



CSJ Parish Magazine

September and October 2026



“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” — Galatians 3:28

Welcome to the September and October 2026 Magazine

Moving from the Year of Prayer to the Year of Music:



To Sing is to Pray Twice

"Those who sing pray twice." These well-known words, traditionally attributed to St Augustine, remind us that music is far more than something beautiful that accompanies worship. Singing is itself an act of prayer. It allows our hearts to express what words alone sometimes cannot. It lifts our minds to God, strengthens our faith and unites us as the Body of Christ.

Over the past two years, our parish has been living through what we have called our **Year of Prayer**. Together we have rediscovered the richness of the Daily Office, the Eucharist, prayer, intercessions and personal devotion. We have learnt that prayer is not simply one activity among many, but the very heartbeat of the Church. Thank you to everyone who has faithfully joined us in prayer, whether in church or at home. Your prayers have helped to sustain our parish, our mission and one another.

As many of you know, we now stand on the threshold of a significant new chapter in the life of St Mary & St John. Over the coming months we will begin our capital project, including the repair of our historic tower, the installation of our first accessible toilet, a new kitchen and servery, and other improvements that will enable our church to serve the community for generations to come.

Projects of this scale are exciting, but they also bring uncertainty, disruption and challenge. They require wisdom in decision-making, patience when things do not always go according to plan, strength

for those overseeing the work, and generosity from those supporting it. Above all, they require prayer.

It is for this reason that, as the capital works begin, it feels entirely appropriate that we move from our Year of Prayer into our Year of Music. This is not because prayer is ending, but because it is time to deepen it.

If, as St Augustine reminds us, to sing is to pray twice, then perhaps there has never been a better moment for us to become a parish that prays twice. As scaffolding rises around our building, may our songs rise to heaven. As work begins on bricks and mortar, may God continue his work in our hearts. As we invest in the future of our church, may we also invest in the spiritual life that gives the building its true purpose.

Throughout the coming year we will place a particular emphasis on the music of the Psalms.

The Psalms have been the prayer book of God's people for over three thousand years. They contain every human emotion imaginable: joy and sorrow, praise and lament, confidence and fear, thanksgiving and repentance. They teach us how to pray when words fail us and remind us that every part of life can be brought before God. Jesus himself prayed the Psalms, and they continue to form the foundation of the Church's daily worship.

During our Year of Music, we will not simply sing the Psalms; we will study them, reflect upon them and allow them to shape our own prayer. My hope is that they will become an even richer source of comfort, encouragement and challenge as we learn to pray with both understanding and song.

Music also has an extraordinary ability to bring people together. It crosses boundaries of age, culture, language and background in ways that few other things can. Here in East Oxford, where we are blessed with such diversity, music has the power to unite our community and build relationships that words alone sometimes cannot.

I would therefore love this to be a year of imagination and creativity. What opportunities might we create to share music with our wider community? Community singing events, concerts, schools' projects, intercultural celebrations, workshops, outdoor music or collaborations with local musicians? If you have ideas, please do share them. This is an invitation for the whole parish.

We are also delighted to be planning the appointment of a Deputy Organist, who will work alongside our excellent Music Directors as we continue to build upon the strong musical heritage of Cowley St John. This investment reflects our commitment not only to maintaining high standards of worship but also to nurturing future musicians and strengthening the ministry of music within the parish.

Our National Lottery Heritage Fund project reminds us that heritage is about much more than preserving beautiful buildings. It is about nurturing the living traditions that have sustained Christian worship here for generations and ensuring that they continue to flourish for generations yet to come. Music is one of those treasures.

As we enter our **Year of Music**, my prayer is that our worship will become even richer, our fellowship even stronger and our witness to Christ even clearer.

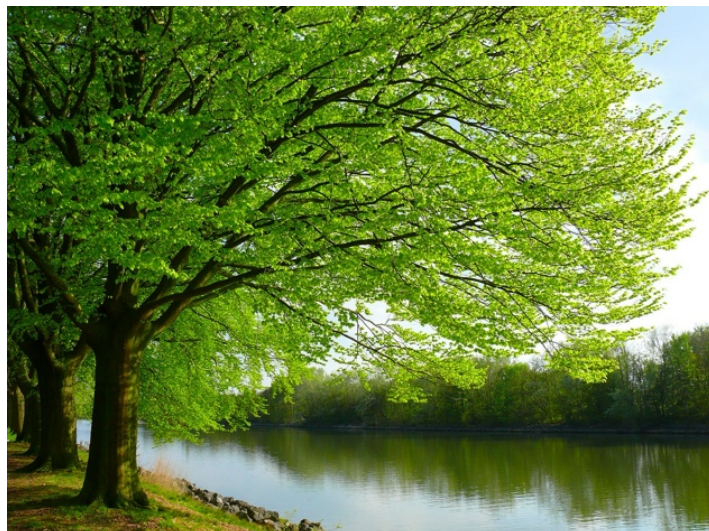
So let us continue to pray.

Let us pray through the Psalms.

Let us support those who lead our music.

And as we continue this exciting season of renewal, both spiritually and physically, let us pray twice, lifting our voices to God with joy, confidence and hope, trusting that the One who has begun this good work among us will bring it to completion.

With thanks for your support,
Mthr Martha



The Psalms Through the Seasons

Psalm 1 – Where Are We Rooted?

