

Cowley St John

Yearbook 2025

Annual Parochial Church Meeting
Sunday April 26th 2026

Cowley St John: A Year of Renewal, Growth and Gratitude

It continues to be a joy and privilege to serve as Vicar of the Parish of Cowley St John. This is a parish marked by resilience, generosity, and a deep commitment to the Gospel. Over the past year we have experienced renewal — spiritually, pastorally, and physically — across both our churches.

Building Renewal and Stewardship

Significant progress has been made in caring for and strengthening our buildings.

At St Alban's, refurbishment works have now been completed, providing a refreshed and welcoming space ready to support worship, children's ministry, and community life. The installation of a new air source heat pump and upgraded heating system has transformed both comfort and sustainability, enabling the church to be used more confidently throughout the year. A new kitchenette has also been installed, greatly enhancing hospitality and making it easier to host gatherings and outreach activities. The transformation has been remarkable, and it has been heartening to see renewed confidence in what St Alban's can become.

At St Mary and St John's, the Renewal Project has continued to move forward with energy and faith in God. This includes urgent tower repairs, plans for a new kitchen and servery, accessible facilities, and new seating — affectionately known as *Verona's Chairs*. We have taken a phased approach and have already completed the installation of a new heating system, new lighting, refurbishment of the two toilets, and improvements to the North Chapel (St John's Chapel). These developments are not simply about buildings; they are about enabling mission, hospitality, accessibility, and environmental responsibility for generations to come. We are deeply grateful for the grants received this year to support heating upgrades, conservation works, and community-facing improvements. These investments have strengthened both sustainability and our capacity for outreach.

Ministry and New Appointments

We have been richly blessed in ministry. Our two Curates, Revd David Gimson and Dr Matthew Schrecker, continue to flourish in leadership, offering thoughtful preaching, pastoral care, and steady presence. In October 2025, two ordinands joined us, bringing fresh energy and insight into parish life. Their contributions in worship, schools ministry, and community engagement have been invaluable. I am grateful to all the clergy, licensed lay readers and lay leaders in the team for their support and help.

We have also strengthened our staff team. Miriam Atoro has taken on responsibility for children's ministry, supported through grant funding, and this work is growing across the parish. Matthew Hiscock, our Parish Administrator, also funded through grants, provides essential organisational support to the life of the parish.

Leadership continues to develop across the congregation, including sacramental and liturgical ministry and discernment towards Licensed Lay Ministry. We are blessed with a strong and collaborative team — clergy, staff, churchwardens, volunteers, and congregation — working with unity and purpose. As Helen Keller wisely said, "*Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.*" That spirit has been evident in every aspect of parish life this year.

Mission in Action

Beyond the church buildings, our mission continues to flourish. Partnerships with The Porch, St John's Care Home, Thames Valley Police, Asylum Welcome, Oxford Mutual Aid, and our local schools have deepened. Community meals, pastoral visiting, and outreach initiatives continue to offer tangible expressions of Christ's compassion in East Oxford.

Children and families remain at the heart of our vision, with renewed focus on consistent provision, accessible worship, and intergenerational community. Both St Alban's and St Mary and St John's are increasingly recognised as places of belonging, prayer, and practical support.

Children & Youth Work

This has been a year of renewed focus and deep encouragement in our Children Ministry across across the parish. We are especially grateful for Miriam Atoro, who has taken on responsibility for children's ministry, supported through grant funding. Her energy, creativity, and pastoral heart have strengthened our work across both churches. Sunday provision during term time is becoming more consistent and engaging, with Bible stories, discussion, prayer, and practical activities helping children grow in confidence and faith.

At the heart of our vision is a simple but profound commitment: that every child and young person who comes through our doors should know they are welcomed, valued, and loved by God. We continue to work towards building consistent, joyful, and faith-filled provision that supports children not only on Sundays, but throughout the life of the parish.

Our ministry extends beyond Sunday worship. Engagement with local schools remains a vital part of our outreach, with assemblies, seasonal services, and pastoral connections strengthening relationships. We continue to pray for deeper partnerships and opportunities to support children, staff, and families in meaningful ways.

We have also seen encouraging signs among young people exploring their faith more intentionally — asking thoughtful questions, serving in worship, and taking on responsibilities within church life. This is a quiet but important sign of growth.

