

St Edmundsbury
Cathedral



Annual Review
2023

2023

Overview from The Dean



The year steadily delivered the core values our ten year masterplan is built around: worship, mission, hospitality and sustainability.

I am thrilled to see that not only have our weekly attendances returned to pre-pandemic levels, but also that attendance, particularly among young families and children, continues to increase.

It has also been a year of consolidation of our structures of governance as we became a charitable incorporation, adopting new constitution and statutes, with the development of new committees of Chapter.

The quality of music and worship has continued to improve with impressive levels of chorister recruitment.

The Cathedral continued to serve its diocese, town, and county with significant services to mark the Coronation of The King, the 50th anniversary of the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, the County Harvest Festival, the annual Justice Service and regular diocesan services, as well as special services to affirm lay ministry.

Social action at the Cathedral continued to develop, incorporating greater numbers of young people using The Yard project, as well as the growth of the Singing Schools scheme. We have progressed in our work with dementia awareness, Hope into Action, our support for the Ukrainian community in Suffolk, our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work, and continued partnership with Bury St Edmunds for Black Lives.

Financial sustainability continues to be a key priority. As we move into 2024, we have the potential for great opportunity and exciting development. We continue to build on secure foundations, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Worship

Worship is the heartbeat of the Cathedral. Rooted in Benedictine Spirituality, it has nourished people of faith here through all life's changes.

Our regular round of worship continues to include weekly meditation and mindfulness, a weekday healing service and a monthly dementia-friendly service. This Together on Tuesday service is now embedded into the life of the Cathedral and attracts over 20 people. We also have visitors from across the diocese and from further afield.

Our Vision for Young Worshippers encourages and supports children and young people both to grow in and to lead us in our liturgical life. Our All-Ages Eucharist is flourishing and helping us all to grow deeper in faith. A very successful Messy Easter was held in the Cathedral during Holy Week, and we welcomed approximately 30 children with their families to participate in a range of activities, a worship session, and a simple shared tea.



We work hard to ensure children and young people are encouraged to find their voices and know that the Cathedral is a place for them and, for some, a place to call home. Children and young people enrich the life of our cathedral community and we do well to listen to and learn from the youngest among us. We look forward to all the joys and challenges they will bring us in 2024 and beyond.

In music, we have reached a stage where we are oversubscribed for boy and girl choristers. We currently have 44 children on the books, divided exactly evenly between boys and girls. This past year, we also appointed six professional singers to the choir. Two each of altos, tenors, and basses. Under Richard Cook's direction, the St Edmundsbury Singers have also built in number and have performed at several of the highest-profile liturgical events of the year, including Midnight Mass, the Requiem for All Souls, and the Easter Vigil.



The Friends of the Cathedral Choirs have been extremely active in their fundraising and we're indebted to the committee and volunteers for their tireless efforts which enable us to undertake exciting opportunities, like choir tours and recordings.

June 2023 saw the official launch of the Singing Schools programme and in November 2023 we undertook our most ambitious project to date, a unique and creative performance of part one of Handel's Messiah. 'Messy Messiah' involved around 200 children from across the county in singing and dancing, plus an orchestra, soloists, and an SATB choir. The important work of the Cathedral's 'InHarmony' Music Outreach Project helped make this brilliant event happen.



Our gratitude goes to all who make such excellence possible: vergers, musicians, servers, wardens, bellringers, administration staff, volunteers, clergy, and so many others who make the Cathedral the vibrant and creative place that it is.

Mission

Our Social Action Group oversees the Cathedral's wide-ranging activity in the community. The group acts as a "think-tank", supporting projects delivered by by committed staff and faithful volunteers.

This year a family, supported by the Cathedral, moved into a house in Bury St Edmunds, bringing to fruition our Hope Into Action project (a national charity that works with churches to provide housing for people in need). The Cathedral continues to support local foodbanks as well as the churches in our link Diocese of Kagera, Tanzania. Once again, the Cathedral marked Dementia-Friendly Sunday in May, and we contributed to our MP's Dementia Awareness and Signposting Event in October. We were a filming location for the County Council's virtual reality project for people with dementia unable to visit special places in the county.



The Pastoral Support Team delivers formal pastoral care within the Cathedral community. This includes home visiting, the First Tuesday Lunch Club, monthly Communion Services in local residential homes, the annual Remembering Together service (for those who have experienced the death of a child), and the weekly Young Families group.

Throughout the year, the Learning Hub connected with around 2,500 young people and their accompanying adults and our popular holiday family activities sold out across the year. The team worked in partnership with the Bury Records Office to deliver a Bury Psalter workshop, and with the Visitor Experience Manager to deliver a Travel and Tourism Masterclass to college students. An internal Welcomers Advanced workshop and Twilight Talks and Tours for the Your Cathedral at Night event proved successful.



In addition, values workshops and informal workshops for staff were designed and delivered. A coronation prayer space and a Godly Play taster day were also organised as well as providing a liaison role for both the Diocesan Education Service and Crime and Punishment showcase for local schools.

