



St Marys Church Banbury

Quarterly Magazine



Issue 6. May, June July £2



St Mary's Church Magazine Spring Edition

Welcome to the latest addition of our Magazine. We hope you find the contents provided useful and informative. Inside you will find information about a new Bible Study group being launched, a reflection on working in our Primary school St Mary's and how you could support them, as well as a reflection on volunteering at our church. We have also included the financial review from our most recent APCM. We are always open to people sharing news about St Mary's, so if you have a story you would like to share about your journey of faith among our community or a special event that is happening at St Mary's, we'd love to hear about it and share it.

Arts@BSM

Arts@BSM has had a fantastic first quarter to the year with various music events.

This month we are excited to welcome Dier Martin to hold their first concert with us - a Bridgerton Themed Music with an amazing stage set on 16th May.

Save the date for Friday 19th June when Lumos returns with music from Han Zimmerman.

St Mary's events

Tudor Hall Ceramics Workshop 13th June
1.30pm-4.30pm Tudor hall school.

Booking essential



Please donate to keep St Mary's Church open



To keep St Mary's Church open it costs around **£150,000** every year. That's over **£400** every day. We receive no financial support from the government, the Church of England or the Diocese of Oxford. Every penny we require for running costs, the maintenance of our buildings and the parish ministry, has to be raised by the church community.

If you would like to donate, please scan the QR code or visit: www.parishgiving.org.uk and enter **270627130** in the search box.



Hope & Hangouts – A New Bible Study Group

Over the last year and a half at St Mary's, one of the things I've really valued most is the sense of community and welcome within the church family. Before coming to St Mary's, my previous church had several small family-style groups that met during the week to spend time together, chat about life, and explore the Bible in a relaxed and informal way. It was something I really appreciated, and after joining St Mary's, I found myself missing that midweek space for fellowship and faith outside of Sunday services.

About 18 months ago, I started asking around to see if there might be interest in something similar here. At the time, several people were keen, but life had other plans — I was going through a number of major life changes and wasn't in a position to help get something established properly.

More recently, I felt God nudging me again to revisit the idea. This time, I was in a much better place to commit to starting something, so I reached out to those who had previously been interested. As often happens, people had moved into different seasons of life and weren't able to join right now. I started to think perhaps the timing still wasn't quite right and considered putting the idea on hold again.

The following week, in what felt like perfect God timing, I mentioned it in passing in another Christian group gathering I attend. At the end of the meeting, several people came over and asked if I would go ahead and start it, saying they would love a space to deepen their understanding of the Bible, ask questions, and simply spend time together socially. And so, Hope & Hangouts was born.

The group will be very informal — no pressure, no need to be a Bible expert, and definitely no expectation that anyone has all the answers (because none of us do!). It's simply a place to explore faith together, encourage one another, and build friendships along the way.

We'll be meeting at The Coach and Horses pub, Butchers Row, in Banbury on Thursday evenings at 7pm.

Whether you've been studying the Bible for years or you're just curious and want to learn more, you'd be very welcome to join us.

We're excited to see where God leads this group and how Hope & Hangouts grows in the months ahead. Sometimes the smallest conversations lead to the biggest blessings — and we're trusting that this might be one of them.

Rebekah Stennett

Quarterly Prayers

Prayers written by our monthly prayer group. For more details about our prayer group, please do contact Rev. Serena or Mary Parker .

God of stillness and creative action, help us to find space for quietness today, that we may discover the inner meaning of silence and hear your still, small voice through Christ, in the love of the spirit. Amen

Lord Jesus, you invite us to entrust our troubled hearts into your safekeeping; our restless spirits into your loving care; our puzzled minds into your welcoming presence. As we do so, may we find our way home into the reality of the living God through your cross and resurrection, our only hope. Amen.

Loving God, we give thanks for all the volunteers who give their time to do the various tasks needed for the running of St Mary's. We give thanks today especially for those who take responsibility for the flowers. And in the community, we give thanks to the men and women who are responsible for the flowers in the parks and gardens and along the roadsides. Amen

We pray that the new life of Easter will spread round this troubled world and that new life will start with all of us at St Mary's. Amen.

Father God, be with your church here at St Mary's and bless the work of the ministry team, churchwardens and all who volunteer their services. It was uplifting to see four members of the congregation be baptised on Easter Sunday and may they continue to grow in their spiritual journeys. We pray for the vacancy in See and for the person who will be elected our next Bishop. Amen.