As we begin our Year of Music, it is fitting that we also begin with Psalm 1, the opening psalm of the Bible's hymnbook. For over three thousand years, the Psalms have been sung, prayed and reflected upon by God's people. They give voice to every human emotion—joy and sorrow, praise and lament, hope and fear—and they continue to shape the worship of the Church today.

Psalm 1 presents us with two ways of living. The psalmist contrasts those who are blown about by life's changing circumstances with those who are deeply rooted in God:

"They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither." (Psalm 1:3)

It is a beautiful image. A healthy tree does not survive because the weather is always favourable. It survives because its roots reach deep into a constant source of life.

The same is true for us. There will always be seasons of joy and seasons of challenge. As our parish prepares for significant change and renewal over the coming months, Psalm 1 reminds us that our strength does not come from our own efforts but from remaining rooted in God through prayer, worship and his Word.

The psalm also invites us to delight in God's teaching—not as a burden, but as the source of wisdom, peace and life. The more deeply we are rooted in Christ, the more able we are to bear fruit for others. As we enter our Year of Music, may we learn not only to sing the Psalms beautifully but also to live them faithfully. May our voices become prayers, our songs become acts of praise, and our lives become like trees planted beside the living water of God's grace.

Prayer

Lord, plant us firmly in your love. Deepen our roots in your Word, strengthen us through prayer, and help us to bear fruit in every season. As we sing your praises, may our hearts grow ever closer to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Mthr Martha

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement, nor sinner in the congregation of the righteous.

For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Psalms 1

Towards Net Zero: Caring for God's Creation

This summer's prolonged spell of exceptionally hot weather has reminded us that climate change is no longer a distant concern—it is something we are experiencing here in East Oxford. As temperatures rise and weather patterns become more extreme, we are called not only to care for our historic buildings but also to care for God's creation and for one another.

At St Mary & St John and St Alban's, we are committed to playing our part in the Church of England's journey towards becoming Net Zero Carbon. This is not simply about reducing energy bills; it is about faithful stewardship of the gifts God has entrusted to us and ensuring that our churches remain welcoming, sustainable and fit for future generations. The Church of England encourages every parish to develop a practical and proportionate route to Net Zero, recognising that every church is unique.

Over recent years, we have already made significant progress.

At St Mary & St John, we have installed a modern infrared radiant heating system, which heats people rather than the whole volume of

the building, making it far more efficient than traditional heating systems. We have also upgraded our lighting with energy-efficient LED fittings and improved our electrical infrastructure.

At St Alban's, improvements have included the installation of an air source heat pump to heat the church hall, together with a modern infrared radiant heating system within the church itself. These changes are already helping to reduce our environmental impact while creating warmer and more welcoming spaces for community use.

Our restoration project at St Mary & St John will provide further opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint. A new glazed internal screen at the north porch will help reduce heat loss, while improved energy management, careful maintenance and sensitive conservation work will all contribute to a more sustainable future. As the Church of England reminds us, good maintenance, efficient heating, LED lighting and reducing unnecessary heat loss are among the most effective first steps for historic churches.

Outside our buildings, our churchyards are also making an important contribution. Mature trees provide shade during heatwaves, while areas managed for wildlife support birds, bees and other pollinators. These green spaces improve biodiversity and offer peaceful places where people can rest, reflect and find relief during periods of extreme heat.

There is still much more we can do together. Future possibilities include installing additional heating controls, improving insulation where appropriate, harvesting rainwater, increasing biodiversity, exploring renewable energy where feasible, and continuing to monitor and reduce our energy use. Every improvement, however small, contributes to the wider goal.

Net Zero is not only about buildings—it is about everyday choices. We can all help a little by:

- Using environmentally friendly products where possible.
- Reducing waste and recycling more.
- Buying local and Fairtrade products where appropriate.
- Planting flowers and shrubs that support pollinators.
- Caring for our churchyards as places of beauty, biodiversity and peace.

During this period of very hot weather, please also remember to look after yourselves and those around you. Drink plenty of water, avoid spending long periods in the hottest part of the day if possible, check in on neighbours who may be vulnerable, and do make use of our church buildings and churchyards as places of shade, rest and refreshment.

Each of us can make a difference, no matter how small it may feel. Together, through prayer and practical action, we can help ensure that future generations inherit churches, churchyards and a planet that continue to flourish.

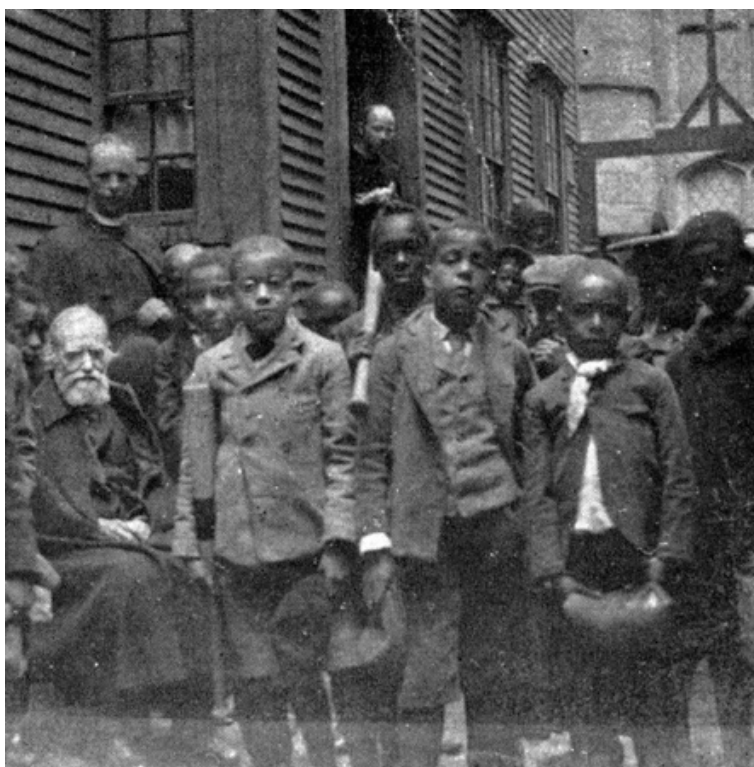
"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." (*Psalms* 24:1)

