

Annual Report and Accounts 2025

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Barnard Castle with Whorlton: Diocese of Durham

1. Introduction

This Report has been drawn up in accordance with the Charities Act 2011.

2. Aims and purposes

St. Mary's Barnard Castle with Whorlton Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, The Revd Canon Alec Harding, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

3. **Objectives and activities:** We have discerned the parish's overarching aim to be

Celebrating God's Love

We seek to do this by:

1. Working in partnership with those who bring life to the community.
2. Celebrating God's gifts in His creation, His children and His work in this place.
3. Creating space, time and opportunities for people of all ages to grow in faith and worship.

Our priorities in 2024 for the next period of our shared life were discerned to be:

1. **Growing our work with Children and young people** and connecting church, schools and families together.
2. **Healing and wholeness.**
3. **Offering 'Living water' through our worship and common life so we might grow.**

Communication:

We communicate our activities through an e-letter and/or a hard copy newsletter, through the church pew sheet, through the church website and through FaceBook.

Achievements and performance

1. Growing our work with children and young people:

The parish continues to work extensively with children and young people with volunteers involved in the weekly under-fives group (Smuffies), offering Junior church provision at Barnard Castle, weekly Big Story sessions, hymn practice and church school choir sessions and (occasional) Prayer spaces at Green Lane School. Clergy conduct weekly collective worship at Montalbo and Green Lane Schools alongside involvement at Barnard Castle School and the Prep school. Barnard Castle church hosts school visits and termly school services. Uniformed organizations visit Barnard Castle Church.

What did we do in 2025?

<p>The parish continued to offer support to the young peoples' music group 'The Panthers'. The group meets in term time. A number of the parishes' more senior members act as a 'second adult' for safeguarding purposes in support of the group. The Panthers offered a short concert in church in April. Izzy Harvey was recruited to support in training The Panthers' singers.</p> <p>Revd Moskvina attended the philosophy club at Teesdale school in the Spring term.</p> <p>Year 5 at Green Lane CE School prepared a service of Holy Communion at which 3 candidates were admitted to communion before confirmation.</p> <p>Members of the parish serve as Foundation Governors of Green Lane CE School and Green Lane CE School's Christian ethos committee has plotted increased activity in the 2025/26 school year.</p>	<p>Increased Special Educational Needs at Green Lane CE School have put pressure on the availability of Teaching Assistants to support the church's offer of the Big Story. A resolution to enable this work to continue is yet to be found.</p> <p>Annette Lowson, Pamela Moody and Kim Harding spend time at Green Lane CE School each week supporting a 'school church choir'. The choir has been able to perform at school services.</p> <p>The traditional preparation of the Easter Garden and Egg hunt at Barnard Castle was expanded to become a 'drop-in session' that included storytelling and a hunt for Jesus figures hidden around the church.</p> <p>The vicar has persuaded Barnard Castle School to promote a confirmation course in 2026. A service is planned for March 2026.</p>
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2. Healing and wholeness

Healing and wholeness sits within the church's provision of pastoral care to the town. At its widest level this includes ensuring that the parish safeguarding procedures are robust; supporting people to meet together and find strength and fellowship in community through the many groups that use the Parish Hall; promoting church social activities and events; hosting concerts and continuing to offer care home services and pastoral visits (not least those surrounding the occasional offices of baptisms, weddings and funerals).

What did we do in 2025?

