

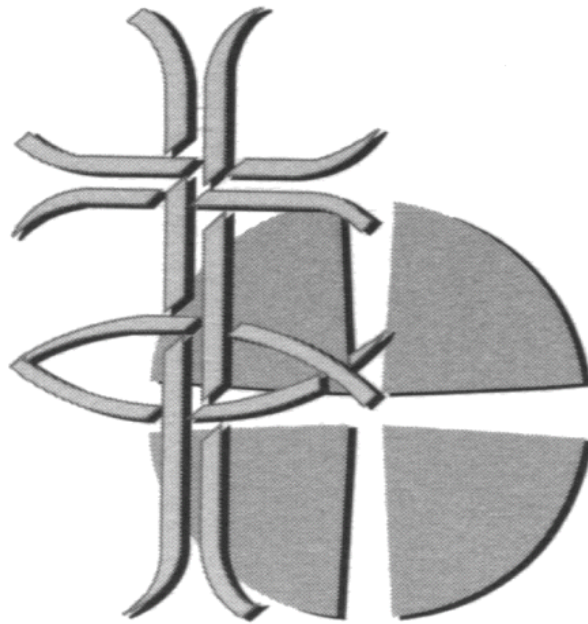
CHRIST CHURCH (URC and METHODIST) LEWES ANNUAL REPORT 2024 -2025

Covering the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

and presented to the Congregational Meeting on Sunday May 4 2025



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SECRETARYS' REPORT

We have spent another year without a dedicated minister at Christ Church. The post has been vacant since Rev. Andrew Mills resigned through ill-health in spring 2022. Our prospects for a new ministerial appointment remain very uncertain, as both the Central Sussex United Area (CSUA) and the URC Southern Synod are regarded as being relatively well provided with ordained ministers, in comparison with most other parts of the country.

Our parent churches – the URC and the Methodists – are increasingly struggling with a shortage of ministers, and the smaller churches are having to think hard about new models of church leadership.

Seen in this wider context, we have been very fortunate to have had the support and guidance of Rev. Andy Melvin as our “Mission Enabler”. Andy has encouraged us to look carefully at our Mission (current version below) and how we can deliver it in a fast changing world. Andy is moving onto other duties in the CSUA after sabbatical leave later this spring. We owe him our thanks for all the help he has given us over the last year or more.

VISION

Christ Church seeks to be a growing church, with a broader age profile, which spreads the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We will strive to be a loving, safe, inclusive, welcoming and environmentally sustainable church, which works to meet the diverse needs of the local community

We will work to be a vibrant part of the local community and provide an active programme to support worship, discipleship and fellowship

We have also been very fortunate to have Claire Bell in the role of Lay Worker. Claire has been very effective in opening up many new areas of church activity over the last three years and we are very grateful for all she has achieved, despite the time limitations of a part-time post. We hope that this Annual Report for 2024-25 shows that we remain a vibrant and forward looking church.

Claire will be stepping down from the role of Lay Worker in spring 2026, so we are currently thinking about how we put in place the best possible church leadership arrangements to take us forward over the next five years or so. In this work, we have been much assisted by discussions with Rev. Barbara Evans-Routley and Stuart Dew, the Methodist and URC leaders at the CSUA, and by officers at our sister church, Cross Way, Seaford. Thank you to them for their time and wise guidance.

We hope that this will enable us to move forward with the recruitment process for a new Lay Worker later in 2025. Grant funding from URC Southern Synod's "Mission and Discipleship Fund" may also be possible for an appointment, and we are actively exploring that option.

In the absence of a minister, we have once again been very fortunate that a number of members of the congregation have stepped up to lead worship in the church on a regular basis. Special thanks are due to Claire Bell, Gwyneth Watkinson, Tom Lunt, Michael Frost, and Brenda and Norman Vance, for preparing and presenting a rich variety of worship. We

are also grateful for the worship leaders provided by the CSUA, and all the services led by Rev. Dr. Richard Goldring, who has preached very regularly at Christ Church once again over the last year.

There has also been a regular CSUA Sunday evening service on Zoom, usually led by Rev. Barbara Evans-Routley. We are very grateful to Barbara for this, and for other support and guidance she has provided to us over the past year.