Children and youth ministry is never simply about numbers; it is about faith being planted, nurtured, and sustained. We are grateful for the dedication of volunteers, parents, clergy, and staff who support this work. Together, we pray that our churches will continue to be places where young lives are shaped by the love of Christ.

Looking Forward

This past year has confirmed that Cowley St John is not simply maintaining tradition; it is growing with confidence. Renewal requires courage, collaboration, and faith. Above all, we are discovering that when we work together — trusting in God's grace — new possibilities emerge.

With gratitude for all that has been achieved, and hope for what lies ahead, we continue to shape a future rooted in worship, hospitality, and love.

With every blessing,
Revd Martha Grace Weatherill

2026 APCM Agenda

Annual Meeting of the Parishioners to Elect Churchwardens

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2025
4. Election of churchwardens and PCC Members

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Welcome
2. Apologies for absence
3. Prayers
4. Acknowledgement of those who have passed away or moved away
5. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2025
6. The Reports

The Trustees' Annual Report including:

1. PCC Membership (see Accounts)
 2. Electoral Roll Report (Alison Shapton/Matthew Hiscock)
 3. Fabric Report (Churchwardens)
 4. Financial Report and Accounts (Richard Dunkerley)
 5. PCC Report (membership, meetings, attendance and key activities)
 6. Safeguarding (Miriam Atoro)
 7. Vicar's Report
7. Closing Prayers

[APCM 2025 Minutes](#)

4 May 2025

Annual Meeting of the Parishioners to Elect Churchwardens

Present

Martha Weatherill (Chair)

Chloe Robinson

Rosy Hancock

Alison Shapton (notes)

Peter McCullough

Gillian Burr

Rodney Burr

Gaby Hock

Karen Metcalfe

Olu Anthony

Beatrice Clayre

Paul Page

Lorna Robinson

Bedford Thomas

Ruth Waddle

Robert Peberdy

Daphne Jefferies

Pam Daniel

Edmund Cornforth

Charis Brown

Sepiso Mwamelo

Mary-Anne Sinclair

Bridget Newman

David Gimson

Ruth Ashcroft
Janet McCrae
Margaret Coombs
Jane Kelly
Virginia Bainbridge
Ingrid Barnsley
Carol Chapman

Apologies
Susanna Gimson

1. Minutes of 2024 meeting
The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2024 were approved. Nominated by Bridget Newman and seconded by Gillian Burr.
2. Election of churchwardens.

Martha Weatherill chaired the election.

Chloe Robinson was elected with no objections.

No nominations were received for the churchwarden at St Mary and St John so there will not be a churchwarden in this coming year. Martha gave thanks to Rosy Hancock for all her work as churchwarden over many years.

There was a full discussion about SMSJ being without a churchwarden in the coming year.

3. APCM

Present
Martha Weatherill (Chair)
Chloe Robinson
Rosy Hancock
Alison Shapton (notes)
Peter McCullough
Gillian Burr
Rodney Burr
Gaby Hock
Karen Metcalfe
Olu Anthony
Beatrice Clayre
Paul Page
Lorna Robinson
Bedford Thomas
Ruth Waddle
Robert Peberdy
Daphne Jefferies
Pam Daniel
Edmund Cornforth
Charis Brown
Sepiso Mwamelo
Mary-Anne Sinclair

Bridget Newman
David Gimson
Ruth Ashcroft
Janet McCrae
Margaret Coombs
Jane Kelly
Virginia Bainbridge
Ingrid Barnsley
Carol Chapman

Apologies – Susanna Gimson

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2024

The minutes were accepted. Nominated by Ruth Waddle and seconded by Janet McCrae.

PCC elections

Mary-Anne Sinclair and Peter McCullough are stepping down so are not seeking re-election.

Clara Ramsay, Rodney Burr and Richard Dunkerley were re-elected. Alison Shapton was elected. All appointments are for one year.

The Reports

The Trustees' Annual Report was noted. This includes the Fabric/Facilities Report, the Electoral Roll Officer's Report, the Deanery Synod Report, the PCC Report, the Churchwarden's Report from SMJ; the Parish Safeguarding Officer's Report, the Music Report, the Church Schools Report, Alice's Tea Party report and the Churchyard Report.

There were comments made on several reports: -

Electoral Roll: Peter McCullough reported that a completely new roll has been compiled. There are 66 people on the electoral roll (compared to 102 in 2024).