<p>Prayer for healing is offered regularly at services at Barnard Castle.</p> <p>Members from the congregation (and the wider deanery) attended the online GoHealth Introduction to healing course. Two people have been added to the rota of those who offer prayer for healing at regular services.</p>	<p>Members of the parish continue to serve as Trustees of Durham Dales Parish Nursing. Discussions this year have revolved around the importance of the work but, as funding is running out, the difficulties of embedding the ministry. In December the Parish Nurse, Gladys Mugambi moved to a different post.</p>
<p>The PCC has complied with the duty to have 'due regard' to the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance.</p>	

Social events

<p>At Whorlton the successful heritage event in 2024 was followed up with the creation of a church guidebook by Amanda Long and Revd Moskvina. The guide was launched at a well-attended event in the village hall in March which was followed by evening prayer.</p> <p>Whorlton village's Open Gardens provides an opportunity for the church to be open. The church community at Whorlton are seeking ways whereby a rota of villagers can open the building through the summer months as a invitation for walkers/passers by to call in. A digital giving device has been loaned by the</p>	<p>Barnard Castle hosted a number of events arranged by others: The Northern Dales Richard IIIrd group raised money for works on the church through both a Ceilidh and a quiz night in the parish hall; the Castle Players performed 'The inn at the Top' in the parish Hall and returned to present The Crucible across four performances in church in October. Barnard Castle School Choral Society presented three concerts in church in the course of the year.</p> <p>The vicarage hosted afternoon tea to mark the Harding's 25th anniversary in the parish.</p>
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diocese to enable visitors to donate more easily to the church.

In September Revd Geoff Lowson gave an informative talk in church entitled 'The Name on the Chair'. The talk focused on the ministry of the first Bishop of Capetown: Robert Gray who dedicated the rebuilt church at Whorlton in 1853.

Community Music continues to flourish in the parish through the hard work of the musical director, Annette Lowson. The Community choir/orchestra offered six concerts in the course of the year (one at Barnard Castle Methodist Church and one at The Witham Hall). All concerts in church were offered free of charge to enable as many people as possible to attend. In addition, musicians offered an 'Inspired by' event at Barnard Castle and supported Carol Singing around the town.

The Flower Guild held well attended wreath making events during Advent.

St Mary's Bell ringers (and hand bell ringers) ran a full program of practices and continue to attract new ringers.

St Mary's hosted its biennial Christmas Tree Festival in early December. Fifty trees were on display and visitors were welcomed throughout by live music co-ordinated by the Director of Music. The Festival was well attended and was a huge success. Thanks go to Mr John Trevett who organized the sale of trees, those who prepare the church (laying cables and bringing the trees into church), those who provide and serve refreshments and the team who dismantle the festival.

3. Offering 'Living Water' through our worship and common life so we might grow:

We always seek to offer the very best we can in our worship involving the gifts of as many people as possible and being true both to ourselves and our inheritance of faith through the celebration of the Liturgical Year, and the use of a liturgical approach to worship. A full range of liturgical resources is used based on the provision in the Church of England's Times and Seasons. We continue to welcome new members to the congregation and seek to engage the gifts of all in the life of the church and service of the community.

What did we do in 2025?

Special services in the course of the year at Barnard Castle marked Church Action on Poverty Sunday and the VE Day anniversary. Alec & Kim Harding's 25th anniversary of ministry in the parish was marked at the Sunday eucharist: the bell ringers rang a peal of bells, Geoff and Annette Lowson wrote and composed an anthem (In this place of faithful worship) which was performed by the choir (supported by members of the community choir), the flower guild decorated the church especially, gifts were presented and a celebratory cake was cut.

St Mary's Whorlton offered Evening Prayer from the Book of Common prayer on a number of occasions to mark saints' days. The church's Hymns and Pimms event rounded off a very successful Flower Festival that engaged the flower guild, congregation members and local villagers. Mr David Harper's skill as an auctioneer was much appreciated. A village flower arranging team has since come into existence. The team was able to support the decoration of the church at Christmas.

The Easter fire was lit before morning worship at Whorlton

Barnard Castle Harvest service took on a 'folk' theme with music offered and supported by members of the community orchestra.

Study courses offered opportunities to engage with Icons (a series presented by Revd Moskvina was well attended) 'The Four Texts', and the Nicene Creed.

Separate meetings were offered for consultation and training for sidesmen/women, those who read in church and those who lead intercessions. Each of the meetings were found to be helpful and produced action points to enable the ministries involved and new members of the congregation have been recruited to these ministries.

