

Trustees' Annual Report

The Friends of St James the Great, Thorley *Registered Charity No: 288678*

Year ending 31 December 2025

Legal and Administrative Information

This report is for the financial year beginning on 1 January 2025 and ending on 31 December 2025.

The Principal Address of the charity is:

60 The Paddock
Bishop's Stortford
Herts
CM23 4JW

E-mail: friends.stjames@btinternet.com

Website: www.friends-stjames.org

The object of the charity is to help and support the Rector and Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St. James the Great, Thorley (subject to any necessary faculties being obtained) to:

- maintain and embellish the fabric, furnishing and fittings of St. James the Great, Thorley
- maintain, protect and beautify the Churchyard of the Church.

The Governing Document of the charity is the Constitution as adopted on 21 February 1983 and amended on 18 March 1984 and 1 October 2021. This calls for the management of the charity to be in the hands of a Committee of Trustees consisting of two members appointed by the Parochial Church Council of St. James the Great and six members elected at the Annual Meeting of the Association. The Committee may co-opt additional members as necessary and invite the Incumbent of St James the Great to be an ex-officio member. The Officers of the charity are a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary who are appointed by the Committee. The Constitution calls for an Annual Meeting to take place in the month of March and the Accounts to be made up to 31st December every year.

In fulfilling the object of the charity, the Trustees have had due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

At a meeting of the Committee held on 15 January 2007 it was agreed that it would be prudent to maintain reserves at a level of £2,500.

The following table details the Trustees as of October 2026 and those who acted during the period covered by this report.

Name	Office (if any)	Dates Acted Since 1 January 2025	Mode of Appointment
Mrs Emma Collins		1 January 2025 - 28 September 2025	Parochial Church Council Appointee
Mr Desmond Conridge	Treasurer	1 January 2025-present	Elected until 13 July 2026 Parochial Church Council Appointee from 13 July 2026
Mr Daniel Daniells-Smith		1 January 2025 - Present	Parochial Church Council Appointee
Mr Bill Hardy		1 January 2025-6 March 2026 13 April 2026 – present	Elected until 6 March 2026 Co-opted from 13 April 2026
Dr Philip Hargrave	Chairman & Secretary	1 January 2025 - present	Elected
Mr Clive Hayball		1 January 2025 - 7 March 2025	Elected
Mr Simon Knight		7 March 2025 – present	Elected
Mrs Margaret Morley	Vice Chairman	1 January 2025 - present	Elected
Mr Graham Rundle		1 January 2025 – 7 March 2025 7 April 2025 – 6 March 2026 13 April 2026 - present	Co-opted until 7 March 2025 Co-opted from 7 April 2025 – 6 March 2026 Co-opted from 13 April 2026
Mrs Sue Russell		1 January 2025-Present	Elected
Mrs Anthea Streeter		6 March 2026 – Presented	Elected
The Revd Gareth Tracey		1 January 2025 – present	Ex-Officio

Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting held on Friday 6th March 2026

Good evening and thank you for coming to the 2026 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Friends of St James the Great, Thorley.

Since our 2025 AGM, we have been saddened to learn of the deaths of six members of the Friends, Clive Weir, Barry Bangert, Norma Symonds, Maud Forino, Grenville Bird and most recently Lilian Horseman. Clive served as a Parochial Church Council appointed member of the Friends' Committee from 2018 to 2022 and again from 2023 to 2024, when he stood down as he was concerned that he was no longer able to reliably attend our meetings.

The Friends activities during 2025 were a joint St James Church / Friends of St James Family Quiz Evening in March, a Sale of Nursery Plants in May, the provision of Sunday Afternoon Teas from the Church Room from the first Sunday in May to the last Sunday in September and an Autumn Craft Fair in November. I will leave it to Des to cover the financial aspects of all these activities in his Treasurer's Report.

The Friends entered 2025 with several funding commitments to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) already in place. The first was in respect of the purchase and installation of permanent equipment to enable the more straightforward and flexible streaming of services in the Church, along with display screens for the presentation of video material. At the time of our AGM last year, we were awaiting the installation of a fixed broadband radio link from the Church to the St Barnabas Centre to overcome the problem of the erratic quality of service resulting from the poor performance of the mobile broadband data link then being used to connect the portable streaming equipment to the Internet. I am pleased to say that this link is now in place, which means that plans in respect of the installation of permanent streaming equipment and display screens can now be progressed.

By the start of 2025, the Friends had also agreed to cover the full cost of the tender that the PCC had received from Lodge and Sons Ltd for the repair and redecoration of the walls of the ringing chamber and stairs in the Church Tower, together with some work at ground level, all of which had been identified as being required during the 2024 Quinquennial inspection of the Church. We had also agreed to fund some work on the trees in the Churchyard to protect the buildings, remove rotten parts of some of the trees and to facilitate the operation of the broadband radio link. The work in respect of the trees was undertaken by the Little Hadham based Tree Surgeons, Atkins and Candler Arb Ltd immediately prior to our 2025 AGM. That by Lodge and Sons Ltd was thought to be nearing completion at that time but was to take much longer than was initially thought and has only recently been completed.