Finance Report: Richard Dunkerley spoke about parish finances, noting that there is a larger surplus than last year due to grant money and a legacy. It was confirmed that the legacy received was not given for a specific purpose and is not restricted funding.

Thanks were expressed to all who worked on the accounts including Richard, Clara and Kate.

Safeguarding Report: Lorna Robinson was thanked for all she has done as safeguarding officer. She is stepping down now and the PCC will appoint a new safeguarding officer.

Churchyard Report: Ruth Ashcroft gave further details about the churchyard, future plans and encouraged gardeners to join the churchyard team working on Wednesday mornings.

Gaby Hock gave information about the Seasonal Meditations held on various Fridays 10.30 – 11.30 am. All are welcome to re-connect with nature and the rhythm of the year/church year through a guided reflection and walk.

Vicar's Report

Martha Weatherill reflected on her first few months in the Parish. She spoke about the Year of Prayer in 2024 and how this prayer is a foundation – building people, working together. She encouraged people to offer what they could and to continue to offer prayers. She invited everyone to see God at work in areas such as: community, pastoral work, the choir and music, community lunches, 5-year grants, and childrens and Youth work for the next seven years.

She noted that we are blessed with buildings and the churchyard (they are assets not liabilities). She gave thanks to those who have worked to get us to this point and spoke of the vision going forward. This is a work in progress. Finally, without naming names, each and every person was thanked for their contribution to the life of the Parish.

The meeting ended with the Grace at 12.35.

Cowley St John Extraordinary Meeting 23 November 2025 at 11.45 am

Present:

Martha Weatherill (Vicar)

Alison Shapton

Rodney Barr

Jack Cole

David Gimson

Sepiso Mwamelo

Jessica Lorimer

Matthew Schrecker

Iona Morphet

Georgina Anstey

Edward Williams

Janet Proudman

Chloe Robinson

Rosy Hancock

Bridget Newman

Verona Harris

Gillian Burr

Richard Dunkerley

Jacqueline Norton

David Garman

Ruth Waddle

Marjorie Adams

Carol Chapman

Virginia Bainbridge

Janet McCrae

Susannah Reide

Sabina Alkire

Edmund Cornforth

Pam Daniel

Robert Peberdy

Daphne Jefferies

Bedford Thomas

Kirsty James

1. Welcome

Martha Weatherill welcomed everyone to the meeting, which had been called to elect a second Churchwarden and to share news of current and future projects.

2. Election of Second Churchwarden

Rodney Charles Barr was nominated by Mr Bedford Thomas and seconded by Miss Kirsty James. This being the only nomination, Rodney Charles Barr was elected Churchwarden.

His brief will be the whole Parish. The Deputy Churchwarden, elected at the PCC meeting on 11 November 2025, is Jacqueline Norton.

Chloe Robinson carries on as Churchwarden.

Martha Weatherill thanked Chloe Robinson for all her work at St Alban's, and Clara Ramsay for all her work with the Finances.

3. Project Update and Timeline

Martha Weatherill gave an update on the work taking place at St Mary and St John. The timeline is as follows: -

September 2025

- Redecoration of the Toilets and St John's Chapel – completed November 2025
- Installation of the new Heating system – completed December 2025
- Installation of new Lighting
- Installation of the Digital Notice Board – completed January 2026
- Installation of the Projector and Screen – May 2025
- Thanksgiving Service with Bishop Steven, marking the new heating and lighting, the beginning of the wider renewal project, and the 150th anniversary of the building Autumn 2026 – Summer 2027
- Major works: Tower repairs, new Servery, Disabled-access Toilet, and Kitchen redevelopment – Summer 2027
- Dedication and Celebration Service marking the completion of the renewal works

She also noted that the Council have made an approach to open the church once a week during the winter as a warm space. It is hoped that this will begin in January, once grant money has been received to enable it to go ahead.

The meeting closed in prayer.

APCM Reports for 2025

Fabric/Facilities Report

Rodney Burr

All our properties are regularly inspected and remain compliant with Health and Safety requirements, fire equipment and regulations, electrical installations (5 yearly electrical inspection reports) and equipment (annual PAT testing).

A programme of clearing rainwater goods (RWG) and surface drains is in effect.

Any problems which arise are dealt with professionally as soon as reasonably practicable.