Additional names have been added to those who can administer the chalice at services.

The Community choir offered a carol concert which was built around a faith reflection by Geoff Lowson.

Barnard Castle' Carol service took place 'choir style' and was very well attended.

Once again, the County Durham WI were welcomed to Barnard Castle for their Carol service.

Church Officers and Staff:

- Revd Canon Alec Harding and his family celebrated the 25th anniversary of their arrival in the parish
- Revd Dr Ana Moskvina married her fiancé Revd Michael Balwin at a service at Barnard Castle on 11.1.25 conducted by retired Bishop David Stancliffe. The service was attended by parishioners and included elements that reflected the bride's Orthodox background and the groom's Roman Catholic heritage.
- Revd Dr Ana Moskvina Baldwin was ordained priest by the Acting Bishop of Durham at a service in Durham Cathedral. Her first celebration of communion on the next day was followed by a celebratory lunch in the Parish Hall and the presentation of gifts.
- Mrs Frances Stenlake continued to serve on the nominations' committee for the new Bishop.
- Former incumbent Revd Peter Lind Jackson marked his 90th birthday: the bell ringers rang a quarter peal in celebration.
- Mrs Sarah Fells was welcomed to spend 6 months in the parish as part of her training for licensed ministry. Her time in the parish proved formational in helping her to decide to offer for selection for ordained ministry

The wider church:

The candidate nominated as Bishop of Durham following interviews in 2024 (unusually) withdrew their candidacy resulting in the renewal of the discernment process throughout 2025. A second round of interviews for the post took place in December 2025.

His Majesty the King distributed the Royal Maundy at a service in Durham Cathedral. Recipients were drawn from the Northern Province and Scotland. Some members from churches in the deanery were selected, Mr Keith Miles being one of them.

The Archdeacon's Visitation took place at All Saints' Blackwell: Joan Kemp Ambler and Amanda Long were sworn in as churchwardens.

A coach was arranged to attend the licensing of our former curate (Revd Sarah Cliff) as Vicar of Great Ayton and Newton under Roseberry (October 2025).

Mrs Helen Goodman represented the diocese of Durham at ordinations in Hamburg. Durham Diocese has a link with the Lutheran NordKirche.

The Bishop of London (Sarah Mullaly) was nominated to become the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

a. **Barnard Castle Deanery.**

The deanery synod welcomed presentations from Communities Together Durham and the Growing Mission strategic lead (Revd Alexander Jones). Discussion involved the wider context for the ministry of healing and the place of Parish Nursing with this.

The Vicar created a course for use across the deanery examining 'The Four texts' (The Summary of the Law, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed). The course was offered to support confirmation preparation and growth in discipleship mindful that many parishes are in vacancy. The course was attended over zoom but also used in person in parishes.

The Vacancy audit processes for the Upper Dale was completed and that for the Gaunless Valley was begun. An appointment was made for Vicar of the Upper Weardale benefice. Revd Graeme Holdsworth will begin his ministry in February 2026. The appointment is shared with 50% being given to Rural Mission Strategic lead.

b. **Churches Together**

Lent and Advent lunches ran successfully in support of the work of Christian Aid.

Churches worked together to raise funds through Christian Aid week.

A united service was held at Barnard Castle in June (rather than in January). The focus of the service was the Nicene Creed: the 1700th anniversary of the creed being agreed falling in 2025.

Wardens' reports

St Mary's Barnard Castle

Longstanding problems with the **foul water drains** through the carpark were resolved through the help of contractors who devoted considerable time to discerning the problem at no cost to the church. Two **manhole**

covers were eventually replaced in the carpark – the collapse of the surround to one of these had caused the drains to block – their replacements are ‘heavy duty’. Camera investigation of the drain from the east end of the tower into the carpark identified a second blockage. The water pipe here was cracked by those who installed the tower uprights in 2013. The crack (and part of the pipe) has been filled with concrete. Now the blockage further along the system has been cleared water should run freely. Advice received was to leave well alone!

