

St Mary the Virgin

**November 2026 to**
**February 2027**

# The Parish Magazine for Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill



St John the Baptist

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Our Shed is a welcoming place. Our mission is to reduce loneliness and isolation as sometimes experienced by older people. We bring together men and women to share knowledge, learn new skills and to make new friends. We have a range of woodworking tools and other equipment for our members to use. We offer training in the use of hand and powered tools for beginners. Members are free to work on their own projects, or to join in with Shed-wide projects to raise money for running the Shed and to help the wider community too.

## COMMUNITY COFFEE MORNING

Join us every Tuesday at the Old Stables, Whitchurch on Thames from 10.30am until 12 noon for a natter and enjoy your coffee or tea with biscuits. Contact sally.woolhouse@gmail.com



***Advertising in this Magazine*** The parish magazine is delivered to all homes in Whitchurch on Thames and Whitchurch Hill three times a year. The yearly rate is £50 for half a page £40 for a third and £30 for a quarter. Contact rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com



# Letter from the Vicar

Dear Friends,

when we started out on the Spire project, I was under the impression that all the wooden shingles on the tower and spire were the originals from the rebuilding of St. Mary's in 1857-58, which would have made them over 150 years old and would have been remarkable. I have since learned from browsing the parish magazine archive that this isn't in fact the case. At our service on 20th September, when we celebrated the completion of the spire refurbishment, I read out excerpts from parish magazines giving details of a similar spire refurbishment project in 1934, which also included dismantling, cleaning and putting the organ back together at St. Mary's and installing a new boiler at St. John's. The cost of the entire project was £650. Compare that to our own project in 2026 costing six figures and you learn something not only about inflation, but also about the rising costs of repairs to heritage buildings (including specialist labour and conservation standard materials) and the impact of modern health and safety standards. It would be fascinating to see photographs of whatever scaffolding was used in 1934 (assuming it wasn't done by steeplejacks). I'm pretty sure that there wouldn't have been weeks of computer-aided scaffolding design before anything was put up!

Since our 20th September service I have made the further discovery that 1934 wasn't the last time the tower and spire were refurbished. Towards the end of 1961 the ceilings of both St. Mary's and St. John's were examined with a view to carrying out urgently needed repairs. It wasn't just the ceilings that were in need of repair, however. This is from the December 1961 magazine:

***Church Repairs.***

*The situation is very serious. We knew about the ceilings in St. Mary's and St. John's, but we did not know about the Tower, which is even more urgent, and should be attended to at once. Any day now you may see it encircled with scaffolding.*

*A committee is meeting to consider ways and means to raise the necessary fund, £3000 in all.*

Fortunately, it was possible to complete all the necessary repairs by February 1962, including the reshingling of the tower and spire. This was followed by a redecoration of the interior of St. Mary's, about which the Rector, the Rev'd C.H. Naylor had written something very interesting back in October:

*It is 100 years since St. Mary's was rebuilt and the walls and stonework inside are sadly in need of cleaning. This would make the church, with all its windows of stained glass, much lighter.*

*Perhaps no private house in Whitchurch has been un-redecorated for 100 years, still less should the House of God be neglected.*

Point taken! This time the project, which also included a new W.C. and drains for S. John's Room (now the Goring Heath Parish Hall), cost just under £3,000, the vast majority of which came from individual donations.

I wonder what you make of all this history. I'm reminded that we are just the latest of many, many generations who have been stewards of our church buildings since they were first built. I hope we're doing our best to pass them on to the next generation in decent shape. I was struck, too, by something the then Rector wrote in the February 1962 magazine:

*It has been very encouraging to receive contributions from several homes, with the remark that "we do not belong to the Church of*

*England but the Church is the Church of the parish, and it is our duty to support it, please accept our contribution." Our giving is giving to God who has entrusted to us all that we have, lives, time, talents, even our money.*

Sixty years on, we are encountering the same deep sense of connection with our church buildings across the wider parish community. And for that, I am extremely grateful.

Every blessing,

James

P.S. If you want to receive my weekly Vicar's email with an update on what is happening at the church, please contact me at jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

P.P.S. I shall be on sabbatical from 27th December 2026 to 30th March 2027. Debbie and I shall be unavailable for parish matters during this time. Urgent matters should be referred to one of the churchwardens or to the Team Rector. Sunday services will continue as usual and will be covered by other members of the Langtree Team.