We have continued to build links with our sister pastorate church, Cross Way, Seaford by holding joint services on “fifth Sundays” during the year in July , September and December 2024 , alternating between the churches in Seaford and Lewes. This arrangement will continue into 2025.

All of this has continued to strengthen our links with our sister churches in the pastorate, the wider CSUA, and with members of the church family who have moved away from Lewes.

We have held regular meetings of our pastoral leaders to share information about the health and welfare of church members. We have also undertaken further training to improve our safeguarding arrangements. Claire Bell’s role as Lay Worker has included regular pastoral visits, some of which have involved provision of communion at home.

During the year, we have been pursuing a “*Lewes Acts on Poverty*” project, with a special service in May attended by the Mayor of Lewes, Cllr. Imogen Makepeace. We discussed the experience of poverty in a generally affluent town and what we might do to connect with, and assist, those affected by a hard world of insecure jobs, rising costs, expensive housing, and difficulties in accessing benefits and other help. We are continuing this project into 2025, having held several events for local people through our partnerships with Fitzjohn’s Community Food, Lewes Open Door and other churches in Lewes.

We have also been very concerned with wider global poverty and the Christian Aid report below outlines our work in that area, where the problems now often also have a climate change dimension.

Thank you to everyone at Christ Church who has contributed to the life of the church over the last year.

Neil Fisher - Church Secretary

Lindsay Frost - Administrative Secretary



Lewes Acts on Poverty



We remember with love those members of the Christ Church family we have lost over the year.

Mickie Lodge died in July and **Hazel Freeman** died in September. Both contributed greatly to church life over the years and will be much missed.

May they Rest in Peace

TREASURER'S REPORT

The church's accounts for the calendar year (1 Jan- 31 Dec 2024) have been prepared and reviewed by an independent examiner. A Financial Statement and the Independent Examiner's Report are available separately.

In brief, the church's finances are in a sound position. In 2024, our income was £68,584 and our expenditure was £68,631, with reserves in excess of £190,000 to cover contingencies, building maintenance and ongoing projects. Our income was sustained by healthy hall lettings, collections and donations, and higher levels of interest. Our expenditure was carefully managed and, in the absence of a minister, our contributions to the CSUA were reduced.

Irene Gannon

LAY WORKER'S REPORT

Claire Bell was appointed to this role on 1 May 2022 to focus on four main areas of work:

- Pastoral support
- Outreach in the local community
- Administration
- Mission and faith development.

The appointment is for a 20 hour a week, and was initially for a period of two years, but this has been extended for a further two year period.

Claire is also now doing 8 hours a week during term time as a lay worker for Cross Way Church in Seaford. Claire has given notice of her intention to retire from the role at the end of April 2026.

Pastoral support has involved considerable support for David Smith who had a period in hospital followed by a stay at Claydon House Care Home as well as occasional visits and telephone calls to members who are unwell.

Activity for the “Outreach” aspect of the work has continued to include supporting the Ukraine Café; and continuing the Warm Welcome space on Wednesdays. A new initiative has been running a number of community events in partnership with Lewes Open Door and Fitzjohns’ Food Club, including a BBQ event in July which was attended by over 60 people from the local community. We also held an autumn celebration with apple pressing as well as delicious free food and craft activities for the children. We held a quiz evening in October in support of Tear Fund to which we invited as many of the groups which use our premises during the week as possible although attendance was again disappointing. Our Christmas event was a Christmas Party with afternoon tea, children’s

crafts and cartoons and was very well attended with over 50 parents and children and a visit from Santa.

Claire has also taken up the mantle of organising Christ Church Tots now that Alison Byrne has returned to work after her maternity leave. The group is doing well and is well supported by volunteers, including Amanda Gander who supplies the weekly craft activity.

Claire has continued to attend occasional events run by Lewes District Council which has kept us connected to others caring directly for the vulnerable in our community. A team of Christ Church volunteers continues to join up with Trinity church to take part in “Open the Book” sessions to deliver bible stories to Southover Primary School and South Malling Primary School.

Administratively, Claire has continued to produce the weekly service sheet and notices email and has managed the rotas and edited and printed the now bi-monthly newsletters and generally assisted with the daily life of the church when on the premises during the week. She is supported by the management team of Lindsay Frost, Neil Fisher and Irene Gannon and has had fortnightly zoom meetings with Rev Andy Melvin, although Andy has now relinquished his supervision of Claire and his involvement with Christ Church in light of new responsibilities.