Lord God, we pray for our community here in Banbury. Be with those who are homeless or trying to cope with housing or work difficulties. We give thanks for all the organisations who support them and for all in need. We pray for our hospital and hospice and care homes and all who work in them as well as all carers whether they work for an organisation or are unpaid carers looking after family members. We give thanks for all our schools and all the teachers and workers within them and especially we pray for our church school of St Mary's. Within the town, we give thanks for all who work in the offices, factories and shops. Amen

Gracious Lord we pray for our young people in this community who will be sitting Exams over the next few weeks.

For Mikayla sitting A Level exams on 13th, 19th, 21st of May and 1st and 9th of June, Montel who starts sitting mock exams on the 7th May until the 15th of June and Ailsa who is sitting her exams through May and June. We also pray for Roland who will be sitting mock exams shortly. Surround them all with your love Lord. Amen

Why Volunteer?

A Personal Reflection

Why volunteer? At times its a question I ask myself! I suppose that I'm one of those people who truly believe that you get more out of life if you put more into it. If you become involved. I still believe that, and during what volunteering I have done, I have met inspirational people and made many friends. Why do I volunteer at St Mary's in particular? Certainly being a church warden can feel like a full time job and its only after two years that I am beginning to feel more confident in the role. I feel I know the workings of the church building a lot more, I'm more thoughtful and cognisant of the liturgical calendar, I'm involved in some of the decision making processes and I have a wider appreciation of how the Diocese works. I would like to sit down after a service and have coffee and conversation with people, but I don't always achieve that.

As a church warden I work closely with all those who volunteer to maintain the church and church life; from those who arrange the flowers and Easter garden to those who during their welcoming stint dust the pews or replenish the loo rolls; to those who hand out hymn books, make tea and coffee, count the collection, act as Eucharist Assisstant and take part in our Embracing Church services. We are so fortunate to have a retired architect who has saved us thousands with her expert knowledge and due diligence. All these things that we take for granted are performed by a small team of volunteers.

I am also part of the Arts Team who manage the social events that occur in the church and which raise money vital to the upkeep of our building. It's a very small band of amazing people who organise the lighting, staging and welcoming for various groups, quartets, organisations, charities and festivals. And the clue to all this is in the word.....small.

St Mary's needs volunteers. Just to exist. Just to survive. To ensure we stay relevant. To provide a service to those in need.

Our church needs over £400 per day to meet its running costs. We are responsible for a grade 1 listed building in constant use by the public which means that everything, from the licenses for the computer to the lightning protection, fire safety, electrical systems, organ repairs and general health and safety comes down to us. We receive no financial support from the government, the Church of England, the Diocese of Oxford or the local council. Every penny we require for running costs, building maintenance and parish ministry has to be raised by the church community.

The social events last year raised over £24,000, an amazing achievement and the calendar is almost fully booked for 2026, but we struggle with staffing the bar and running the sound system and that's when things can become tough. When you volunteer you become part of a friendly team who enjoy seeing the church lit up with the amazing light system and full of people enjoying an evening out. You learn new skills, meet loads of interesting people, get to see shows free of charge and have the satisfaction that you are part of something bigger.

More volunteers would help to spread the load. Could you consider being part of the Arts Team? Do you want to play a bigger role in our church services and be on the rota (all training given), then please chat to one of the church wardens!

- Please think about it
- Be involved
- come and have a chat

Caroline Owens
Church Warden

Getting involved with our School



We are very lucky as a church in our connection to the wonderful St Mary's primary school, situated just five minutes away on Southam Road. As a Church of England school, it has Christian values rooted in everything it does, from keeping positions for our Vicar and representatives of the local church on its governing body to its daily teaching and way of life. The school has four key Christian values that govern life together there: Truth, Koinonia, Compassion and Endurance. The children take particular delight in knowing a Biblical Greek word that most adults don't! (In case it's unfamiliar to you too, *koinonia* roughly translates as community).

St Mary's School is one of the most richly diverse schools in the region. Our pupils come from 40 different countries, with 80% of them speaking English as an additional language. I've had the chance to lead classes on Pentecost in the school where, to introduce the idea of speaking in tongues, I ask the children to say something in their first language, and it always results in a joyful babble. When we had the asylum hotels in town, many of the children in the school came from asylum-seeking families, and we're still blessed to have a number of refugee families involved with the school, as pupils, staff and volunteers.