St Mary & St John Church

New and improved heating, lighting, St John Chapel redecoration and new chairs, toilets refurbished, audio visual equipment (AV) installed, external CCTV security system and temporary repairs to high level tower windows.

The churchyard boundary wall adjacent Magdalen Road rebuilt.

The renewal project and major tower repairs (provision of accessible toilet facilities for the disabled, a new kitchen in the sacristy area, servery and storage in the church) is well advanced in planning, specifications and costings. We continue to liaise with our conservation architect and Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC).

Richard Benson Hall

Oxford Mutual Aid (OMA) remain as tenants providing us with an annual rental of £15,480.

St Albans Church and Hall

Air source heat pump installed (a Diocese 'first') and a full refurbishment completed.

Bartlemas Chapel

Minor repairs. Still to address items identified in the Quinquennial Report (QI).

Investment Property at 14 Magdalen Road (aka 'The Mission House')

Significant water ingress caused damage to three of the flats, now the subject of an insurance claim with Ecclesiastical Insurance. Repairs effected but longer term requirement to address roofing issues, damp problems and RWG. Budgetary planning required.

Irving Building, Hertford Street

Still no progress on proposed redevelopment of the site (as outlined in last annual report). Our solicitor is in dialogue with the property owners.

Electoral Roll Officer's Report

Alison Shapton/Matthew Hiscock

The electoral roll stood at 67 on 24th February 2026. The new electoral roll (finalised in April, 2026) will allow some data on departures, deaths, and incoming new members between April 2025 and April 2026 to be reported at the APCM.

Deanery Synod Report

This diocese is divided into 29 deaneries. Cowley Deanery consists of 15 churches and meetings are held 4 times a year. Sometimes we meet jointly with Oxford Deanery. The Deanery has both an ordained and a lay chairperson. These gatherings provide a useful opportunity to meet lay and clergy from other parishes, share news and learn from each other. Cowley St John contributes financially, as do all churches in the Deanery, to what is known as the Parish share. A communal pot which helps equal out the disparity of income between parishes.

Synods are defined by church law; they have a serious purpose and can be a force for change. to bring together the views of parishes of the deanery on common problems, to discuss and formulate common policies on those problems, to foster a sense of community and interdependence among those parishes, and generally to promote in the deanery the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

See link below for more information about deanery synods.

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are/how-we-are-governed/deanery-synods/deanery-synods.php>

PCC Report

Alison Shapton

The PCC met six times since the last APCM. We had an extraordinary APCM on 23rd November.

Churchwarden's Report from SMJ

Rodney Burr

Our parish commitment to a year of prayer and renewal brought rich rewards.

A fresh expression of faith in action resulted in many new initiatives bearing fruit and growth.

A growing sense of optimism and teamwork, openness and trust alongside a deepening of the fellowship between both church congregations.

St Alban's Church and Hall benefitted from a complete uplift and refurbishment and is now a modern, attractive, safe and warm environment to host both worship and community groups.

Ss Mary and John Church saw many improvements, the major items being heating, lighting, refurbishment of St John's Chapel (and new seating), redecoration of the toilets. Planning the major project to deal with the church tower repairs, new toilet, kitchen and servery is well advanced and we hope to be granted the necessary approvals soon.

These are all an outward and visible sign of our commitment to extend and improve engagement with the wider community we serve. An opportunity to open the doors, particularly to the Cowley Road.

We've seen people grow in confidence and step forward to offer suggestions and participate more widely in parish activities.

All in all a good year. Let's maintain the prayers for renewal during 2026.

Ever onwards.....

Rodney

Churchwarden's Report from SA

Chloe Robinson

It has been a relatively busy year at St Albans and we have started 2026 with a fresh energy. I am so thankful for everything the community has done to get us to this point.

Over the last year it has been, as ever, been lovely to be together as a church community, sharing worship, laughter, and conversation week by week. Whether through singing, serving, or staying on for a chat over coffee (and ping pong) these moments show the strength of gathering together in the same space. There has been a real buzz over the last twelve months, with excitement building for things to come.

The building is equally renewed. There have been a number of works completed over the last year, with new heating, a new kitchen in the hall, and refurbished toilets. All of this work was rounded out with a full redecoration at the beginning of 2026. It is so wonderful to see the church looking so loved and cared for. And it was definitely nice to be warmer across the winter months than we have in previous years!