The final commitment in place at the start of 2025 was the reservation of funds for a potential contribution by the Friends towards the cost of enlarging the Churchyard. As I noted last year, although there is PCC interest in such an enlargement to prevent the Churchyard having to be closed when there is no room for further burials, it is something that would be beyond its financial means without significant support from statutory bodies and local landowners. The Committee therefore decided at its meeting in June 2024 that some of the Friends' funds should be reserved as a potential contribution towards this cost until such time as the PCC is able to make a final decision on the way forward. That reservation is still in place.

The Committee made a further commitment to the PCC in October 2025, to cover the cost of replacing a label stop, in the form of a carved masonry head, that had then recently fallen from the hood mould of the West Window in the Tower.

The Friends Churchyard Team continued its important work throughout last year's March to December growing season. We were very grateful to our small band of regular volunteers who worked throughout the season, and to others who helped whenever they were able to do so. As in previous years, the powered machinery used in the maintenance of the Churchyard has recently been serviced in preparation for this year's growing season.

Margaret and Peter Morley have indicated their intention to step down from their role in co-ordinating the Churchyard volunteers. I am pleased to report that Tony Read, one of the regular volunteers, has agreed

to take over this role later this year. Simon Knight, a current member of the Friends' Committee has agreed to assist Tony in some of the administrative tasks associated with this role.

As you will have seen from the letter inviting you to this year's AGM, the Committee's plans for the remainder of this year are once again a joint St James Church / Friends of St James Family Quiz Evening that this year will be in April, a Sale of Nursery Plants in May and an Autumn Craft Fair in November. We would also like to be able to offer Sunday Afternoon Teas from the Church Room for a 37th consecutive summer season.

However, as I noted last year, it has become increasing difficulty in recent years to find volunteers willing to sign-up for the weekly slots to host such Teas. Last year proved even more difficult in this respect and the Committee gave serious consideration to shortening this year's season to reduce the requirement for volunteers. After much discussion, we agreed that if the season had to be shortened, it would be preferable to plan to do so by finishing it earlier rather than starting it later, as this would give time to seek to recruit further volunteers and thereby hopefully prevent us having to shorten the season, rather than such shortening being a *fait accompli*. The Committee therefore agreed that Sunday Afternoon Teas would again be advertised as being available from the first Sunday in May until the last Sunday in September, in the hope that sufficient new volunteers would come forward to make this possible. If you can help in this respect, please speak with me or any of the other members of the Committee.

Finally, there has been a recent development in respect of Government funding that I feel that I should bring to your attention, as it will unfortunately make fundraising in respect of future work on our Church building more onerous.

The Government announced, by way of a Written Ministerial Statement in Parliament on 26 January this year, that the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which has provided grants towards the VAT paid on repairs to listed places of worship across the UK since 2004, would close on 31st March, or once the Scheme's 2025/2026 budget of £23 Million, a significant reduction from the £42 million in previous years, was exhausted, whichever would be the earlier. On 18 February the Government made a further announcement to the effect that all this budget had been allocated and that the Scheme was therefore closed to new applications.

As with almost all of the Friends' recent funding commitments to the PCC, that in respect of the cost of the work in the Church Tower that I mentioned earlier was for the amount initially tendered by Lodge & Sons Ltd, on the assumption that the VAT element would be reclaimable by the PCC through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. This work took much longer than originally envisaged, with the result that the invoice for it was only issued by Lodge & Sons Ltd on 13 February 2026. Although the PCC made a prompt application to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme for a grant to cover the VAT, this was declined, subject to being placed on a "wait list". However, as the Scheme was clearly overrun with applications, spurred on by the announcement of its closure, there is no realistic chance of any money being received by the PCC in response to this application.

Fortunately, the final invoice from Lodge and Sons Ltd was for an amount that was less than that tendered. This meant that only a relatively small amount of money over and above that originally committed by the Friends was required to also cover the additional 20% cost of the VAT, a sum which the Committee was able to agree to pay. However, going forward this means that almost all future work on the Church building will cost 20% more than would have been the case had the Government not ended the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

Once the necessary business of this AGM has been completed, Edward Miller will give a short presentation entitled 'Growing up in Bishop's Stortford in the late-1940s to mid-1950s'. Our evening will then conclude with a 'bring and share buffet' with drinks provided.