(Images of the pupils courtesy of the school from the school website
<https://www.banburystmarysschool.co.uk>)



St Mary's School pupils and staff also face an unusually high level of challenges. Around 40% of our pupils have special educational needs, requiring specialised support to flourish, and over 30% are entitled to free school meals. The staff of the school do amazing work supporting every child, and Serena and I feel very privileged to spend regular time in school each week, feeling the warmth of the community and the depth of care from everyone involved.

We would love for the church to have even more involvement with our school, supporting them in the amazing work they do. They welcome both new volunteers and donations.

Do you have time to spare to go in to school and read with children?

They would love to have you!

Do you have old toys, or things that could become toys, that you'd like to donate?

They're wonderfully creative, so an old suitcase or piece of exercise equipment is as welcome as a shiny kit!

Do get in touch with Sarah if you're able to help out in these or any other ways. For working age folk, it could also be great for your CV!

Sarah Cotterill

Friends of Sylvia Crowe Country Park



A map of the Banbury Country Park, which should be re-named the Dame Sylvia Crowe Park after the influential landscape architect

Sylvia Crowe was a landscape architect, who redesigned our churchyard in the 1950s. (Take a look at the noticeboard in church for more information about her!)

A new group, formed earlier this year, has now been established with the aim of renaming Banbury Country Park in honour of this significant local figure.

The country park in Banbury contains several examples of 20th century infrastructure - pylons, Banbury's flood defence system, small lakes. Her career included several examples of setting 20th century infrastructure in a naturalistic setting - power stations, nuclear power stations, reservoirs - and these projects form a large part of her legacy and are of national and international importance. The country park in Banbury is therefore perfect as a place to commemorate Sylvia Crowe.

We believe that, as well as fostering interest in and the development of the country park in Banbury, the renaming of it would be a great way of encouraging local and national interest in all that Sylvia Crowe achieved.



The Friends of Sylvia Crowe Country Park is open to any individuals and organisations that would like to join our campaign to rename the country park in Banbury to commemorate Sylvia Crowe's achievements. We would be delighted if you would like to join us. There is no money involved and we are not a political group in any shape or form. Cherwell District Council is the owner of the country park - as a group, we have no intention of opposing their policies and priorities. Rather, we would like to work with them and provide support to them in relation to the country park. Our chief aim is the renaming of the country park but, if and where we can, we would like to support the council in the development of the country park including its access for the public and, very importantly, its habitat for wildlife.

You are welcome to join our facebook group -Friends of Sylvia Crowe Country Park or take a look at our website: friendsofsylviacrowecountrypark.org.uk. There are no forms to fill in, the easiest way just to join is on our facebook page.

Jane Kilsby

Images courtesy of Banbury Gaurdian article April 2024

Finance and Fundraising reports from APCM 2024-2025

Fund Raising

As a community we were really disappointed to not receive the funding for our community café that we applied for from the Diocese Development Fund. We believe the main reason for this is due to our lack of ability to pay our Parish Share. As a community we have managed to raise about £5000 towards our café plans, but we are still working on how to raise the rest that we need.

Another setback has come in the form of changes the government have made to the VAT system where we were able to claim all the VAT back on building projects. Sadly, there are now restrictions that mean VAT can now only be claimed for building projects of up to £20,000. I was interviewed by ITV evening news about this earlier in the year to help share the struggle we are facing when it comes to looking after historical churches.

I asked the Diocese for some support in applying for grants and we did manage to receive a grant for £10,000 in November from an independent donor, which has come in handy to pay our many building repair bills.

Myself and members of the standing committee, are working together to figure out the best ways to raise money including a large funding bid to the Heritage Lottery fund.

Rev. Serena Tajima Incumbent

Financial Review

The accounts are consolidated across the areas of the PCC and Arts@BSM

Regarding Mission Giving it was decided that donations from the Christmas services would be given to three charities. From Carols by Candlelight £437.50 was donated to the Amos Trust (www.amostrust.uk); a small, creative human rights organisation committed to social justice, gender equality, climate justice and Palestinian rights. From the Crib Service £200.00 was donated to Standing the Gap (www.standingthegap.uk); an early intervention mental health charity, helping pre-school and primary school children manage big emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger and grief. The Midnight Mass (9pm) service raised £214.88 and this was donated to the Diocese of Oxford's Jamaica and Cayman Islands Appeal Fund (www.oxford.anglican.org/campaigns/jamaica-and-the-cayman-islands-appeal). In October 2024 Jamaica was hit by Hurricane Melissa, which affected thousands of people. Four churches were destroyed and a number of other churches and schools suffered significant damage.