Parish Safeguarding Officer's Report

Miriam Atoro

All DBS checks are up to date, with one application currently in progress.

Arrangements are being made to ensure that those who require safeguarding training will attend the appropriate training sessions in due course. Safeguarding continues to remain a priority within all our children and youth activities.

Children & Youth Work Report

Miriam Ato

Children and Youth Work

Children and Youth Work continues to grow and provides a variety of age-appropriate activities including:

- Oral storytelling
- Bible picture story sessions
- Arts and crafts
- Pantomime events
- Harvest-themed activities

Children and young people are actively involved in the life of the Church. They serve during the Sunday Eucharist at both St Mary & John and St. Alban's, supporting as servers and participating fully in worship.

Baby and Toddler Group

The Baby and Toddler Group runs weekly during term time at SMJ on Wednesdays from 9-10am.

The group continues to grow steadily and provides a welcoming space for parents, carers, and young children to connect within a safe and supportive church environment.

Outreach Activities

Bible Story Literacy in Schools

Weekly Bible storytelling continues during school term time:

- **St. Mary and St. John CE Primary School** – Tuesdays (5-minute assembly storytelling)
- **St. Frideswide Primary School** – Mondays (weekly assembly storytelling)

These sessions support Bible literacy in schools and have received positive feedback from school leadership and staff.

Prayer Space – St. Frideswide School

A Prayer Space was organised at St. Frideswide Primary School. Each class group attended for approximately 20 minutes.

The space allowed children to:

- Sit quietly
- Reflect and pray
- Write prayers for loved ones
- Decorate a prayer tree using prayer tags

The experience created a calm and reflective environment for the children.

Harvest Events in Schools

Both primary schools organised Harvest celebrations during the year. During these events, an interactive Harvest-themed story (approximately five minutes) was delivered to support the theme of thanksgiving and generosity.

Sunday School

St Mary & John's

Weekly Sunday School continues during term time, with breaks during half-term and school holidays.

Children:

- Hear a Bible story aligned with the readings from the Eucharist Mass
- Engage in related activities
- Share and showcase their work with the congregation during announcements

This helps to connect the children's learning with the wider worshipping community.

St. Alban's

St. Alban's Church ran a Laudate service once a month on the fourth Sunday. Activities are planned to be inclusive and suitable for a range of ages.

Collaboration with Schools

The Church welcomed three schools to visit and tour St. Mary and St. John Church:

- St. Mary and St. John Church of England Primary School
- St. Frideswide Primary School
- Comper Nursery School

During Advent, the schools performed their Nativity plays in the Church, with many parents and guardians attending. These events strengthened relationships between the Church, schools, and families in the parish.

Nursery School Event

Comper Nursery School brought children to Church for a Harvest activity in October 2025. A Harvest-themed story was shared, engaging the children in a simple and meaningful way.

Pantomime Event

The team from LOL Bear performed at the Church. The event was well attended, and children and their families greatly enjoyed the performance. It provided a joyful community gathering opportunity.

Mission at Cowley St John continues to be lived out not only within our church buildings, but in our churchyard, streets, schools, and community spaces. This year has been marked by a deepening of relationships, practical compassion, and creative outreach.

Our Community Lunches remain a central expression of our mission. Held regularly, these gatherings bring together parishioners, neighbours, and those who might otherwise experience isolation. Around shared tables, friendships are formed, stories are shared, and faith is lived simply through welcome and generosity.

Alongside this, café mornings and seasonal events continue to offer informal spaces where people can encounter the church in a relaxed and open setting.

One of the most joyful sights this year has been the weekly ice cream van visits for local school children during the warmer months. What may seem like a small gesture has become a powerful sign of presence and care. It has created moments of delight, strengthened our relationships with families, and allowed us to be visibly embedded in the life of our neighbourhood.

Our partnerships with local schools remain a vital part of our mission. Through assemblies, services, seasonal celebrations, and pastoral engagement, we continue to build trust and connection with children, staff, and families. These relationships are long-term and relational, rooted in listening as much as leading.

Children and families increasingly see both St Mary and St John's and St Alban's as places of welcome and belonging.

We are grateful for our ongoing relationships with The Porch, St John's Care Home, Thames Valley Police, Asylum Welcome, and Oxford Mutual Aid. These partnerships reflect a shared commitment to supporting those facing hardship, loneliness, or displacement.