Mission and faith initiatives have included weekly prayer meeting on Wednesdays 12.30 to 1.30pm which continues as well as a monthly prayer meeting prior to the Second Sunday service. Second Sunday services have been a chance to involve many members of the congregation and use their skills and talents. The bible study sessions on Wednesdays have become a firm fixture. This year we have held studies on “Leading your Church into Growth”, the Christian Response to Climate Change, Women of the Nativity, Water and Hear my Prayer.

Claire Bell

MISSION COMMITTEE

Services held in church have continued to be available on Zoom throughout the year to enable those who are not able to attend church to enjoy worship with us, including - from time to time - Karen and Vivian from Kenya.

In the continued absence of a minister, we have made arrangements for worship with the help of our own preachers including Tom Lunt, Gwyneth Watkinson and Claire Bell and have been thankful for the contribution of Rev Richard Goldring as well as other preachers provided by the CSUA.

We have continued to hold Second Sundays which have given us the chance to explore a wider range of hymns and songs as well as poems and film extracts in these services. Recent themes have included Lewes Acts on Poverty, Leading your church into growth, Gratitude, the Vine and the Olive Tree, Harvest, Remembrance, Christingle, beauty and truth, following Jesus' call, and surviving and thriving as a Christian.

Carols on the Green went ahead this year on 15 December and was well attended and a joyful event. We held a community Christmas Party with cartoons and craft activities and were very pleased to welcome over 50.



Carols on the Green attracted nearly 90 people in mild dry December weather: our biggest attendance for several years

Unfortunately, the Choir has not been able to meet since the illness of David Smith.

Bible Studies on Wednesday afternoons have continued to be well attended with studies on “Leading your Church into Growth”, the Christian Response to Climate Change, Women of the Nativity, Water and Hear my Prayer.

Claire Bell

PROPERTY COMMITTEE



Meetings were held and reports made to Church Council and Congregational Meetings. These included the following works to maintain and improve the church buildings and grounds during the year:

- Grounds managed to facilitate maintenance.
- Fire Alarm testing and extinguisher maintenance now carried out by DH Group, all is satisfactory.
- Gas meter housing floor concreted and entranced paved due to rat invasion, by A Swayne.
- Some gutters and brackets replaced.
- Bank rear of the small hall is being cleared and is ongoing.
- Loft floor/insulation carried out to provide storage for barbeques and redundant plastic chairs.
- A new shed on carpark plinth will help too with large hall storage issues.
- New apse carpet laid, and pulpit removed. George Justice has former lectern to devise a scheme to cater for smaller and taller users and incorporate a larger desktop and shelf for books and water.
- Provision of new concourse insulation doors (to include glazed panels and double doors) is still progressing, despite two contractors dropping out.
- Apse ceiling and stairs wall painted by Jason Milburn.
- New induction hob cooker installed.
- The car park is still to be marked out for efficiency.

- A leak above the stairwell is to be sorted by the external wall being waterproofed.

Thanks to the committee and the church cleaners.

Alan Pett Convenor

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding is a priority at Christ Church. We want to ensure that everyone who uses our buildings feels safe and welcome, and – if they have any problems or concerns - know who to contact.

We have once again reviewed our safeguarding policy to ensure that it accords with the national policy of the United Reformed Church.

Safeguarding is now a standing item on our monthly Church Council meeting agendas, so that we can consider any issues which arise without delay. During 2024-25, no safeguarding incidents were reported.

All members of Church Council received basic safeguarding (refresher) training in 2023 -24. However, the URC has now introduced a requirement for intermediate level training for all church trustees, with advanced training additionally required for ministers and lay preachers. The Synod has published a series of dates for online intermediate training, which takes about two to three hours to complete.

Lastly, our Safeguarding Co-ordinator for many years – Helen Chiasson – is standing down from the role in April 2025. Helen has provided wise guidance and support to the church on safeguarding matters, drawing on her professional experience in education , and we thank her for all she has done, particularly running training and awareness sessions. A new Co-ordinator will be appointed at our next Annual Church Meeting.

Lindsay Frost

ECO WORKING PARTY

After securing a “bronze level” Eco Church Award in 2022, two more years of hard work saw us receive a “silver level” award in August 2024. This is a big achievement for a small church such as ours, and reflects the drive and enthusiasm of our working group and the wider church membership.