Our Heavenly Father, as once again we prepare for Christmas, help us to find time in our busy lives for quiet and thought and prayer; that we may reflect upon the wonder of your love and allow the story of the Saviour's birth to penetrate our hearts and minds. So may our joy be deeper, our worship more real, and our lives worthier of all that you have done for us through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

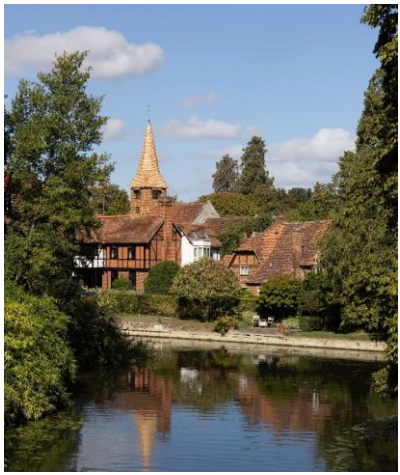
*Frank* Colquhoun

# SAVE OUR SPIRE!

ST MARY'S CHURCH, WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES

**Save Our Spire Update**

It is wonderful to see the newly restored St Mary's spire and the associated works now complete. A big thank you to everyone who has made this possible from across the community and beyond, and for your support and interest in the project.



We celebrated two weddings in St Mary's in September following the re-opening, and Sunday services resumed from the first Sunday in September.

We will be sharing further information about the project and other updates over the coming months, but in the meanwhile, please Save the Date" for this year's **Community Christmas Concert** which will be held on **12th December 5.00-7.00pm at St Mary's.** We hope you can join us there to celebrate completion of the project as well as Christmas festivities. More details will be available on the Whitchurch Village Website and on posters nearer the time.

From the Save Our Spire Project Team

Photo courtesy of Jim Donahue



# The Friends of St Mary's and St John's

*The Friends are an independent charity and welcome members from all faiths and none. We aim to bring together the local community in support of the preservation and improvement of our two churches and churchyards.*

**Work Parties**

Our regular churchyard working parties at St John's take place on the last Wednesday of the month. The next ones will be on 28th **October and 25th November.** As well as battling against bramble, which is an ongoing task, we find that there are many saplings that constantly try to establish themselves in this open sunny location. Prime culprits are the elm suckers along the north border, and oak and ash saplings, but also many saplings from the *false acacia or Robinia pseodoacacia* which stands on the south easterly side of the churchyard. This tree is native in the United States but has naturalised in many countries. It is fast growing and can be considered to be invasive. The young trees are often spiny and prickly and difficult to remove, as volunteers have discovered! With this in mind, and to assist us manage St John's churchyard now, and in the future, the PCC are considering applying for a faculty from the Diocese to remove the mature tree and wanted to first find out from parishioners if anyone had an attachment to this tree or knew how it had come to be in the churchyard. **Please contact Sally on the email below if you have any strong thoughts or relevant information.** Thank you to all those that make a regular appearance as many hands really do make light work. If you fancy joining one of these sessions, please get in touch with Sally Woolhouse at whitchurchfriends@gmail.com. A welcome cup of coffee is always provided at half time.

**Save our Spire!**

The new Spire is now complete and looks very elegant now that the scaffolding has been removed. We are so grateful to the PCC for achieving this, as a lot of energy and thought has been required in order to plan the work, raise the funds from a number of sources and agree the contract with a suitable workforce.

**Other improvements at St John's**

We are currently planning to replace the dilapidated notice boards at St Johns Church and are just checking out finer details of the quote we have received.
The natural areas near the northern boundary and also to the rear of the church will soon be marked with attractive rope and metal poles to help designate these protected sections and distinguish them from the rest of the churchyard which is more closely mown and managed. The right type of posts and rope are being sought, and it is envisaged that this initiative will add to the aesthetic appeal of these 'wilder' biodiverse areas.

**Future Events**

Our AGM will be held on October 31st at The Old Stables at 3pm. All are welcome.
On 12th December, a Community Christmas Concert will be held at St Mary's, and the PCC are now busy planning the programme. Please note it in your diaries as it promises to be festive and fun.