Pastoral visiting continues quietly and faithfully. In homes, hospitals, and care settings, the ministry of presence remains at the heart of our calling.

Our churchyard continues to be both a sacred resting place and a living witness to our faith and inclusion of everyone. It offers space for remembrance, reflection, and encounter. We are increasingly aware of its role as a place of quiet mission — where conversations happen naturally and the church's presence is gently felt.

Environmental responsibility also forms part of our mission. Improvements to heating systems, including the installation of an air source heat pump at St Alban's, reflect our commitment to sustainable stewardship of creation.

Mission at Cowley St John is not confined to programmes; it is expressed through people.

Volunteers, clergy, staff, and congregation members together form a strong and collaborative team.

We continue to pray that our churches will be places where Christ's love is visible, practical, and transformative — in worship, in welcome, and in the everyday encounters that shape our common life. With gratitude for all who serve and support this work.

A Year of Imaginative Writing at the Creative Writing Cafe

We have run a number of Creative Writing Cafes at St Alban's throughout the past year, with visitors from a range of ages and backgrounds sharing ideas and responses to ancient stories and creating their own pieces. We've had comedy, poetry, newspaper articles, and all sorts of other creations! We have also created some bookshelves in the hall for people who would like more inspiration. All are welcome to borrow these, but please bring them back again.

The Cafe has been a powerful way of connecting people through imagination, empathy and creativity, and we will be running every fortnight from St Alban's Hall in the coming year.

Music Report**St Mary & John's****Lawrence Tao**

Following last year's inauguration of the Choral Scholarships, it has been wonderful to continue to have choral scholars this year; Anika, Marcus and Angus have all continued for a second year, while the soprano position remains vacant. The choir has continued to grow steadily, with around ten on most Sundays and there have been some memorable joint services where the number of singers in our joint choirs has been around twenty, which has been wonderful. Throughout January and February we had several joint services while St Alban's was being refurbished, and it has been a joy to sing together with a larger choir during this period. A particular occasion on which the joint choirs made us and the parish proud was Verona's funeral, which included a full liturgical performance of Fauré *Requiem*. Congregational singing has also been strong, including confident singing of the MacMillan and Merbecke mass settings in Advent and Lent respectively. The music list this year has continued our strategy of a mix of traditional favourites and new repertoire, and, in particular, including a number of carols from the Cowley Carol Book, which was commissioned for our parish 125 years ago in 1901; there will be more of these in Eastertide and Ascensontide as we continue to celebrate this anniversary. Musical highlights have included the Holy Week sequence, *Worthy is the Lamb* from Handel *Messiah*, Finzi *God is gone up* for Ascension, the Fauré *Requiem* in our first parish Summer Concert, and MacMillan *O radiant dawn* and Gibbons *This is the record of John* in Advent.

St Alban's**Susanna Gimson**

As always, I am very grateful to our small but committed choir who sing so beautifully each week. We continue to explore new repertoire, especially for upper voices. Most of our anthems are not difficult and we are encouraging beginners and children to join us especially on the last Sunday in the month.

On Shrove Tuesday we had a traditional St Albans fish and chip Talent Show. It was such a fun evening with instruments ranging from the trombone to the African harp, and a wide range of songs from folk to pop (the Beatles) to musicals. We even had an original composition (with guitar accompaniment). There were some lovely poems too, and there was a chance to dance Caribbean style to 'How great thou art!'

Over the year four members of the City of Oxford Silver Band Cathy, Alex, Tess and Max have joined me (on the organ) with the concluding voluntary. As always it was a bonus to be joined by the Byrd Chorus for the Charles Street Carols.

Thank you to Alex for leading the music for us once a month, and also to both Alex and Lawrence for their musical support.

Church Schools

Karen Metcalfe

Parish engagement with our two Church of England schools is a huge privilege. It is widely valued and acknowledged by members of the school communities.

Foundation governors (nominated by the parish and diocese), generously use their skills and experience alongside the full governing board, to promote and develop the Christian ethos of the two Church of England Primary Schools in our parish.

St Mary and St John Church of England Primary School

We continue to have a strong relationship with SSMJ school and visit the school for assembly exploring bible stories and the school's Christian values. Four foundation governors appointed by the diocese and the parish support the work of the school.