The **carpark wall** adjacent to the Parish Hall was demolished by a car that ‘missed’ the main entrance. The driver did not confess to the damage caused but witnesses led the PCC to inform the police of their number plate. A confession and insurance details were received but the insurer involved did not pay for the damage and the church insurer felt that the £500 involved would cost too much in legal fees to pursue.

Church lights: a number of the main church lights have failed. Their replacement (at high level) would involve major expenditure. Help was gratefully received from Barnard Castle School who, working with Mr Astley Fenwick, were able to move some existing lights to lighten our darkness. Astley has also replaced most of the uprights on the church pillars.

A change in energy supplier will see a new **electricity meter** installed in 2026

A **Fire Risk assessment & PAT testing** have been conducted.

Work to repair the **lifted tiles** beneath the pulpit has been completed with thanks to Revd Canon Geoff Lowson for the many hours devoted to this task.

The PCC has devoted considerable time to the discussion of **carparking** outside the church and the abuse of the carpark by those who are neither attending the church nor using the Parish Hall. A strong letter was sent by the PCC to the estate agent advertising the church footpaths as providing vehicle access to the back of a property on Newgate. Revd Moskva Baldwin, Mrs Joan Kemp-Ambler and Mrs Clare Trevett have investigated different providers that offer CCTV and/or Number Plate Recognition to control carpark use. Decisions will be made in early 2026.

South Transept and chancel project. The architect’s estimates for the work proposed have been updated. A fundraising appeal will be launched in 2026. Changes to the Governments Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme are likely to impact funding. Details of a replacement grant scheme are not yet available. Works will require considerable grant aid.

Barnard Castle Parish Hall

The Parish Hall is in the care of the Parish Hall Association (PHA) under a lease from the PCC. A request to extend the lease of the hall was made by the PHA to the PCC. The current lease expires in 2034. The PCC and PHA are working towards renewing the lease.

The committee have overseen the renewal of the fire doors to the rear of the building. Significant repairs to the guttering above the main hall are planned for 2026 as well as the replacement of the hot water boiler that serves the kitchen and Guild Room.

St. Mary’s Whorlton

Major work took place in the first half of the year as damp issues were addressed by the **clearing of gutters and downspouts, the investigation of soakaway channels and then their subsequent replacement.** Funds for this work came from the Whorlton endowment fund, the Diocese and from PCC reserves.

A **Fire risk assessment and PAT testing** have been carried out

The **bells were inspected** and a report received. It was noted that a beam in the tower is not load bearing but does not need attention.

The **latch bolt to main door** of the church was repaired to ensure that it locks properly.

The **Quinquennial Inspection** of the church will be carried out by John Barnes in 2026

Whorlton Village Hall:

The Village Hall is in the care of the Village Hall Association under a lease from the PCC. The association continue to make changes and improvements to the building.

Some numbers (brackets indicate 2025 numbers)

Baptisms 22 (16) baptisms were conducted at Barnard Castle, 7 (4) at Whorlton	Admission to communion Three children were admitted to communion at a service held at Green Lane CE School in October 2025
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Weddings Six (7) weddings were celebrated at Barnard Castle, two (0) at Whorlton

Funerals There were 18 (20) funerals at Barnard Castle and 2 (3) at Whorlton with a further 20 (15) conducted at the crematoria alone.

Clergy conducted 5 (7) funerals in neighbouring parishes

Confirmation Six candidates were presented for confirmation at a service held at Barnard Castle on 11th October 2025

Usual Sunday attendance

Based on the 'October count' the usual Sunday attendance at Barnard Castle is 79 (76) adults and 2 (2) children.

At Whorlton the figure is 14 (10) adults

Easter

At Barnard Castle 146 (126) adults attended Easter worship: 109 (114) communicants.