**Membership**

We are always keen to welcome new Friends. For information on how to join please go to the Whitchurch on Thames village website at https://whitchurchonthames.com and follow the link for the Church.
*Sarah Dragonetti, Chair of Friends*,
Registered Charity Number: 1168335



# COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS CONCERT

## Saturday 12th December
## 5pm – 7pm

Doors open at 4.45pm

St Mary's Church · Whitchurch-on-Thames

**A festive mix of local musicians, children's choir, singalong carols & songs, Christmas themed readings, and celebrating completion of the Save Our Spire project.**

**Mulled wine and mince pies too!**

**Dress as Christmassy as you like!**

**Adults – £10 on the door**
**Children – Free**



The Friends of St Mary's & St John's Whitchurch

## A TIME FOR REFLECTION IN ADVENT



Getting ready for Christmas can be very hectic, we can begin to feel we are losing sight of the things that are really important. So, we are offering a time of quiet stillness in St John's Whitchurch Hill each Tuesday evening in Advent (December 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd) from 8.00 – 8.30 pm.

You won't have to do anything – just Be!



## Advent Wreath making is happening again!

Date: Sunday 29th November at 6.00pm

Venue: Whitchurch Village Hall, Manor Road

Cost: £30 (£15 if you bring your own ring and equipment)

Refreshments provided, and everything you need to make a festive wreath.

To book a place email Debbie Leach on debs.leach71@gmail.com

# WHITCHURCH UNITED CHARITIES

# THROUGH THE AGES



Whitchurch United Charities is an active local charity which supports students (or their parents), who live in the ecclesiastical parish of Whitchurch, with their educational costs such as school trips, essential equipment towards sporting excellence and many other educational pursuits. This current charitable purpose was agreed with the Charity Commission in 2003 – prior to then, there is a long and fascinating history associated with bequests which were combined in 1907 under a new scheme.

The funds now used to make grants are the interest paid on the charity's holdings in the COIF funds, managed by CCLA, for registered charities. The holdings are still identified by the names of the benefactors who made the bequests, the earliest being made in 1602! This was made by Augustus Knapp, who left £1 a year to be given in clothing to poor, lame and impotent people. He lived in Rotherfield Peppard, but his family rented land from the Whitchurch Manor.

Soon after, in 1628, John Whistler (then Lord of Whitchurch Manor), left £12 12s. a year to be given in 12 pennyworths of bread to poor people at church every Sunday. By the 1820s, the bread was given monthly, and in 1889 Whistler's successor redeemed the rent charge to invest in £104 stock. A century later, in 1728, Thomas Cresswell (from a prominent yeomen family associated with Beech Farm) left a cottage and 11 acres at Path Hill to provide three poor ancient men of Whitchurch, and two of Goring, with greatcoats. These were to be distributed every 21st December (St Thomas' Day) after a charity sermon in St Mary's church.

A 4th charity that is still listed as a named holding of the charity, is known as the 'Poor's Allotment'. This was a fuel charity created in 1813, when 6 acres of common land at Whitchurch Hill were enclosed. This was awarded in lieu of inhabitants' rights to cut furze and collect wood. Parish cottages were built on part of the land in 1814, and the remaining 5.5 acres produced approximately £7 rent p.a. which was spent on faggots for the 'uphill' poor and coal for those in the village. By 1872, when distribution was wholly in coal, 100 people shared over 6 tons purchased at the wharf. A 2nd coal charity was given by Robert Dashwood Fowler of Walliscote, who died in 1895, leaving £200. Two more clothing charities were established in the 19th C by Robert Pigou of Thames Bank in 1842 and Mary Eliza Moore who died in 1894.

It was the legal duty of the Rector of the parish, together with the churchwardens and the Lord of the Manor to manage these various diverse charities over the centuries – it must have been increasingly onerous as the demographics of the district changed after the Industrial Revolution and modernization of farming practices. As a result, in 1905, the Rev Henry Eden Trotter, John Foster (Lord of the Manor and Churchwarden) and Charles Aldridge, the 2nd Churchwarden, applied to the Charity Commission to authorise the combining of these individual charities under one Scheme, and this was duly drawn up and sealed on 22nd March 1907. It became increasingly difficult to sensitively administer a charity to benefit "the poor of the parish" so in 2003, the then trustees successfully approached the Charity Commission to change to the current charitable purpose of supporting educational needs.

I am indebted to Vicky Jordan, Whitchurch History Society, for providing me with much background material for this article.

