It was an amazing sight-seeing all the guiding colours and a fantastic atmosphere of girls learning about Bexleyheath in a fun way.

In June we had a joint evening with the Beavers at Danson Park, the rain held off and we managed to have a scavenger hunt and picnic, as well as playing Tunnel Ball with the very anxious looking Beavers - the girls certainly took control that night!

One of our interesting challenges this year was to take part in the GLK Trivial Pursuit Challenge - Breakaway to Belgium. We did six activities connected to the Trivial Pursuit Game which included Science – designing our own star sign, Sport - learning about Belgium golfers while making our own mini golf course, Food - exclusive chocolate cooking, Art – painting in a renaissance style with cotton buds, salt, vegetables and bubble wrap.

We supported a local horse sanctuary, where we were able to give them some resources to make the horses that had been badly treated and abandoned some hope for a much better future.

We concentrated on the Theme Award Skills for My Future by doing the Jobs badge, inviting people who do different jobs to come into the unit and to be interviewed by the girls. This theme also included being a Scientist and doing the STEMinis Badge, which was made up of different science experiments some with slime, exploding liquids, red sugar cubes and secret writing – a good and messy time was had by all. A parent who works for a deaf charity came and taught all the girls how to sign their names as well as playing games without speaking, it was a very quiet evening and we were able to give some money to her charity.

We also have been working on the Know Yourself Theme, where we have been testing our memory skills and learning about Brownies in the past for Thinking Day. We have just finished doing a series of activities which include skipping, jumping and leaping to music all to do with the Bounce Badge for Leap year.

Along with 118 other Rainbows and Brownies we had our annual visit to the Panto at Bob Hope theatre - we saw Once Upon a Time, it was a remarkable night - all the girls shouted, screamed and ate their way through the panto - The audience participation was electric which suited our shy retiring girls.

We have just returned from another very successful Pack Holiday with the theme being The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. A full on time was had by all including the leaders who had to try the zip wire!

At present we have 35 girls (6 are due to go to Guides at Easter). Luckily we have gained a very strong team of adult helpers that consist of myself, Becki (who is doing her adult leadership qualification) Eliza and Penny and also five young leaders, Beth, Connie, Eleanor, Anna and Rebecca.

We look forward to the next year full of exciting challenges, the first one being a sit out at night for the Porchlight Charity, a homeless charity for women and girls. Lots of badges, events and trips are being organised by our team to give the girls such a wide variety of fun, friendship, laughter and challenges.

Sue Davies

2023 was another busy year for the group.

At the end of 2023 we had an Explorer Young Leaders Unit with six Explorers in it. They help to run games at Scouts, Cubs and Beavers as well as do their own badge work. Congratulations to Sam, Aaron, Josh, and Freddie for getting their Chief Scout's Platinum Award during 2023. They went camping at Thriftwood in May and have also camped at the Avery Hill Scout Centre and Hope Hill at Meopham. Five of them attended a Young Leaders training course in June and First Aid course in July and have now very nearly finished all the Missions required to complete the badge.

The Scouts had a successful summer camp at Thriftwood at the end of May and have been working on their Challenge Awards. Max and Kristian both achieved their Chief Scout's Gold award in 2023. We now have another three moving on from Scouts to Explorers.

Many of the Cubs attended a Badge Rally in March and achieved a variety of badges. They went to Thriftwood for their summer camp in May. The Cubs went shelter building in Oxleas Woods in the summer. They have been working hard on a range of badges and three Cubs (Sam, George and Nathan) achieved their Chief Scout's Silver awards during the year.

The Beavers went litter picking in March and took part in an Easter egg hunt at Footscray Meadows in April. They went on a day trip to Thriftwood in May and had a sleepover at the Scout hut in June. They also went to Danson Park for a joint evening with the 8th Welling Brownies. Five Beavers (Harry, Jaxon, Jackson, Jonah, Josh) achieved their Chief Scout's Bronze award before moving on to Cubs.

The group held two very successful jumble sales in 2023 and ran our first Beetle Drive. We were nominated again to be one of the organisations supported by the Co-op Local Community Fund.

We are lucky to have a supportive Trustee Board and a great team of uniformed leaders and other helpers who put in a lot of hard work running sections, organising events and camps for our young people. This enables us to help our young people gain skills for life whilst having fun, and to help us to support our local community.

Keith Thomson
Group Lead Volunteer

Links

Churches Together in Welling (CTW) is a group which represents nearly all the church denominations in Welling. It meets five times a year (including one meeting for its AGM, which was hosted by Bishop Ridley (BR) this year) to hear how other churches are building God's kingdom here in Welling and to arrange joint church activities.

The aim of CTW is as follows:

1. Include in weekly prayers, prayers for Welling churches and Leaders.
2. Work together to support Christian Aid.
3. Share in preparation for Easter during Lent and support an Act of Witness on Good Friday.
4. Hold a World Day of Prayer Service.
5. Observe the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.
6. Run joint courses for Marriage Preparation, Sickness or Bereavement Counselling.
7. Observe together the Global Day of Prayer.
8. Share worship together in rotation on 5th Sundays at Evening Service.

Fifth Sunday services have been poorly attended and they may be discontinued. If you wish them to continue, please attend and encourage others to join you. It is wonderful opportunity to see how other churches and denominations worship God.

Unfortunately, this year's celebration of The World Day of Prayer had to be cancelled. The theme was written by women of the Taiwan and the theme was 'I heard about your faith'. Information about The World Day of Prayer can be found on their website <https://www.wwdp.org.uk/>

CTW organises Lent activities, which includes craft, poetry workshops, Lent courses and lectures. These activities are a good opportunity to meet with other Christians in the area.

The big event each year is the Good Friday Walk of Witness from St Mary's Church at Shoulder of Mutton Green to St John's Church, Danson Lane which is followed by a hunger lunch at St John's.

Spark in the Park was held in Danson Park in the last week of July. This year's event is scheduled to go ahead in the week of 29 July 2024. If you haven't previously been involved, please consider taking part, you do not have to commit to the whole week. Also, all are welcome to come and join in the fun events in the evening. Anyone wish to join a BR Quiz team?

At Christmas, CTW supported the national Shine Your Light campaign by singing carols outside the FCI on 16 December. Churches also sang carols at Welling Sparkle at Westwood Lane Car Park on 19 November. These were both opportunities to share church's Christmas services.

As usual, we appeal to our BR community to support CTW services and events. Could you help in collecting for Christian Aid or attending Spark? If so, or if you would like more information, please speak to one of the CTW representatives. CTW now has a website: <https://ctiw.uk/>

Following the resignation of Les Brett as treasurer in 2022, Mervyn French has stepped into the breach.

Revd Mark Tariq
Karen Freeman
Grace Woodley