At Whorlton 18 (10) adults attended Easter worship 14 (9) communicants

Christmas At Barnard Castle 662 (691) people attended services on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve with 160 (139) communicants The combined total of those attending Christingle, the Christmas Tree Festival final worship, a Carol concert with reflection and the church Carol service was 909. Green Lane CE school's Carol service and Montalbo school's Carol concert were attended by a further 742 people (approx. 350 children). The Whorlton Carol service was attended by 84 adults and 4 children. The Carol singing and Christmas communion service at Whorlton was attended by 38 people (29 communicants)

The Worshipping community Those who attend 'regularly' in church, care homes, but excluding weekly Collective worship at two Primary Schools and occasional services at Barnard Castle School

At Barnard Castle 299: (7 under 10; 8 aged 10-17; 161 aged 18-69, 123 over 70)

26 adults and 1 child joined the community, 23 left (moved away or died). 4 children moved away.

The worshipping community at Whorlton is 14: 5 aged 18-69; 9 over 70

Comment This year's figures would continue to suggest that we do well at 'events' (Christmas and Easter attendance is strong but other 'one off' events in our churches are also well supported.) It is worth noting that attendance at the two main festivals is frequently affected by the weather (!), by whether Easter is early or late and when Christmas falls in the week.

Numbers of baptisms, weddings and funerals are holding steady. This should not be taken for granted as evidence would suggest that engagement with faith communities is weakening in many urban parishes.

Worshipping community numbers are horrendously difficult to calculate (as are the ages of those counted). Numbers here reflect a significant number of older folk in our care homes but the numbers of these attending worship in their respective home has dropped. The numbers also include members of the community music groups who connect with the parish through worship.

Attempts to re-establish a congregation for younger families continue to fall foul of finding committed lay leadership to support this. In 2026 a number of possible 'drop in' events that may well involve worship are scheduled but these are labour intensive and will need congregational support.

Structure, governance and management

Members of the PCC are either ex-officio, elected or co-opted by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting [APCM], in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. At its Annual Meeting in 2020 a motion was passed that came into effect in 2021:

- a. Churchwardens be eligible to serve up to six consecutive years (this provision to be reviewed every six years as per the Church Representation Rules).
- b. The balance between elected/ex officio members of the PCC be changed through
 - i. removing the automatic membership of Readers to the PCC
 - ii. replacing the existing 'rolling election of PCC members' with the election of 8 lay representatives (who for the purposes of continuity can serve up to 4 consecutive years).

As Charity Trustees PCC members are mindful of the Charity Commission's Guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion.

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting was held at Barnard Castle following morning worship on Sunday 4th May 2025. The Electoral Roll had been renewed and was reported to stand at 114.

Members of the PCC: PCC Standing Committee elected 4.5.25 are marked *

Incumbent & Chair Revd Alec Harding*

Churchwardens <i>(Can serve 6 consecutive years)</i>	Mrs Joan Kemp Ambler (elected 2020)	Mr Roy Long* till APCM 2025 (elected 2020)
	Vacancy	Mrs Amanda Long* (2025)

Ex Officio: Mrs Frances Stenlake* (Diocesan Synod) Lay Chair of PCC

Deanery Synod: Mr Keith Miles Ms Abi Littlefair Mr Astley Fenwick (resigned summer 2025)
(Three elected places to serve for 3 years from 2023)

Elected Members (8 places – can serve 4 consecutive years)

Carolyn Knott (<i>resigned Autumn 2025</i>) Helen Goodman* (2021)	Liz Burdon (2022)	Seonaid Walker-Jones (2023) Catherine Wilkinson (2023)	Merrion Chrisp (2024) Roy Long (2025) Co-opted (from Sept 2025) Robin Taylor & Mary Barnard
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PCC Secretary Mr Geoff Knott (Ex Officio)

PCC Treasurer Mrs Frances Stenlake*