I will now draw my report to a close by thanking Margaret Morley, our Vice Chairman and Des Conridge, our Treasurer, and indeed all the members of the Committee, for their help and support since our last AGM. On behalf of the Committee, I would also like to thank you for the support you have given us.

Unless there are any questions or observations at this stage, I will now pass over to Des for him to deliver his Treasurer's Report.

Thank you very much.

Treasurer's Report to the Annual General Meeting held on Friday 6th March 2026

The formal annual accounts for 2025 (Annex A) show how income was received and expenditure incurred in the year ended 31st December 2025, with comparative figures for 2024.

The Friends' income in 2025 was as follows:

- £750.00 in membership subscriptions,
- £459.09 from ticket sales for the March Quiz Night and £160.00 from the associated raffle,
- £32.00 in donations,
- £1,341.94 in interest on reserves held in the Church of England Deposit Fund,
- £1,166.40 from the sale of plants and £135.00 from donations for refreshments during the Plant Sale in May,
- £1,362.00 in donations for Sunday Afternoon Teas,
- £715.07 in the form of a tax refund from HMRC in respect of Gift Aided donations and other cash donations individually no greater than £30,
- £1,463.49 from the Autumn Craft Fair in November and
- £65.28 in Gifts in Kind.

The Friends' total income in 2025 was £7,650.27.

Our expenditure in 2025 was as follows:

- Fund-raising costs of £1,245.89 consisting of:
 - £899.50 to Matthews Plants for the Plant Sale
 - £276.90 to Matthews Plants and £69.49 for refreshments for the Craft Fair.
- Other expenditure amounting to £3,629.13 consisting of:
 - £368.66 for the service & repair of Churchyard Equipment and £65.28 for the purchase of fuel,
 - £28.25 for AGM expenses,
 - £295.94 for insurance and
 - £2,871.00 grant to PCC for work on Churchyard Trees.

The Friends' total expenditure in 2025 was £4,875.02.

The Friends started 2025 with total reserves of £35,322.16, which by the end of the year had increased by £2,775.25 to £38,097.41. Of the latter, £2,500.00 was in the Friends' current account with Barclays Bank on 31 December 2025 and £35,597.41 with the Church of England Deposit Fund.

At the end of 2025 the following spending commitments were in place:

- Up to £5,000 for the installation of permanent equipment to enable the flexible streaming of services in the Church, together with display screens for the presentation of video material,
- £7,237 for work in the Bell Tower by Lodge & Sons Ltd (a grant of £7,784.40 was made to the PCC in Q1 2026 to cover the final VAT inclusive cost),

- Up to £1,650 for the Restoration of a West Window Label Stop
- Up to £15,000 as a contribution towards the enlargement of the Churchyard.

The Friends' total spending commitment at the end of 2025 was therefore up to £28,887.

Authorisation

This Annual Report is issued on behalf of the Trustees and was approved by them at a Committee Meeting held on 21 September 2026.

Philip Hargrave
Chairman and Secretary

Margaret Morley
Vice Chairman

Desmond Conridge
Treasurer

September 2026

Annex A

**FRIENDS OF ST JAMES THE GREAT,
THORLEY**

BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31st DECEMBER

2025		2024
£		£
NET ASSETS		
2,500.00	Barclays Community Account Bank Balance	2,500.00
35,597.41	CBF Church of England Deposit Fund Bank Balance	32,822.16
38,097.41	TOTAL NET ASSETS	35,322.16
REPRESENTED BY:		
35,322.16	Surplus Brought Forward from Previous Year	26,387.70
2,775.25	Year Surplus / (Deficit)	8,934.46
38,097.41	TOTAL RESERVES	35,322.16

FRIENDS OF ST JAMES THE GREAT, THORLEY

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER

2025		2024
£	INCOME	£
750.00	Subscriptions	775.00
32.00	Donations	100.00
65.28	Gifts in kind	115.49
0.00	Bequest	5,048.09
619.09	Quiz	1,028.55
1,301.40	Plant Sale	940.00
1,463.49	Craft Fair	1,717.24
1,362.00	Refreshments	1,577.00
1,341.94	Bank Interest	1,211.03
715.07	Tax Rebate (Gift Aid)	581.85
7,650.27	TOTAL INCOME	13,094.25
	EXPENDITURE	
899.50	Plant sale	615.00
346.39	Craft Fair	456.74
28.25	Annual General Meeting	36.64
295.94	Insurance	295.94
433.94	Mower service, repairs & fuel	674.47
2,871.00	Tree Work in Churchyard	0.00
0.00	Bell-tower specification work	240.00
0.00	New Bell Ropes	1,000.00
0.00	Church Lighying	566.00
0.00	Strimmer	275.00
4,875.02	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	4,159.79
2,775.25	TOTAL SURPLUS / DEFICIT	8,934.46

Desmond Conridge Treasurer
March 2026