

FROM SUMMER HARVEST TO COLD MORNINGS AND DARK EVENINGS

You can find contact details/information on our website <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/benefice/34-370BX/>. We also circulate the Courier digitally; if you would like a digital copy, please contact the Editor. Since January 1st, we have returned to the common cup during parish communion. We will continue to offer opportunities to join services via livestream (for the vulnerable) for the foreseeable future.

CREAM TEAS – St. George's Church held our traditional Cream Teas by the River in August, despite the lack of rain then (and the downpour in the last week), it was very well attended. John Godber has informed me that the collective weekends events have raised £1428.43 which will allow St. George's Church to meet some of its forthcoming financial commitments. Many thanks to everyone who attended and special thanks to the army of volunteers who helped out - as all this could not have happened without all your extremely hard work and commitment to St. George's Church – Thank you!

AND MANY THANKS - to everyone who participated in Rockbourne's Last of the Summer Wine drinks party which raised over £1,500 and made a welcome contribution to the annual running costs of St. Andrew's Church of some £25,000.

FIND YOURSELF A BARGAIN - There is a 'Nearly New Sale' at Damerham Village Hall on the 11th of October 2024 starting from 2.00p.m. This event will support St. George's Church, Damerham. Donations can be brought from 10.00a.m. to Damerham Village Hall. Please ensure that all donations for sale are in good condition and actual saleable items please. For any enquiries, please contact John Godber on (01425) 650044.

COME TOGETHER – The next Churches Together meeting will be held on Thursday 30th October 2025 at 7.00p.m. at The Fordingbridge Salvation Army Hall, Roundhill, SP6 1AQ. If you have any questions about the meeting, please contact Rachel Edwards at fordingbridgechurches@gmail.com.

THE CHOSEN – If you're interested in following the life of Jesus as part of the "The Chosen" US historical drama series then these are being shown on Saturday 20th September (Episode 7 - "Reckoning"), Saturday 11th October (Episode 8 - "Beyond Mountains") and Saturday 15th November (A pre-Christmas special). All of these are being shown at Fordingbridge Town Hall. Please arrive at 7.30p.m. for an 8.00p.m. start, and each performance will finish at 9.30p.m. Tickets are available from <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-chosen-season-2-episode-7-reckoning-tickets-1217048758599> at no cost, and free refreshments are served.

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals

St Andrew's, Rockbourne	18 th August	Vanda Hewson
St George's, Damerham	27 th August	Bill Drake (Interment of Ashes)

NB. For all pastoral enquiries including baptisms, marriages, funerals and other related matters, please contact the Rector, Rev'd Les Player, The Rectory, Mill End, Damerham, SP6 3HU (01725) 518642.

For matters regarding benefice administration support, please contact the Western Downland Team Administrator (Bernice Churchill) on infowdchurches@gmail.com or (01725) 518816.

For information concerning individual parishes including matters of a general nature, please contact the Churchwarden: -

Damerham	John Godber (01425) 650044
Martin	Alistair Groom (01725) 519204 and Lizzie Fernie (01725) 519542
Rockbourne	Patrick Thompson (01725) 518246 and Rory Smith (01725) 518215
Whitsbury	Chris Harper (01725) 518324 and Chris Cobb-Smith (01725) 518313

Please send contributions for the next Courier to the Editor Arron Shutt (arron@ashutt.myzen.co.uk). The deadline is 31st October 2025.

News and Views from the Church of England
in Damerham, Martin, Rockbourne and Whitsbury

THE COURIER

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2025

A Newsletter for the Communities of the Western Downland

A Word from the Rector - So much owed by so many to so few

A few interesting (?) facts... the global Christian population is estimated at 2.4 billion. There are approximately 50,000 active Christian congregations in the UK. At the last UK census 27.5 million people identified as Christian. All sounds pretty good, right? But here are a few more facts. Our four congregations have to collectively raise around £90,000 a year to meet regular costs (not counting major fabric repairs; a figure set to rise sharply in the coming years). This contrasts with around £40,000 in 2001. Our combined average regular Sunday attendance has fallen significantly from around 100 people in 2001 to around 50-60 today. The average age of our congregations is approaching 80; it was 10-12 years younger a generation ago. On some Sundays there are fewer than 10 people in the congregation; sometimes as few as 5 or 6. Of course, this isn't the whole picture. Take Christingle or Christmas Day, when more than 100 people can be present. But like dogs, the Church isn't just for Christmas. Not just for your wedding; your christening or funeral.