Did you know? From the archives

Sharing historical moments of our parish life a century apart



Janet Proudman is licensed to the parish of Cowley St John, May 1990.



Father Benson (left) travels to India and then on to Boston, 1890.

Did You Know?

Father Richard Meux Benson – The Visionary Behind Cowley St John

Did you know that Father Richard Meux Benson (1824–1915), the founding priest of Cowley St John, had originally hoped to become a missionary in India? Instead, he was called to the rapidly growing suburb of East Oxford, where he became one of the most influential Anglican priests of the nineteenth century.

When Father Benson arrived, East Oxford was little more than fields and orchards. Seeing the area's rapid expansion, he recognised the urgent need for churches, schools and practical support for local families. In 1859 he established the Iron Church in Stockmore Street, before laying the foundations for the parish of Cowley St John in 1869.

Father Benson was also the founder of the Society of St John the Evangelist (SSJE), established in 1866. Better known as the Cowley Fathers, this became the first Anglican male religious community founded since the Reformation. From Cowley, the Society grew into an international order with missions in America, India and South Africa.

His vision extended far beyond Sunday worship. He established schools, soup kitchens, coal and clothing clubs, mothers' groups and youth organisations, including the Gladiators' Club, believing that the Church should care for the whole person—body, mind and spirit. Today, Father Benson's legacy lives on. More than 150 years later, St Mary & St John continues his vision of being a place of worship, welcome, learning and compassionate service at the heart of East Oxford.

"The Church exists not for itself alone, but to make Christ known through worship, service and love." – Inspired by the ministry of Father Richard Meux Benson.

Cowley St John, Continuing Fr Benson's Vision....

Mthr Martha

News

Welcoming Those Ordinands Called to Serve

Dear Friends,

One of the greatest privileges of being a parish church is that we are not only called to proclaim the Gospel today, but also to help form the priests, deacons and Christian leaders of tomorrow.

I am delighted to share that, from October 2026 until June 2027, we will be welcoming around four ordinands who will undertake their parish placements with us. Each comes from a different background, profession and stage of life. Some are changing career, others have come to ordination after many years of service in other walks of life. Each brings unique gifts, experiences and questions as they continue to discern God's call.

Their year with us will be one of learning, growing and discovering what parish ministry is really like. They will join us in worship, preaching, visiting, serving, learning and simply sharing in the everyday life of our parish family.

May I ask one small favour of you all?

Please welcome them as if you were welcoming Jesus himself.

In St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us:

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me." (Matthew 10:40)

Please speak to them, invite them into conversation over coffee, encourage them, pray for them, and don't be afraid to ask them questions about their own journey of faith. Help them to feel that this is truly their church home for the year.

Of course, I suspect I am preaching to the converted! One of the great joys of this parish is the warmth and generosity with which newcomers are welcomed. Time and again, visitors tell me how quickly they feel at home here. Thank you for being that kind of church.

Please keep our ordinands in your prayers as they prepare to join us.

Thank you, as always, for your support.

With every blessing,

Mthr Martha

Opening St Mary & St John for Visitors and Prayer

We are pleased to share that, in addition to our regular services and activities, the church is now open at set times during the week for visitors and for quiet prayer. At these times, the church will be staffed and ready to welcome anyone who would like to come in.

Opening hours:

Monday – Friday: 10am till 3pm

Our hope is to encourage greater use of the church, enabling more people to experience this beautiful space of worship, community, and heritage.

Please spread the word and invite others to come and share in this special place.

Mission Focus – The Leprosy Mission



It was a pleasure to welcome Mr Chris Strata from The Leprosy Mission to St Mary & St John recently. Chris shared something of the charity's remarkable work supporting some of the world's most vulnerable people affected by leprosy.

Although leprosy is now curable, millions of people continue to suffer from its physical, social and emotional consequences. Many experience stigma, discrimination and isolation, often losing their livelihoods, education and place within their communities. The Leprosy Mission works in partnership with local churches and communities to provide medical treatment, rehabilitation, education and opportunities for people to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

Following our Parish Mass, members of the congregation stayed to watch a short film highlighting this life-changing work and to learn more about how the charity is transforming lives across the world. We are grateful to Chris for sharing this important ministry with us and reminding us that our Christian calling extends beyond our own parish to our neighbours around the world. As Jesus reached out with compassion to those living with leprosy, so too we are called to

stand alongside those who are marginalised, offering love, practical support and hope.

Please continue to pray for all those affected by leprosy and for the work of The Leprosy Mission, giving thanks for the lives being transformed through their ministry.