A special “Thank You” is due to Tom Lunt, Alan Pett, and Ian and Judy Christie-Miller. We unveiled our “Eco Church - Silver Award” Plaque at a special Sunday service in October.



The Eco Church “gold award” is a much tougher set of challenges , which very few churches are able to meet, but we will to continue to work on various initiatives to improve our environmental performance and our discussions have identified a number of initiatives for the coming year.



Our Bible Study sessions over the last year have used the A Rocha New Zealand /Aoteroa “Rich Living “series of bible study courses. We started with the “Climate Change “ course and have also completed the “Water” and “Food” courses , with “Waste” and “Transport” to follow later in 2025. These courses have given us a scriptural perspective on the climate , nature and resources crisis, and much to think about as our global environmental problems intensify.

Lindsay Frost

ECUMENICAL HOUSE GROUP

The object of this long-established group is to bring together people from a range of church backgrounds to move beyond our Sunday worship and talk about the place of the church in the wider world. Our source material is taken from religious journals, such as *The Tablet* or *Reform*, as well as secular newspapers and of course from the internet.

Members come from Christ Church, St Pancras, and one from the Canadian Church who joins us by Zoom. Claire Bell from Christ Church and John Culley from St Pancras continue to provide the material for discussion.

During 2024-2025 we have discussed the following subjects in ten meetings.

- Martrydom (St Martin)
- Faith and Politics
- The General Election
- The experience of God according to St Bernard of Clairvaux
- The experience of Truth
- The Life of St Bernard of Clairvaux
- Ecotheology
- Assisted Dying
- The future of biotechnology
- God's role in natural disasters

We have been very pleased that David Smith has been able to join by zoom at many of these meetings and intend to continue our interesting trans-Atlantic discussions.

Claire Bell and John Culley

THINK TANK

Think Tank is concerned with issues in contemporary society and contemporary religion – especially where they interact. David Smith retired from the role of organiser at the end of 2024 and meetings are now managed by a team of Mike Ramsey, Andrew Buxton and Neil Fisher (publicity and technical support). The frequency has been changed to bi-monthly.

During the last year topics have included “Exploring science and faith”, “Britain’s colonial past”, “Sustainable development”, “Vaccines” and “Art and Performance as the Fifth Estate”. We continue to attract an audience in person and on Zoom from Christ Church, other local churches and those without church connections.

Andrew Buxton

HALL LETTINGS

I have noticed a shift in how we use our premises. It is not just that the premises are 'very well used', even over-crowded: there is a shift away from very regular bookings for specific teaching or rehearsing purposes towards more flexible/irregular bookings which involve an element of sociability, coffee, tea, often for older, mobility-impaired and/or otherwise potentially isolated people. This increases the workload of the Treasurer and the Hall Bookings Sec., also our cleaner, and is something which needs to be taken into account as we look at future leadership plans.

However, it increasingly means a welcome erasure of the line between the activities entirely run by the Church (Christ Church Tots, Think Tank, Ukraine Café), together with those run by Christ Church in contractual partnership with other charitable organisations (i.e. Fitzjohns Community Food, Lewes Open Door), these two groups together counting as 'Mission', and 'the rest' hitherto regarded indiscriminately as 'income', any community-care element discounted.

Community-oriented activities range from therapeutic Table Tennis sessions organised by the local branch of Parkinson's UK in association with their national organisation and Table Tennis England as a National Pilot, to yoga-classes, singing-groups, and an art-class. Other paying groups provide further welcome income.

Brenda Vance

CHRIST CHURCH TOTS

Having resumed in September 2023, Tots has continued to meet weekly on a Friday morning during school terms. Our numbers have remained steady, and we average having around 15 families attend each session. Tots plays an important part of outreach and mission to our local community. Our families come from across Lewes District with several of our families coming from the immediate locality to the church, including the De Montford Estate.



Tots is especially valuable in the current climate as it provides a warm, safe and welcoming space at low cost. Our weekly themes have linked directly with the Church's Sunday Services such as Harvest, Christingle and Mothering Sunday.

Sessions are staffed by a very small team of volunteers (mainly from the present church congregation). Without these volunteers, including those who help set up and clear away afterwards- we would not be able to run the sessions. I am enormously grateful to all our volunteers and the support and prayers of the Church. If anyone else would be able to lend a hand on a Friday morning, even on a very occasional basis, do please get in touch!

