

## **Berwick Parish Church Trust**

### **AGM, 7 July 2025: Chairman's Report**

Welcome to this 2025 Annual General Meeting of Berwick Parish Church Trust. It's encouraging to see not only current Trustees but three people who are not Trustees – or at least in one case, not yet a Trustee – also present today.

The Trust is not a membership organisation, so I am afraid that those of you who are not Trustees will not be entitled to vote on any of the matters for discussion. However, the Trustees are keen to carry out their responsibilities in an open and transparent way: so, if you wish to ask a question about our business, please alert me to that by raising your hand at the appropriate moment and I will do my best to ensure your question is answered. Please also (and I address this to everyone) speak up clearly, so that everyone can hear you if you are called on to speak.

Last year I reported that the year from April 2023 to end March 2024 had been a relatively quiet one for the Trust and the same could be said of the one which has just finished. The Quinquennial Inspection report received by the PCC in the autumn of 2024 showed no major problems with the fabric of the church – a tribute to the care with which the church building has been maintained by past as well as current generations. As a result, there have been no major calls on the Trust's resources over the last 12 months. One major potential call – for the re-leathering of parts of the organ – has not yet materialised, although it is predicted to hit us – to the estimated tune of well over £55,000 – sometime in the next 3-5 years.

The grants made by the Trust in response to requests from the PCC have therefore been relatively small, and have all been made out of income rather than requiring the Trust to expend any of its capital. These grants have included ones of some hundreds of pounds to upgrade the church's AV system and for repairs to the church's processional cross, as well as, more recently, of somewhat larger sums for a professional survey of the church's nave roof (more on that later) and the repainting of the church's downpipes and of the churchyard gate.

David Mason, the Trust's Treasurer, will give a fuller account of the Trust's financial position in a moment. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for his assiduous and careful stewardship of our resources. Our capital investments are of course professionally managed to a high standard by Evelyn, a major firm of investment advisers. There is no chance of Evelyn sitting back and relaxing with David on their tail.

While the Trust has not had to respond to major requests for funding, the Trustees have by no means been idle. I mentioned last year the setting up of a joint group of members of the Trust and the PCC, with the aim of raising the profile of the church and of the Trust in the wider community. That Group has taken advantage of a number of anniversaries and other events to ensure that the church has been actively involved in

plans to celebrate them alongside, and in support of, other community organisations. So far we have managed the church's involvement in last year's Berwick Bridge 400 celebrations, the events to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE and VJ Days (the latter being due on 15 August), the visit of the Coldstream Guards to Berwick on 10 June and, most extensive of all, a series of events to mark the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Holy Trinity School, a programme which will not be concluded until the end of the next school year. In addition, the Group has worked on developing a prototype 'Friends of Berwick Parish Church' with the aim of informing more people about the life of the church, and on draft proposals for a common visual identity for the Trust complementary to that recently developed for the church. Both of these initiatives are expected to be completed soon.

All of this activity has ensured that Father Lee – who, incidentally, has asked me to present his apologies that he cannot be here tonight because he is required to attend the Diocesan clergy conference - has been kept suitably busy since his very welcome arrival as our new incumbent shortly before Easter. It has also paved the way for the development of a programme over the next two years to mark the 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of our present parish church. The programme will kick off in late October of this year, as we mark the passing of 375 years since the laying of the foundation stone of the church, and will conclude on Trinity Sunday in 2027, 375 years after the present church building opened for worship. I take this opportunity to thank all those involved so far in organising the various different initiatives I have mentioned for their dedicated effort, which has prepared the ground for all that is to come over the next two years.

The increased focus on the church building which celebrating its 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary will ensure could not be more timely. The signs are that the recent relatively quiet period in the core activity of the Trust is about to end. The absence of major repair and refurbishment commitments cannot last. As many of you know at first hand, the nave roof of the church has started leaking and if the recent professional survey of it concludes that its replacement after a life of 100 years or so is required, the church will need to embark on a major fundraising effort. There is no rest for the righteous, let alone the wicked. We will be looking for more people to become regular donors to the Trust (at the moment we have only three, whom I thank warmly for their continued support), as well as for one-off donations and legacies.

Thanks to the hard work of my fellow Trustees, the Trust is well-placed to play its part in that fundraising effort. I have already mentioned David Mason, but all have contributed in their different ways. I take this opportunity to mention in particular Andrew Phillips, who stepped down recently, and those colleagues – Gwynneth Guthrie and Helen Mason - who will cease to be members of the Trust at this AGM. All three of them have served the Trust with distinction and I thank them warmly for that. I must also mention the vital contribution of Flora Moxon, the Trust's Secretary who, although not herself a Trustee over the past year, has been a model of wisdom and efficiency in that role. I mention Flora because although we will, I hope, in a moment re-appoint her as the

Trust's Secretary, she has given notice that she will step down from that role at the end of this month. We can be confident that when that moment comes, everything will be left entirely shipshape.

To conclude, the Trust, like the Parish Church of Holy Trinity and St Mary, stands at a pivotal point in its story. We can, I believe, look forward with confidence to all that lies ahead.