Community Life – Building Community Together

One of the greatest strengths of St Mary & St John is the vibrant community that gathers here each week. Whether through worship, friendship, hospitality or practical support, we continue to welcome people of all ages, backgrounds and faiths into the life of the parish. Our **Community Lunch**, held on the last Wednesday of each month, continues to grow and offers not only a delicious meal but also companionship for everyone. It is wonderful to see new friendships being formed around the table, and we are grateful to our dedicated team of volunteers who make these lunches possible.

Every **Wednesday**, we also continue our ministry of **feeding people experiencing homelessness and those facing food insecurity**.

More than simply providing a meal, this ministry offers dignity, friendship, a listening ear and practical support. It reflects our belief that everyone deserves to be welcomed with compassion and respect, whatever their circumstances.

As the weather changes, our **Warm/Cool Space** will offer a welcoming environment for anyone seeking warmth/cool, conversation and refreshments. Everyone is welcome, whether for a few minutes or a few hours.

Our **Toddler Group** continues to flourish, bringing together young children, parents, grandparents and carers each week. It is a joyful place where families build friendships and discover the church as a place of welcome and belonging.

We are also delighted to continue our **Story, Song & Shine**, our monthly after-school gathering for primary-aged children. Through Bible stories, music, crafts, games and a shared meal, children are exploring the Christian faith in a fun, creative and welcoming environment.

The **churchyard** remains one of our greatest community assets. Alongside regular conservation work and improvements, we

continue to develop it as a place of peace, remembrance and learning through new interpretation boards, heritage trails, family activities and biodiversity projects.

From St Albans



Members of the St Albans community have continued to enjoy all the improvements to the church and hall. When we re-open for services on 6th September, we look forward to seeing the new hall floor. We celebrated St Alban on Sunday 12th July with a whole parish Eucharist, remembering how his example has continued to inspire us down to the present. The choir have been enjoying singing some lovely anthems in recent months. The Sunday School has restarted on a weekly basis and is very much appreciated by the young people. The congregation members who were confirmed by Bishop Steven in November 2024 met in July to catch up, and will meet again in September. The serving team continues to do wonderful work. St Albans will be open from 10am to 6pm on Saturday 12th September, for the Ride and Stride and Oxford Open Doors. Everyone from the parish and the wider local community is warmly invited to come for refreshments, table tennis and children's crafts, and to enjoy the building.

Fr David

News in Brief

Remembering Verona Harris

We are pleased to announce that a memorial plaque in thanksgiving for the life and faithful service of Verona Harris has now been installed in the church. Verona served as our devoted Sacristan for over 75 years, caring lovingly for the worship and fabric of St Mary & St John. The plaque stands as a lasting tribute to her extraordinary commitment, faith and quiet dedication, and gives thanks for the remarkable legacy she leaves to our parish.

Community Lunch Returns

Our Community Lunch resumes in September after the summer break. Join us on the last Wednesday of each month for good food, friendship and fellowship. Everyone is warmly welcome.

New Heritage Interpretation

Work is well underway on a series of new interpretation boards and a digital heritage trail, sharing the stories of Father Benson, the Cowley Fathers, the churchyard and the remarkable people who shaped East Oxford.

Deputy Organist

We are beginning the process of appointing a Deputy Organist to work alongside our Music Directors, helping to further strengthen and develop the musical life of the parish for the future.

From Advent 2026 – Our Year of Music

Following two years of focused prayer, we are preparing for a Year of Music, celebrating worship through singing, studying the Psalms and supporting the wonderful ministry of our choir, musicians and Music Scholars.

Cowley Haven Homes

Planning continues for Cowley Haven Homes, our new community housing project providing safe, affordable homes for people near homelessness. We are grateful for the encouragement and support received as this exciting project progresses.

Chairs appeal: latest update

We are delighted to announce that we have raised all the funds necessary to purchase a full set of chairs.

There is still an opportunity to dedicate a chair to a loved one. If you wish to do so, please speak to Mthr Martha.

Website Developments

Our parish website continues to grow with new pages highlighting our heritage, community life and the exciting Cowley Haven Homes project, making it easier for people to discover all that happens at St Mary & St John.

Oral History Project

Our oral history project continues to gather memories from long-standing parishioners and local residents. These stories will form an important part of our heritage programme for future generations.

Churchyard Improvements

Our Wednesday morning Churchyard Team continues to care for our beautiful churchyard, helping to preserve this special place for future generations.

Celebrating 900 Years of Bartlemas Chapel

This year we give thanks to God for the remarkable 900th anniversary of Bartlemas Chapel, one of Oxford's hidden treasures and a place of prayer whose story reaches back to the medieval foundations of our city.

For nine centuries Bartlemas has stood as a witness to faith, compassion, and continuity. Originally linked with the care of the sick and poor, the chapel reminds us that Christian worship has always been closely bound to service, mercy, and the healing love of Christ. Through changing centuries, social upheaval, reformations, wars, and modern growth, this sacred place has endured as a quiet sign of God's presence. Many generations have prayed within its walls. Countless people have sought peace, hope, and renewal there. Today, Bartlemas continues to inspire all who visit, offering a rare connection with the deep Christian roots of East Oxford and the wider Church.

As we mark this anniversary, we celebrate not only a building but a living inheritance. Bartlemas Chapel calls us to cherish the past while renewing our commitment for the future: to be people of prayer, pilgrimage, hospitality, justice, and hope.