Alison Byrne

CHRISTIAN AID

For 80 years Christian Aid has worked around the world to overcome the injustice of poverty and tackle its underlying causes. It is thanks to supporters like you that **Christian Aid** and its overseas partners have been able to do this.

Christ Church continues to make a very positive contribution to the work of Christian Aid. In Christian Aid Week 2024, we collected over £700 from houses in the Wallands Park area. As a church we have also collected funds throughout the year for Christian Aid generally and specifically for the Gaza and Myanmar Appeal with a total of £2232.40 in 2024-2025.

Claire Bell used Christian Aid's **Act on Poverty** campaigning material for the Harvest service last October. This service complemented our earlier Act on Poverty campaigning in May. One of the activities during the service helped us think about how what we eat impacts the climate - we brought along some labels from the food we had eaten during the week which said where they have come from and what the ingredients were. We shared lunch which served the Christian Aid plant based climate friendly comfort food inspired by the cuisine of North Africa - a delicious butternut squash and chickpea tagine with locally sourced rolls and vegan spread followed by locally grown fruit. As we ate together we discussed climate justice, introducing new laws to cancel debt and being a force for peace in the world.



In last year's annual report I asked for prayer in relation to Christ Church's work towards an **Eco Church Silver Award**. God has answered this prayer as the plaque on the concourse wall shows. The award complements Christian Aid's climate and debt justice campaigning work.

The Restore Campaign: Christian Aid believe that poverty is caused by human structures and systems and that we all have a responsibility to speak out against injustice and challenge the causes of poverty. One way we can do this is to ask the UK Government to step up action on poverty and make reckless polluters pay for the climate crisis they've caused and use its power to force lenders to cancel or renegotiate the debts of low-income countries. By taxing the profits of polluters like Shell and BP and introducing 'debt justice' laws that force private lenders to cancel or negotiate the debt of low-income countries millions would be lifted out of poverty without costing the average UK taxpayer.

There is more information about the Restore campaign on the Christian Aid website caid.org.uk, including an online petition to sign and opportunities to pray, act and give to the work of Christian Aid.

The table below sets out the financial contributions we've made to Christian Aid as a church in 2024-2025.

Christian Aid collections through the year including gift aid	£1408.40
Christian Aid Gaza Appeal	£100
Christian Aid Week Collection	£724
Total	£2232.40

Thank you for your support financially, in your actions and prayers.

Tom and Liz Lunt

FITZJOHN'S COMMUNITY FOOD

Following a change in our operational model last year from a “Food Bank” to a “Food Club,” we have also undergone a rebranding – we are now known as Fitzjohn’s Community Food, though many still refer to us as the Food Bank.

Fitzjohn’s Community Food (Fitzjohns) operates on Mondays, utilizing most of the downstairs areas of the church. We have experienced another busy year with numerous changes.



There is a weekly membership fee (currently £3.50, free for the first 6 weeks). Members can select their preferred food items from an assortment of tinned and dried goods, along with a variety of fruits and vegetables. Additionally, we offer a selection of products from FareShare and supermarket collections, including sanitary products, pet food, and once a month, some cleaning materials.

We manage a community café in the large hall, where freshly prepared meals are available from 12:30 pm, alongside coffee/tea and biscuits. Individuals are welcome to gather in the hall, socialize, and enjoy a meal together, fostering a sense of community which is an essential social aspect of Fitzjohns.

The number of attending families has remained relatively stable this year, usually around 50-55 families per week, with peaks up to 70. Not every family attends every week.

The significant supermarket collections organized by Mark Perryman, with the assistance of many other Lewes groups, greatly contribute to our inventory. These collections occur three to four times a year and reflect the generosity of the Lewes community. Fitzjohns benefits from additional storage facilities at the North Street Quarter, enabling us to store these extra supplies. Due to our regular donors' generosity, we are also able to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables each week, which are highly appreciated by our members.

Throughout the year, Fitzjohns has also arranged several community events in collaboration with Christ Church, all of which have been very successful.

Our coordinator, Ruby Makepeace-Somerville, has returned from maternity leave, and we are pleased to welcome her back. Kirsty, a community navigator who assists individuals in navigating various support schemes, continues to visit bi-weekly. Additionally, we have energy advisers, the baby bank, and other professionals who provide diverse forms of assistance to the members.