We also continued with our well supported Craft Fairs held in May and November, with each one attracting around 25-30 stalls. Overall, these generated an income of £4,272, which was slightly down on the previous year (2024: £4,580, 2023: £4,748).

However, this was the sixth consecutive year the Parish Share has not been paid in full, with just £15,000 (35%) of the allotted contribution being made. This is down on recent years where we've generally managed to contribute around 50 to 60%. Ultimately, we're a congregation of around 60 individuals struggling with the running costs of a Grade I cathedral-sized parish church. Looking at 2025 overall, we generated an income of £122,452, with an expenditure of £125,181. We were unable to contribute more towards our Parish Share because around £20,000 of income was linked to specific restricted funds and we currently have very low reserves within our unrestricted Funds.

The PCC continued to encourage the congregation to consider giving under the Parish Giving Scheme and for taxpayers amongst the congregation to consider making their financial donation to the Church under gift aid. These are important and vital ways to help ensure the financial future of St Mary's Church.

During the year we received three grants. In February we received £2,000 from Cherwell District Council to provide kitchen equipment, food and activities for refugees and asylum seekers. In November we received £2,800 from Warner Bequest, a Diocese of Oxford Fund, towards essential repairs. Finally, also in November we received £10,000 from RWK Goodman towards the restoration and conservation of St Mary's Church. Throughout the year St Mary's was the venue for seven weddings and 12 funerals, generating an income of £3,371, a 20% increase on the previous year. Centre Lettings had an extremely good year generating an income of £11,631, a 60% increase on the previous year (2024: £7,201, 2023: £4,076). This was primarily due to one organisation using the facility for four days every week.

Regarding the Arts Events at St Mary's we had another very successful year, generating an income of £22,530 a 56% increase on the previous year (2024: £14,400, 2023: £18,066). Once again, we must give special thanks to the small band of Arts Committee volunteers without whose support these events would not be able to take place. Events included 28 (2024: 21) major concerts, a series of school concerts, art and photographic exhibitions, creative workshops supported by a local school, a Book Fair, the Banbury Early Music Festival and our regular Christmas Tree Festival.

Phil Burge St Mary's Treasurer

Could you leave a gift to St Mary's?

Last year all members of the PCC, including Rev. Serena Tajima, made a pledge that they would leave a legacy in their Wills to St Mary's church. This came after discussion around other people who had left legacies to St Mary's such as Rev. Jeff West. There was no expectation on the amount just that one day the church would receive a gift, which considering our current financial difficulty, we believed that whenever it happened it would be greatly appreciated. We also hoped this would encourage our congregation to do the same, as well as to think about their regular giving and whether people would consider signing up to the Parish Giving scheme, or increasing the amount they give as all our costs increase.

If you would like to know more about either the Parish Giving scheme or leaving a gift in your Will, please do speak to any member of the PCC who would be happy to help you with any questions you have. There is an offer to Write your will for free online.

Will writing can often seem like a time-consuming and difficult thing to do – and that's a big reason why many people put it off. To make it easier, the Church of England has partnered with Farewill, the UK's favourite will writer, to offer a free online will writing service which you can do from the comfort of your home in less than 30 minutes.

Making a will and keeping it updated is the only way to make sure your wishes are carried out after your death, giving you peace of mind that you can continue to support the family, friends and charities you love.

We hope you'll consider leaving a gift St Mary's to help its ministry and mission thrive for the benefit of future generations.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-life/lasting-gift-your-church/writing-your-will/free-willst>

AFRICA



DAY

2026

CELEBRATION IN BANBURY



Theme

Africa RISING



10:00AM
17:00PM

SUNDAY MAY
24TH
2026

INNOVATION, RESILIENCE RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

CELEBRATING AFRICAN & CARIBBEAN CULTURE, FOOD, MUSIC, ARTS, FASHION, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY.



SPICEBALL LEISURE PARK

SCAN



<https://bit.ly/3MCG51Y>

FREE Stall for Businesses and Charities of African or Caribbean roots, influence or cultural association. We also welcome donations, raffle-prized items, and support for volunteer welfare to help make this community event unforgettable. Let's celebrate HERITAGE | SUSTAINABILITY | PROGRESS.

EXHIBITORS/VOLUNTEERS FORM | Email Contact
<https://forms.office.com/r/1J1Vbrfa8s> | eventsaide@corezy.co.uk

+44 1295 254816

SUPPORTED BY