We give thanks for all who have cared for the chapel across the centuries, and for those who continue that stewardship today. May this 900th year be a moment of joy, thanksgiving, and fresh vision. To God be the glory for 900 years of witness at Bartlemas Chapel.

Final Anniversary Event: 12 & 13 September - Oxford Open Doors

***From the 1939 Inventory of
Historical Monuments in the City of Oxford***

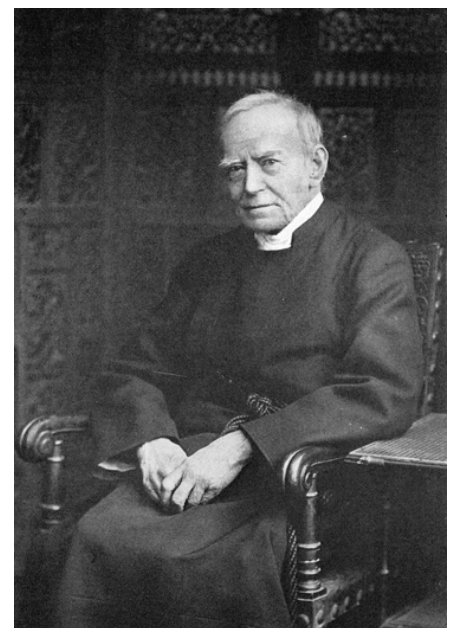
ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHAPEL, COWLEY, stands to the N.E. of the Cowley Road. A hospital for lepers was founded here by Henry 1; it passed through Adam de Brome to Oriel College in 1328 and in the same century the chapel was rebuilt; it was restored in the 17th century. The hospital eventually became an almshouse and the foundation was merged in the Oxford Charities in 1900. The chapel is of local rubble with dressings of the same material and the roof is slate-covered.

Architectural Description-The *Chapel* (34½ ft. by 16 ft.) is of early 14th-century date. The partly restored late 14th-century E. window is of two cinque-foil lights with tracery in a two-centred head. In the N. wall is an original window similar to the E. window but with different tracery and with a label; at the W. end of the wall is an original doorway with chamfered jambs and two-centred head. In the S. wall are two windows both of two cinquefoiled lights, with two-centred heads and labels; the eastern is original and the western of late 14th-century date. The W. doorway has moulded jambs and segmental-pointed head and is of late 14th-century date; the W. window is of one cinquefoiled light; in the gable is an opening with a four-centred head, for a bell.

Music News

*“There must be a lifting up of every
faculty of our nature to take part. And so,
our office is not complete unless it is
sung, because there is a part of our nature
which is not taking its share. Our whole
nature must thus rise up to God”*

Fr Benson



Music Scholars Fund – Thank You

We are delighted to share that the Music Scholars Fund has now raised over £4,500.

This is a wonderful milestone, and we are enormously grateful to everyone who has contributed so generously. The fund will help support our Music Scholars and strengthen the musical life of St Mary & St John, enabling talented musicians to develop their gifts while contributing to the worship and ministry of the parish.

As we prepare for our Year of Music, this support is especially significant. It will help us continue to nurture the next generation of church musicians and build on the strong musical heritage of St Mary & St John.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has donated, encouraged and supported this initiative.



St Mary and St John Church
Cowley Road, Oxford

Choral Scholarships 2026-27



For details and to apply please visit

cowleystjohn.co.uk/choral-scholarships



St Mary and St John Church
Cowley Road, Oxford

Assistant Director of Music



For details and to apply please visit

cowleystjohn.co.uk/assistant-director-of-music



A Moment of Music: Organ Voluntary

As the service comes to an end, we warmly invite you, if you are able, to remain for the organ voluntary. It is not music after the service has finished, but a final offering of praise to God and an opportunity to reflect quietly on all that we have heard, prayed and received.

Our organists devote many hours to preparing music that inspires our worship and enriches our spiritual life.

So, if you can, stay a little longer. Let the music lift your heart, send you out in joy, and remind you that worship continues long after the final blessing.

With our grateful thanks to our Music Directors and organists for the beauty, dedication and joy they bring to our worship each week. May God continue to bless your ministry among us.

Mthr Martha

Pope Leo has also recently spoken of the valuable role of music in liturgy

“...the musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art...part of the liturgical action and is not merely a decorative part of the celebration.”

Singing “... contributes to the unity of hearts, overcoming differences between people and bringing everyone together in praise of God through the symphony of voices. Thus, it becomes an epiphany of the Church, a tangible manifestation of the communion that belongs to her very nature.”

News from the Churchyard



Our **Churchyard Team** continues to work tirelessly every **Wednesday morning**, caring for one of East Oxford's most treasured green spaces, their dedication makes a real difference. As we prepare for our National Lottery Heritage Fund project, the churchyard is also becoming an increasingly important place for heritage, education and community engagement. New interpretation boards, guided heritage trails and biodiversity initiatives are all being developed, helping visitors discover the rich history, remarkable people and natural beauty of this special place. We are enormously grateful to our volunteers for the time, energy and care they give each week.

BULB PLANTING IN THE CHURCHYARD

Saturday 17th October from 10am.

There will be a morning session planting bulbs for spring flowers and later-flowering plants in the churchyard. All help very much welcomed - there will be refreshments mid-morning! Meet near the Cowley Road entrance where we have our tool shed at 10am or find us later on site. A key focus will be the Garden of Remembrance especially around the area for ash burials. Bring gardening gloves if you have them, otherwise all tools will be provided. Do join us!