Sally Woolhouse Whitchurch United Charities Trustee

## Diary Dates

| | |
|---|---|
| November | |
| Sun 1st | ***Service of Remembering*** *St John's 4.00 pm* |
| Tues 3rd | ***Community Coffee Morning*** *10.30-12noon every week in the Old Stables* |
| Wed 4th | ***Tots on the Thames*** *10.00 – 11.30 am in Old Stables, weekly during term time*<br>***Compline Prayer Group*** 8.00- *9.00 weekly on Zoom see p 17* |
| Thurs 5th | ***Ladies Bible Study*** *10 am first and third Thursdays each month in the Old Stables*<br>***WOTSING Choir*** *7.30 – 9.00pm at St John's monthly first Thursday* |
| Sat 7th | ***Friends Art Café*** *10.30—12.30 in the Old Stables* |
| Tues 10th | ***Pray for the World*** *9.10-9.30am in the Old Stables* |
| Sun 15th | ***Outdoor Church,*** *4.00pm St John's followed by refreshments in Goring Heath Hall* |
| Mon 16th | **PCC meeting** 7.30pm Old Stables |
| Sun 29th | **Advent Wreath Making** Whitchurch on Thames Village Hall 6.00 pm see p 11 |
| **December** | |
| Tues 1st | ***Advent Reflection,*** *weekly 1st,8th 15th,22nd December St John's 8.00-8.30pm* |
| Sat 5th | ***Friends Coffee at Art Café*** *10.30-12.30 in the Old Stables* |
| Sat 12th | ***Community Carol Concert*** *(ticketed event ) 5.00pm St Mary's* |
| **January** | |
| **February** | |
| Sat 6th | ***Friends Coffee at Art Café 10.30—12.30 in the Old Stables*** |
| Tues March 16 | ***Lent Lunch at the Old Stables*** |

# Advent and Christmas Services and Events at St. Mary's Whitchurch on Thames and St. John's Whitchurch Hill

**Please note that there are no services in Whitchurch on 29th November and 27th December 2026, when there are 10.30 am Langtree Team services**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 29th Nov | 10.30 am | St Peter and St Paul Checkendon | Langtree Team Advent Carol Service |
| 6th December | 9.30 am | St Mary's | Crib Service |
| 12th December | 5.00 pm | St Mary's | Community Christmas Concert( ticketed event) |
| 13th December | 4.00 pm | St John's | Service of Lessons and Carols (No morning service) |
| 20th December | 6.00 pm | St Mary's | Carols by Candlelight No morning service |
| 24th December | 2.30 pm<br>4.30 pm | St John's<br>St Mary's | Christingle<br>Christingle |
| 25th Dec | 9.30 am | St Mary's | Christmas Day Communion |
| 27th December | 10.30 am | St Mary's Ipsden | Langtree Team Service |

N.B. These dates and times are correct at time of going to print but are subject to change. For up to date service information see our website at https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/422/. For a weekly update on what's going on at the church, sign up for the Vicar's email – contact Rev'd James Leach at jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

## Service of Remembering

Sunday 1st November at St John's Whitchurch Hill 4.00pm. You are very welcome to join us to remember loved ones who have died during 2026 and those who left us many years ago. If you would like to do so there will be an opportunity to light a candle in their memory. The service will be followed by refreshments in Goring Heath Hall.



## The Whitchurch Art & Craft Exhibition 2027

We're delighted to announce that the next Whitchurch Art and Craft Exhibition will take place on 27th and 28th February 2027 at the Village Hall in Manor Road.

The Exhibition is open to current and former residents of Whitchurch-on-Thames, Whitchurch Hill and Goring Heath, as well as children attending our local schools.

Cups will be awarded for the best exhibits in Art, Craft, Photography and Film & Animation (New Media), alongside awards for best in show, best first-time adult exhibitor and junior winners across four age groups. New for 2027 is a dedicated AI category. All AI-generated entries should be submitted here to ensure fair judging.

The theme for the Joyce Voysey Prize is 'From Old to New', inspired by the renovation of St Mary's church spire. We look forward to seeing the many imaginative ways this theme is interpreted. Please note that only one entry per person is permitted in this category. Full entry details will be available soon at www.wotarts.co.uk and on our Facebook event page. So, save the dates and start creating!

Sally Woolhouse sally@wotarts.co.uk

## Goring Chamber Choir

**Autumn Concert: 'Sing Together Always'** with the Oratory Prep School Choir at The Oratory Prep School, Reading RG8 7SF on Sat 14th November at 6.30 pm with welcome drinks from 6pm **Tickets:** Free
**Winter Concert: 'A Present for the Future'** at St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Goring on Saturday 9th January 2027 at 3pm **Tickets:** £15. Free for under-18s. Obtainable from a choir member, from Inspiration in Goring, Garlands Organic in Pangbourne or on the door

## Wednesday evening Compline at 8pm by Zoom

**Compline** is the final prayer time of the day. We follow the Wednesday lectionary. Typical contents include; prayers of preparation and forgiveness, a Psalm, Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis a Bible reading, a short teaching commentary, Lord's Prayer and a prayer of protection with two praise songs. There is a final time of shared prayer and reflection, as the Spirit moves us. We reach the continents of Europe, Africa and South America sharing God's love and praying for those Christians in the world who suffer. Join us by Zoom in your own home each Wednesday evening at 8pm. You are warmly invited to participate with friends across the world, so please send an email to Peter Ferguson – peter@pcfconsultancy.com who will add you to the distribution list and send you weekly invitations with Zoom joining instructions. So, you can join when you can.