Headteacher, Rebekah Stott commented that "We are fortunate to enjoy a positive partnership with the parish, which enriches the life of our school in many ways. We continue to work closely with the church, and the children especially enjoy Teacher Miriam's celebrations — her storytelling in particular really brings the Bible stories to life for them and helps deepen their understanding in an engaging and memorable way.

We visited the church for our Christmas service and will be returning again in the next few weeks for our Easter service, which will be our reception children's first visit to the church. It is always a special milestone for them. Families were invited to stay for mince pies after our Christmas visit, which created a warm and welcoming opportunity for community connection. The clergy have also supported our Christingle and Harvest celebrations in school.

In addition, the parish has hosted occasional family events, which some of our families have attended. Overall, the partnership with the parish strengthens our Christian ethos, supports the children's spiritual development, and helps foster a strong sense of belonging within the wider community"

St Frideswide's Church of England Primary School

Our relationship with St Frideswide's continues to flourish with regular visits to the school for festivals and the school have held services in church throughout the year.

Headteacher, Hannah Forder-Ball commented that "The Governors at St Frideswide support the school and the community through taking an active role in the life of the surrounding area. They have a keen interest in what we do and care deeply about the outcomes of the children in our school."

Churchyard Report

Janet McCrae & Ruth Ashcroft

The churchyard team has continued to meet every Wednesday morning through the year, rain or shine. We are a very stable group of around 12 people, and welcomed two new members this year. A volunteer discretionary fund has been set up by the church, in part to help those needing help for example with the cost of travel to the churchyard. The churchyard steering group meets every other month to discuss projects, strategy, finance and events.

A main focus this year has been the upgrading and re-organising of the Garden of Remembrance, now that ash burials will all be there, with stone memorial plaques to mark them if desired. The work is ongoing, but good progress has been made on removing brambles and the more invasive plants. In two public bulb planting sessions in October we added large numbers of spring bulbs and hardy cyclamen in the stretch including the St John the Evangelist memorial and elsewhere. Wild type bulbs are always a bit slow to establish, but they are beginning to come up. Many thanks to those who contributed practical help and donations for this.

We have also focussed on improving the stretch between North Porch and the car park, letting in more light by removing some large dark bushes, adding new planting, and digging out a small area which may have been a cause of damp in the toilets area of the church.

The long hot dry spell in the summer had an impact. Initially many plants flowered well and there were large numbers of butterflies, but later the flowering meadow areas and flowerbeds finished early and the butterflies became scarcer. We wondered whether trees would be impacted, but there have been no overwinter losses. The Council tree team had a few unsafe (diseased) trees felled late last winter.

Routine work continues to prune hedges and shrubs, make compost and leaf mould, maintain flowerbeds, and mow grass paths and grassland areas. Grave memorials are gradually cleared of ivy, with a special focus on the many war memorials for which we get a small annual grant to maintain. A project is ongoing to get the memorial data compiled 20 years ago by the Family History Society and which is currently on CD Rom into a form more easily consulted (eg on the church website) and keep it safe for the future.

Events this year included monthly meditations in the churchyard, walks focussing on the geology of gravestones, and Carols in the Churchyard (which had to be in the church because of poor weather).

Many people walk through the churchyard and tell us that they enjoy the flowers, trees and birdsong. Sadly, anti-social behaviour also continues much as before with similar problems, but not quite as bad as at its peak despite the dry weather. We are thankful that Thames Valley Police have been helping us with this, with several meetings to discuss and assess various strategies. Two strategies were CCTV installation and more regular patrols from the police, which have both helped. We need more help with the constant litter picking required. Fly-tipping has not reduced sadly, and happens mostly out sight of the CCTV; it includes furniture, building waste, garden waste, and worst of all rotting food. The Garden of Remembrance has been a focus for noisy drinking and drug use, and a source of serious night-time nuisance for neighbours – now solved by removing all seating here, but this is of course a sad loss for daytime use.

Parish Magazine Report

Edward Williams

Advent 2025 saw the relaunch of the Cowley StJohn parish magazine under Mthr Martha's watchful eye. The magazine will be published every two months and currently the cost of printing is being generously donated. We have so far enjoyed a wide range of articles and contributions on a range of spiritual themes, but it is also a way of keeping the parish informed about events and updated on developments and the progress of the renewal campaign. The next edition is due out in time for Palm Sunday.