The stark reality is that like pubs and village shops, banks and buses if we don't use churches we risk losing them. Maybe not the buildings themselves, but the vibrant life that grows out of them and which does such good in your community. Do you care about your local church and churchyard? Do you feel that if your church doors closed you would lose something indefinable but vital? If your answer is 'yes' ask yourself this. Do you want your local church to be open and playing its part in 10, 20 or 50 years' time? I know that the vast majority of you do. And many of you already help in practical ways to raise money, cut grass, clean pews, bake cakes. Thank you so much. But we need more of you to help and to help in other ways too. We need people to commit to regular giving (30 or 40 people each giving the equivalent weekly cost of a shop-bought coffee and pastry, or a pint of beer would make a tremendous difference). And we need people to join us on a Sunday; maybe not every Sunday or even every month, but once or twice a year outside of Christmas. We need people willing to provide coffee at the end of a 'normal Sunday' service once or twice a year, or willing to join a flower rota, or a churchyard team, or a key rota, or to read a Sunday reading. We're so grateful for what many of you do already - quietly as unsung heroes - and we love seeing you at Christmas, at a fundraising event or at a wedding. But truthfully even at Easter, at Remembrance Sunday and - surprisingly for our rural communities - at Harvest numbers are dwindling.

There are shining exceptions, like Snowdrop Sunday in Damerham, Darkness to Light in Martin, Christmas morning in Rockbourne and Christmas Eve Communion in Whitsbury, but we need you to come and stand with us throughout the year. Otherwise like our Baptist and Methodist friends we may one day find ourselves faced with the painful decision to close the church doors on so much that enriches the fabric of our lives, whether we count ourselves Christian or not.

For now, we still do all that we can, from coffee mornings to school storytelling, to hospital visits, to cream teas. But we are doing it on ever slimmer human resources. Please, if you can help, speak to your local churchwarden, to a friendly member of your local congregation, to our Team Administrator or to me. Thank You.

Rev'd Les Player

DAMERHAM AND WESTERN DOWNLAND BRANCH – ROYAL BRITISH LEGION



The Damerham and Western Downland Branch of the Royal British Legion will hold its annual Coffee Morning in Damerham Village Hall from 10.00a.m. to 12.00 noon on Saturday 8th November. As usual, there will be a variety of stalls, including excellent home-made cakes for sale, and there will be a raffle with exciting prizes. The Legion provides lifelong support to serving and ex-serving Armed Forces personnel and their families, and all the money raised on the day will go directly towards helping welfare cases in Hampshire. Everyone is invited to join in this important and enjoyable fundraising event, so come along and do bring your friends and relations. Admission is only £2 (which includes coffee, tea and biscuits).

DARKNESS TO LIGHT - The Church's year of worship begins again each Advent Sunday. This year's Advent Sunday falls on the 7th of December. Once again, we will be holding our popular Darkness to Light service at All Saints Church in Martin at 5.00p.m.

A Service for the Bereaved - If you would like to remember a loved one (or more than one) who has died - please join us for a simple and reflective 'Service of Prayer & Remembrance' on Sunday the 2nd of November at 3.00p.m. in St George's Church, Damerham. All are welcome.

Patronal Festivals - Do join us to celebrate the Patronal festival in your local Church. These are at All Saints Church, Martin on Sunday 26th of October at 11.00a.m., St Leonard's Whitsbury on Sunday 2nd November at 9.30a.m. The last is at St. Andrew's, Rockbourne on Sunday 30th of November at 11.00a.m.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Wednesday 8th October 7.30p.m. The Royal British Legion Annual Meeting in Committee Room of Damerham Village Hall.

Monday 13th October 6.00p.m. Combined PCC Tuesday Western Downland School, Rockbourne (Junior Site).

11th November 6.30p.m. for a 6.45p.m start. Chalke Deanery Synod, Dinton

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE IN ROME AT THE TIME OF ST PAUL?

The home groups of our four churches are currently studying Paul's letter to the church there and seeing how its challenges reflect our own. If you'd like more details of home groups, please contact Michael and Isabel King (519383), or Rory Smith (518215).