The Yard project continued to be embedded in the community in 2023 as a trauma-informed youth provision, supporting young people with a variety of identified needs from neurodiversity to refugees and children eligible for free school meals. We developed our existing partnerships with Suffolk 4YP, Suffolk Family Carers Young Carers, Outreach Youth, Access Community Trust youth centre, and started our weekly gardening club with King Edward IV High School Intervention Team. In June, we entered a new partnership with Innov8 Workshops, an alternative education provider. We now offer ten hours a week of one-to-one horticultural mentoring to some of the hardest-to-reach young people and those most at risk of exploitation.



We started our Tuesday after-school volunteering sessions for Duke of Edinburgh Award participants and trialled Friday after-school sessions for Mindfulness and Emotional Resilience. Overall, we enjoyed a creative, inclusive, and fulfilling year of group activities and one-to-one sessions meeting the needs of our young community. We had 365 spaces filled by young people over 212 sessions.

Hospitality

Visitor numbers in 2023 reached nearly 73,500. This growth since the pandemic and uplift on the number of visitors in 2019 is heartening. Our visitors are supported by approximately 300 active volunteers in the Guild of St Edmund who are involved in roles such as Welcome Stewards, guides and chaplains. The friendly, welcoming presence of volunteers makes a huge difference to the experience of our visitors.

The Cathedral relies on donations from visitors as a part of its income, and efforts were made to improve this in 2023 through interventions like re-positioning the donations boxes. This increased the average donation per person to 74p.



Guided tours and Tower Tours were popular, and we were able to offer more regular tours now that the guide team is at full strength. Heritage Open Days were extremely popular with the Ancient Library and Norman Tower open to visitors. Changing exhibitions in the Treasury and occasional exhibitions in the Cathedral and Cloisters mean that visitors are assured of something new to see on each visit. A highlight in 2023 was the loan of the Bury Psalter for a weekend, giving a rare opportunity to see this beautiful manuscript written in the Abbey of St Edmund.

New themed leaflets were introduced and visitors were encouraged to follow a trail linking our 'Royal Connections' and 'Food and Drink', exploring stained glass, statues and art work. The non-English Welcome leaflets were all updated in 2023 and we now offer eight languages. As well as a print version, visitors are encouraged to use a QR code to access a leaflet in their own language.



2023 saw the busiest year we have had for events, including pre-pandemic. In February, we hosted a reeling night for the first time which was very well received. March kicked off the 'concert season' when we hosted 'Queen by Candlelight' over three consecutive evenings - a first for us, and complete sell-out experience.

Another first for the Cathedral was to host a Silent Disco, where a crowd of 700 danced in the Cathedral Nave. We hosted The Bury Bach Choir for their only performance of the year, and our first ever Wedding Fayre which brought many new faces into the Cathedral. In June, we welcomed our friends from across the county when The Aldeburgh Festival returned. Later in the summer the East Anglian Beer and Cider Festival returned for the third straight year with their highest attendance ever, followed by a Gin Festival in September hosting 1,200 people over two sessions.



The Cathedral Christmas Market was another huge success, welcoming an estimated 12,000 visitors over three days. Honourable mentions to G4 @ Christmas, London Concertante, and Christmas with the Cathedral Choir!

Sustainability

Having achieved our Silver A Rocha Eco Church Award, we aim to be consistent about our environmental message and encourage sustainability in our congregation and wider diocese.

This year we implemented a mini-meadow on the Cathedral Garth and pledged to only buy environmentally-friendly cleaning products. We held our annual Climate Sunday Service and supported other initiatives such as Earth Day, and made great strides in the Solar Panel project for the Cathedral roof. We have achieved Gold status in three of the five categories of the Eco Church Gold Award, and strive to fulfil the final two categories soon.



An application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund was submitted in November with the Cathedral, West Suffolk Council, and English Heritage working together as members of The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership. This partnership aims to encourage people to experience the international significance of St Edmund and the historic Abbey footprint (which includes the Cathedral), and to ensure that the Abbey will inspire all its visitors through excellent conservation, learning, and community engagement.

We continued to build the in-house fundraising department, focusing on legacies and our steady number of Patrons. A major event was the inaugural 'Grand Nave Dinner' which was a wonderful night of food, dancing, entertainment, and auction for 220 people. The £52,000 raised surpassed expectations and will be spent on three vital areas of our mission: social outreach, music, and fabric.



Pilgrims' Kitchen's turnover in 2023 was 23% higher than in 2022, and profit exceeded budget by 160% which is a 130% increase compared with the previous year. During busy lunchtime periods, PK operates significantly above capacity, and this year, the Enterprise Board invested for the future by purchasing two new Combi Ovens for 2024. This will double the oven capacity without the requirement to extend the kitchen space.

The Shop and Tourist Information Point (TIP) celebrated the King's Coronation with a range of royal and commemorative products. These sold exceptionally well and generated a lot of interest. We also launched our range of Cathedral beer which is brewed by the local Artefact Brewing. This has proved to be an excellent addition to the shop. Even closer to home we were very pleased to offer Cathedral honey in the shop for the first time. The hives are located on top of the Cathedral centre and the bees gather nectar and pollen from the Abbey Gardens and surrounding area. Following a sell out success, we are now waiting for our next batch.



Increased trade continued through December and resulted in the highest annual turnover to date for the shop and Tourist Information Point. This is against a backdrop of difficult trading conditions for the high street which continued from 2022. We have returned to and exceeded pre-pandemic turnover.



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