Working Together for a Safer Churchyard

Our churchyard is one of East Oxford's most treasured green spaces—a place of prayer, remembrance, wildlife and quiet reflection. It is open every day for everyone to enjoy, and we remain committed to ensuring it is a welcoming place for all.

Over recent months, however, we have experienced an increase in anti-social behaviour, particularly during periods of warmer weather. We are therefore working closely with Thames Valley Police, Oxford City Council, the ASBIT Team and other local partners to address these challenges in a positive and compassionate way.

Following recent meetings, we are pleased that there will be increased patrols and a more coordinated approach to supporting vulnerable individuals while helping to reduce behaviour that impacts the wider community. We are also introducing additional signage throughout the churchyard to encourage everyone to respect this historic and sacred space.

At the same time, we remain committed to supporting those experiencing homelessness through our weekly ministry of food, friendship and signposting to appropriate support services. We recognise that many people using the churchyard are themselves vulnerable and in need of compassion as well as practical help.

Our aim is to strike the right balance: maintaining the churchyard as a peaceful, safe and welcoming place for residents, visitors and worshippers, while continuing to extend Christ's love and hospitality to those in greatest need.



Renewal at St Mary and St John

National Lottery Heritage Fund Project – A New Chapter Begins

Exciting progress continues to be made on our National Lottery Heritage Fund project as we prepare for the next phase of the renewal of St Mary & St John.

Planning and detailed design work are progressing well, with our professional team now developing the final specifications for the project. Subject to the necessary approvals, we anticipate that the main capital works will begin shortly after Easter 2027. The programme will include the repair of the historic tower, the installation of our first fully accessible toilet, a new kitchen and servery, and associated electrical and infrastructure improvements. The works have been carefully planned so that the church can remain open for worship and community activities wherever possible.

Before then, we are delighted that the new glass entrance door in the North Porch is expected to be installed by October 2026, improving accessibility, welcome and visibility while respecting the historic character of the building.

Alongside the building works, our heritage programme continues to gather momentum. Gillian Edom is making excellent progress with the oral history project, capturing the memories of long-standing members of our congregation and local community. New interpretation boards are also being developed for the church and churchyard, telling the stories of Father Richard Meux Benson, the Cowley Fathers, the Sisterhoods, the churchyard, Victorian East Oxford and the remarkable people who have shaped our parish over the past 150 years. Work is also underway on a new interactive digital table, enabling visitors to explore the church's history through photographs, film, maps and personal stories.

As part of the project's long-term sustainability, Focus Consultants have recently completed a detailed market appraisal. Their work confirms significant opportunities to increase community use of the church and generate sustainable income through expanded events, heritage tourism, concerts, cultural activities, educational programmes and an exciting new community café once the kitchen and servery are completed. These recommendations will help ensure

that the investment made in our buildings continues to benefit both the parish and the wider East Oxford community for many years to come. There will also be many opportunities for volunteers to become involved, whether helping with welcoming visitors, heritage interpretation, oral history, churchyard tours, education activities, events or digital projects. If you would like to be part of this exciting new chapter, we would love to hear from you.

Thank you for your continued prayers, encouragement and support. Together, we are preserving our heritage, strengthening our mission and creating a church that will continue to serve East Oxford for generations to come.

Oral History Heritage Update – Recording Our Stories

Every person has a story to tell, and every story helps tell the story of our parish. As part of our Heritage Project, we are delighted that Gillian Edom continues to lead our Oral History Project, recording the memories and experiences of people who have been part of St Mary & St John and the wider East Oxford community. These interviews capture not only the history of our church but also the lives, friendships, celebrations and challenges that have shaped our parish over many decades.

The recordings will become a lasting archive for future generations, preserving voices and memories that might otherwise be lost. They will also contribute to our new interactive heritage displays and educational resources, helping visitors discover the rich and diverse history of our community.

We are always looking for more people to interview. If you know of someone who has memories of the parish or you have memories of the parish, the church, the churchyard, local schools, community life, or simply stories of growing up in East Oxford, we would love to hear from you. Whether you have been here for fifty years, five years or five days, your experiences are an important part of our shared story. If you, or someone you know, would be willing to take part in an interview, please speak to **Miriam, Gillian**

(gillianae@hotmail.co.uk), or one of the clergy.

Together, we are ensuring that the voices of today's community will become part of tomorrow's history.

Update on Parish Grants

As we continue to grow in mission and prepare for an exciting new chapter in the life of our parish, I am delighted to share some encouraging news.

Over recent months, we have been blessed to receive several significant grants in support of our ministry and the future development of St Mary & St John. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to:

- **Benefact Trust – £74,000**
- **Beatrice Laing Trust – £20,000**
- **The Gladiator Trust – £20,000**
- **Robert & Margaret Moss Trust – £1,000**
- **Doris Field Trust – £1,500**
- **Stanton Ballard Trust – £1,000**

We are deeply grateful to these trusts for believing in the vision of our parish and investing in its future. Their generosity will help us deliver vital improvements to our buildings, strengthen our community ministry and ensure that St Mary & St John remains a place of worship, welcome and service for generations to come.

These grants also demonstrate the confidence that charitable trusts continue to place in the work of Cowley St John. Every successful application is a recognition not only of the projects we are undertaking, but of the faith, dedication and generosity of our whole parish community.