ALL SAINTS PCC NOMINATED CHARITY 2025

All Saints Church PCC is supporting the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance as their charity for 2025. This allows critically injured people to reach hospital where ambulances cannot quickly reach. More information is available at <https://www.hiowaa.org/>. This will be formally announced at the Martin Harvest Festival. You can find out how to donate by contacting our Church Warden Alistair Groom (01725 519204) or Lizzie Fernie (01725 519542). Or you can pick up an envelope for this purpose (available in church from the Harvest Festival onwards) and return it with your gift in the collection plate in any main church in the benefice (up to 31st December).

FORTHCOMING CHURCH EVENTS

Tuesday Reflection and Prayer - We meet each Tuesday at 9.30a.m. using a simple structure, offering a 25-minute space for reflection and prayer based around the daily scripture reading, a little liturgy and a brief thought. To join on Zoom : <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87190762729> Meeting ID: 871 9076 2729 Passcode: 325626

Harvest Thanksgiving 2025 - There are harvest thanksgiving services planned across the benefice. Damerham and Martin are having their Harvest Thanksgiving services on the 28th of September and Whitsbury on the 5th of October. Rockbourne St Andrew's has theirs on the 12th of October with lunch afterwards in the Village Hall, open to all - adults and children. RSVP to Gill Scott on gill.mary.scott@gmail.com if you wish to attend the lunch. Each year we accept harvest offerings of dried and tinned goods, deodorants, shampoo and other suitable items, alongside more traditional items (but with a good 'shelf life' please!) can be brought to your local Harvest Thanksgiving Service and will be distributed locally where possible amongst older members of our communities or donated to the Ringwood & Fordingbridge Food Bank. Their website has a list of essential items they need if you are keen to donate which will have the most benefit to the poor and hungry. The list of essentials changes, so check often. <https://ringwood.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-food/>

Current essentials are: ⊕Tinned meat stews, ⊕Tinned meat pies, ⊕Long life fruit juice, ⊕Long life milk, ⊕Tins or jars of pulses, ⊕Tinned tomatoes, ⊕Jams and Preserves, ⊕Jars of pasta sauce, and boxes/tubs of dried instant mashed potato.

***** SERVICES DURING OCTOBER & NOVEMBER *****

We are livestreaming some physical services on Zoom denoted by three asterisks (***) in the service listing below. Links to join the stream are in the weekly church update sent out via email each week.

21st September 9.30a.m. 14th Sunday after Trinity
Rockbourne – Sung Eucharist (Contemporary)

11.00a.m. Whitsbury – Parish Worship***

28th September 11.00a.m. 15th Sunday after Trinity
Damerham – Harvest Festival (Contemporary Non-Eucharistic)***

5.00p.m. Martin - Harvest Festival

5th October 9.30a.m. 16th Sunday after Trinity
Martin - Parish Communion (CW1)

11.00a.m. Whitsbury – Harvest Thanksgiving***

12th October 9.30a.m. 17th Sunday after Trinity
Damerham – Parish Communion (CW1)***

11.00a.m. Rockbourne – Harvest Thanksgiving

19th October 9.30a.m. St. Luke - Prayers for Healing and Wholeness
Rockbourne – Sung Eucharist (Contemporary)

11.00a.m. Martin – Parish Worship***

5.00p.m. Whitsbury – Autumn Evensong



A Selection of Harvest Vegetables – Public Domain Image, Wikipedia

26th October 11.00a.m. Bible Sunday – Last Sunday after Trinity
Martin - Benefice Festival: Communion (CW1)***

2nd November 9.30a.m. 4th Sunday before Advent
Whitsbury – Patronal Parish Communion (CW1)

11.00a.m. Rockbourne – All Age Worship

3.00p.m. Damerham – A Service of Prayer & Remembrance for the Bereaved***

9th November 9.30a.m. Remembrance Sunday
Martin - Family Worship for Remembrance Sunday

10.50a.m. Damerham - Remembrance Sunday Service***

Tuesday 11th November - Armistice Day 10.50a.m. Damerham - Wreath-Laying at the War Memorial

16th November 9.30a.m. 2nd Sunday before Advent
Rockbourne – Sung Eucharist

11.00a.m. Martin – Matins***

23rd November 9.30a.m. Christ the King (Sunday next before Advent)
Damerham – Parish Communion (CW1)

11.00a.m. Whitsbury – Parish Worship***

30th November 11.00a.m. 1st Sunday of Advent
Rockbourne – Patronal Choral Matins

5.00p.m. Martin – A Service from Darkness to Light***

7th December 9.30a.m. 2nd Sunday of Advent
Whitsbury – Holy Communion (1662)

11.00p.m. Damerham – All Age Worship***