Irene Gannon – volunteer with Fitzjohn's Community Food

Neil Fisher – Trustee of Fitzjohn's Community Food

LEWES OPEN DOOR

After using Christ Church as the base for the lunchtime drop in four days a week until late November 2022 (by which time the vast majority of guests were in emergency accommodation at the White Hart Annex) , Lewes Open Door has continued to support around 20 people on and off with food and clothing and signposting to appropriate advice and services including taking people to hospital or dental and GP appointments.

The main meeting point for volunteers and guests continues to be the Malling Food Bank, which is located at Kings Church on a Monday lunchtime. We are very concerned at the planning application for domestic housing to be developed on the White Hart Annex site which is likely to leave our guests with nowhere to stay.

We also maintain an extensive store of items our guests may need including clothing, toiletries, sleeping bags and tents and also provide items including white goods to guests who are able to obtain secure housing and need to establish their own home.

We have continued our partnerships with the Fitzjohns Food Club and Christ Church and have been pleased to contribute to the community celebrations including the summer BBQ (attended by around 60 people including our guests) and the Autumn Celebration, to make use of our funds and our volunteers, to benefit the most vulnerable in our community.

We held a trustees' strategy meeting in April where we considered our purpose and decided to seek additional trustees who would add to our expertise given that many of our guests now present with complex needs (eg mental health and immigration) in addition to the issue of homelessness itself.

Claire Bell

LEWES FOR UKRAINE

At the instigation of church member Helen Chiasson, in association with the charity Lewes4Ukraine, the Ukraine Café has been held at Christ Church since May 2022. A number of church members volunteered to staff the café each week from 10 till 12 on a Wednesday morning in the early days, but this has not been required for some time as Claire and Neil are able to cope with the small number attending.

As time passed, many of the refugees obtained jobs, or places of study, and some returned to Ukraine after the first few terrifying weeks of the war. The café has however continued and will continue to be hosted by Christ Church for the foreseeable future. If the group needs to meet to plan the regular fundraising events or other events such as commemorations marking the time since the war began, they naturally meet at Christ Church on a Wednesday morning. We also welcome occasional rehearsals by the Ukrainian choir and were delighted that they contributed two carols to last year's Church Carol Service.



A new occasional initiative is a Pilates class held in the hall on a Wednesday morning run by a Ukrainian Pilates teacher. We are also able to publicise occasional requests for food or warm clothing which is sent to Ukraine to relieve the suffering of the population.

It has been a wonderful outreach activity for Christ Church and has been widely publicised throughout the Lewes area.

Claire Bell

CHRIST CHURCH WALKS

We have a regular core group of about 6-7 walkers, who turn out most times, and sometimes we also attract a few more church members (and the odd dog) out to enjoy the Sussex countryside and coast. All are welcome. Encouragingly, this year, two of our walks attracted 13 people.

Our monthly walks programme in 2024/5 has been very varied and generally lucky with the weather, apart from the very wet autumn and winter months when we had several cancellations.

Our walks covered these areas:

- Kingston and Swanborough (April)
- Woodingdean and Roedean, Brighton (May)
- “Cuckmere Pilgrim Path” (Part I) from Arlington to Berwick (June)
- Seaford Head and Cuckmere Haven (July)
- “Cuckmere Pilgrim Path” (Part II) from Selmeston to Berwick (August)
- Great Fire of London Walk (September)
- The October and November walks were cancelled due to poor weather, as was the traditional New Year’s Day walk to Mount Caburn. We did not plan a December walk due to overcrowded diaries at that time of year
- Cockshut Stream Restoration Project, Lewes (January)
- Bishopstone and Seaford Downs (February)
- Lodge Hill, Ditchling and Keymer (March)

Perhaps our most memorable outing this year was the Great Fire Walk in the City of London, where we traced a route linking sites associated with



Setting off from St Paul's



Cuckmere Pilgrim Path

the catastrophic fire which destroyed much of the old city over five days in September 1666. We completed the two-mile walk, which was packed with historical interest, in time to attend a memorable Sung Eucharist under the dome at St Paul's Cathedral, and then enjoy a pizza before heading home.

We welcome non-church members on our walks.

Lindsay Frost