Alongside these grants, we continue to seek funding for our heritage, community and housing projects, while also working to develop new sources of sustainable income for the future.

Thank you to everyone who supports the parish through regular giving, donations, volunteering and prayer. External grants are invaluable, but they are only possible because they build upon the faithful commitment of our congregation. Together, we are ensuring that our church continues to flourish as a place of worship, mission, hospitality and hope in the heart of East Oxford.

Your Voice Matters

We warmly invite contributions of all kinds to the next edition of the parish magazine. You might write about:

- something that has inspired you
- a moment in church life that has stayed with you
- an act of kindness you witnessed
- a book that challenged or nourished you
- a memory from parish life in years past
- something creative or joyful you want to share
- or suggest a hymn or prayer for the back page

Whether long or short — a paragraph or a page — your contribution helps us reflect who we truly are: a community made up of many voices.

To contribute to the next edition (deadline 10th October), simply email:

vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk

Thank you for being part of this community, in whatever way you are able.

May this issue of our parish magazine be a blessing to you — a sign of hope, warmth, and belonging.

With every blessing

Mthr Martha

Join In – Groups, Teams & Volunteering

A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Volunteers

As we reflect on another busy and fruitful season in the life of St Mary & St John, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the many volunteers who give so generously of their time, talents and love.

Whether you welcome people at the door, serve at the altar, read the Scriptures, sing in the choir, play the organ, arrange flowers, prepare refreshments, care for the churchyard, maintain our buildings, lead children's activities, visit those in need, help in the office, support our heritage work, serve on the PCC, organise events, prepare community lunches, feed those experiencing homelessness, clean the church, count collections, or quietly undertake countless unseen acts of service—you are an immense blessing.

Your generosity reflects the love of Christ in practical and often unnoticed ways. Every smile offered, every chair moved, every meal served, every prayer prayed and every hour given helps make this church a place of worship, welcome and hope for our community. As we look ahead to an exciting new chapter with our building project and growing mission, your commitment will be more important than ever. Thank you for all that you have done, continue to do, and will do in the months and years ahead.

May God richly bless each one of you and your families. Thank you for serving so faithfully and joyfully.

Ways to Get Involved

- Hospitality Team

Help with refreshments, serving at special events, or welcoming at services and events.

- Choir & Music Group

All voices welcome — whether confident or quietly curious.

- Churchyard & Gardening Group

A friendly outdoor team meeting every Wednesday morning caring for our green spaces, wildlife areas, and memorial garden.

- Toddler Group Helpers

Come and support play, chat with parents and carers, and help create a warm, safe space.

- Pastoral Visiting Team

Visiting those who are housebound, isolated, or in need of companionship and prayer.

- Serving, Reading & Intercessions Rotas

Take part in our worship by reading, and leading prayers.

- Altar Servers & Sacristy Team

Assist in preparing the altar, serving at the Eucharist, caring for linens and vessels, and helping ensure our worship is reverent and beautiful. A wonderful way to learn the rhythm of liturgy.

If you are unsure where to begin, simply speak to Mthr Martha or one of the curates after a service or email: vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk

There is a place for everyone, and your presence — whether weekly, monthly, or occasionally — truly makes a difference.

With heartfelt thanks and every blessing,

Mthr Martha

Volunteers Needed for Children's Ministry

We are currently looking for volunteers who would like to support our growing children's ministry and after school activities.

This may include helping with:

- welcoming families,
- storytelling,
- creative activities,
- refreshments,
- music and singing,
- and supporting children during sessions.

Anyone interested in volunteering or finding out more is warmly encouraged to get in touch by email or telephone for further information.

Volunteer Heritage Guides Wanted!

St Mary & St John Church is looking for friendly volunteers to welcome visitors and share the story of our beautiful historic church.

No experience needed – full training provided.

Flexible commitment.

Join us in bringing our heritage to life!

Contact: vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk

Events & What's On



JOIN US!

OUTREACH WEDNESDAY

**Join us every Wednesday
at St Mary & John's Church:**

**Baby & Toddler Group @ 9:00am
Coffee Morning @ 10:00am
Community Lunch @ 12:00noon (last
Wednesday of the month only)
Churchyard Meal @ 4:00pm**

For more information visit www.CowleyStJohn.co.uk

Sponsored by the Oxford Community Foundation

☼ COFFEE ☼ MORNING



“

The church is open for everyone – whether you're looking for company, a listening ear, a quiet moment, or simply a good cup of coffee.



<http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/>

Where

Every Wednesday at 10:00am –
St Mary & John's Church, Cowley Road,
OX4 2AJ

Contact Us

Phone 0747 290 9011

Mail vicarcsj@gmail.com

Website <http://cowleystjohn.co.uk/>

*Generously sponsored by the Oxford
Community Foundation.*



Baby & Toddler Playgroup

At St Mary & St John's Church, Cowley Road
Every Wednesday (term time) at 9:00am – 10:00am

01865 792717

children@cowleystjohn.co.uk



Sunday Morning Cafe Church

**St Mary & John's Church
Cowley Road**

Short **All Age** Service with
Continental Breakfast
Every Sunday 8:00 – 8:30am (Term Time)

Enjoy a light breakfast together with a simple time of
prayer and worship

Fresh pastries and drinks
Peaceful start to your Sunday before sports and other
events
Everyone warmly welcome

St Mary & John's Church, Cowley Road, Oxford
OX4 1UR



Home Groups

The home group has continued to meet fortnightly on Tuesday evenings through the spring and early summer for fellowship, prayer, and mutual support in our life as disciples of Christ. Sessions have alternated between broad-ranging discussions stimulated by a book (initially Rowan Williams' *Meeting God in Mark*) and more informal evenings of conversation and prayer. While various members are on holiday in July and August, we are taking a break but will resume in September with a new book (to be decided). New members are always welcome and, if you are interested in joining, please email Fr Matthew.

Fr Matthew



Open Space, the monthly inclusive, ecumenical meal and service for the queer community and affirming allies, has continued to meet and flourish over the past few months. This community offers a space for gathering, conversation and prayer that has continued to welcome people from across the city and beyond. The service is always informal, reflective, and meditative, structured around cycles of prayer, reading, music, and quiet space.

The meal, offered before the service, (always vegan and nut-free and aims to meet all dietary requirements) continues to offer opportunities for fellowship with friends both old and new.

There are lots of ways to get involved if you are interested. Please do reach out to us if you are interested in helping, or speak with Emma, Joel, or Matthew after a service.

Our next service, on 27 September, will be themed around Beginning. Do join us for the meal at 6pm, the service at 7.15pm, or for both.

Dates for your diary

AUGUST		
Sunday 30 th		Services in both churches as usual
SEPTEMBER		
Sunday 6 th		Services in both churches as usual
	10:30am	SS Mary and John Visit of Br Geoffrey Tristram SSJE
Saturday 12 th	All day	Ride and Stride in aid of Oxford Historic Churches Trust
Saturday 12 th and Sunday 13 th	All day	Oxford Open Doors at St Alban's (Sat only), SS Mary and John, Bartlemas Chapel
Sunday 13 th	10.30	Joint Patronal Festival at SS Mary and John (followed by bring and share meal)
Sunday 20 th		Services in both churches as usual
Friday 25 th	10.30am	Seasonal Meditation: SS Mary and John churchyard
Sunday 27 th Michaelmas		Services in both churches as usual
	6pm	Open Space: Beginning
OCTOBER		
Sunday 4 th Harvest Festival		Services in both churches as usual
Sunday 11 th Mental Health Sunday		Services in both churches as usual
Saturday 17 th	10am	Bulb planting in SS Mary and John churchyard
Sunday 18 th S Luke		Services in both churches as usual
Saturday 24 th	7pm	Stand-up for the church roof
Sunday 25 th Bible Sunday		Services in both churches as usual
Friday 30 th	10.30am	Seasonal Meditation: SS Mary and John churchyard
NOVEMBER		
Sunday 1 All Saints		Services in both churches as usual

Seasonal meditations 2026

**Fridays 10:30am to 11:30 – SMJ Churchyard – Come Rain or Shine
All Welcome!**

Seasonal Meditations in the churchyard is a gentle sharing of poetry, song and silence following the rhythm of Christian and Celtic festivals through the year. Together we explore how these seasons are reflected in the natural world and what they may offer us about faith, renewal and hope in our daily lives.

For further information:

gabyhock1@gmail.com or bethisolde@gmail.com

25th September Michaelmas – Autumn Equinox, mid-Autumn

30th October All Souls, All Saints, Halloween – beginning of Winter, Samhain

18th December Winter Solstice –Christmas – mid-Winter

Little acts of kindness

‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

I could not but help notice on Sunday mornings after Mass a group of people collecting in the hymn books and service booklets and handing them to the welcoming team. This simple act of kindness ensures the task is carried out quickly so that the welcomers can join everyone else for coffee.

Caring for Our Churchyard Community

Every Wednesday at 1.30pm we continue our weekly outreach, offering food and friendship to those spending time in the churchyard. This simple act of care reflects the vision of Father Richard Benson, who called the Church to be a place of compassion and welcome for those on the margins. This ministry is a quiet but vital expression of our parish life, reminding us that the church is here for all.

Please keep all those we meet in your prayers.

Mthr Martha

Support for Those in Need: Discretionary Fund

We are blessed to have a generous discretionary fund available to support those facing hardship. If you, or someone you know, is in need, please feel free to contact Mthr Martha in confidence. If you would like to contribute to the fund and help support others in need, please also speak to Martha. Thank you for helping us care for one another.

Comment from a beneficiary: Thank you again so much for the help, we were able to use it to put towards a cot and bedding for our daughter which will be coming tomorrow Thank you once again for all the help you have given to me and my family, it means the world to me.

Donations via Bank Transfer

Name: COWLEY SAINT JOHN PCC

Sort Code: 08-92-99

Account Number: 67325896

Donations via Cheques Payable to:

Cowley Saint John PCC, and send to:

The Vicarage, 271 Cowley Road, Oxford. OX4 2AJ

Please use the references: Music, Magazine

The parish is committed to promoting a safer church.

The **Parish Safeguarding Officer** is Miriam Atoro.

Miriam can be contacted **with any concerns** at safeguarding@cowleystjohn.co.uk

Or you can contact the Vicar, Revd Martha Weatherill:

vicar@cowleystjohn.co.uk or 0747 290 90 11

The **Diocesan Safeguarding Team** can be reached on 01865 208295 or safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org for urgent safeguarding concerns.



David Jones

Music at the consecration of Solomon's Temple

The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

2 Chronicles 5: vv 13-14

We wish everyone a vibrant,
anticipatory Autumn.