## *The Old Stables Meeting Room*

The Old Stables Meeting Room is a welcoming, carpeted space in the centre of Whitchurch-on-Thames available for hire by local groups and private event organizers.

There are tables and chairs for up to 35 people and a well-equipped kitchen. Hire fees start at £18 for 2 hours.

For more information, please contact Geoff Weir at OldStablesBookings@btinternet.com *The Old Stables Meeting Room is owned by the Diocese of Oxford and managed by Whitchurch Parochial Church Council*.

## Whitchurch Community Choir

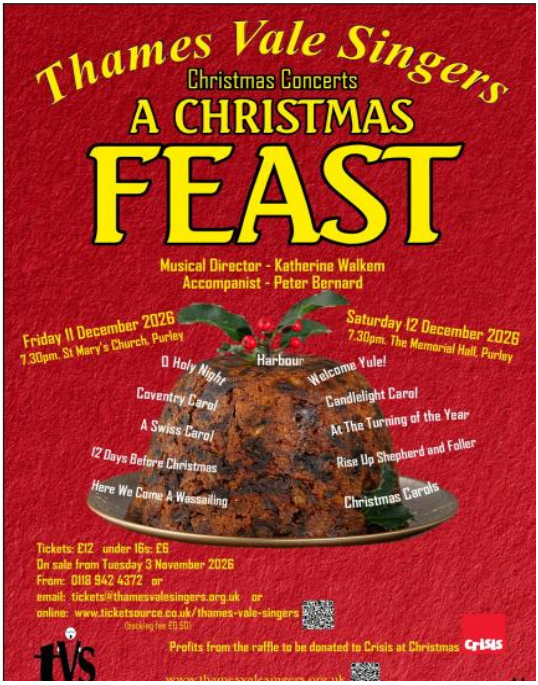
WOTSing is a monthly informal community choir that comes together to enjoy a broad range of songs, hearty singing and good fun.

We meet on the first Thursday of the month in St. John's Church in Whitchurch Hill 7:30pm-9.00pm. No previous singing experience is required, and we always leave feeling good after a hearty sing together.

The repertoire includes songs from the shows, 'pop' songs and well-known traditional songs. Refreshments are provided.

New members are always welcome - please come along and join us.

For further information please contact jcockeram@hotmail.com



**Officers of the Parish**

***Team Rector:*** Revd Canon Kevin Davies, The Rectory, Checkendon,

Reading, RG8 0SR. 01491 680252 revkevdavieslangtree@yahoo.co.uk

***Team Vicar:*** Revd James Leach, St Mary's House, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Reading RG8 7DF. 0118 976 5905. jamesleach.whitchurch@gmail.com

***Churchwardens:*** Kenneth Baker, 10 Laytom Rise, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 6FQ 07702 185827 baker_kenneth2@sky.com

Rosemary Pearce, Little Eastfield, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch on Thames, Oxfordshire, RG8 7EJ 07761 056125 rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com

***Verger:*** Kenneth Baker (contact details above).

***Honorary Secretary:*** Vacant

***Electoral Roll Officer:*** Rosemary Pearce, (contact details above)

***Honorary Treasurer:*** Peter Dragonetti, Covert Cottage, Hill Bottom, Whitchurch Hill, Reading, RG8 7PT. 0118 984 4711. peter@dragonetti.co.uk

***Assistant Treasurer:*** Kenneth Baker, 07702 185827

***Organist and Choirmaster:*** Rota ***Contact for the Bell Ringers:*** Kenneth Baker, 07702 185827

***Magazine Editorial Team:*** Wendy Ferguson, Rosemary Pearce, Angi Simpson. Correspondence: rosemarypearcele@btinternet.com

Closing date for copy for next magazine : 6th February 2027

## Church Services at St Mary's and St John's

**1st Sunday of the month:** 9.30 am Parish Communion at St Mary's

**2nd Sunday of the month:** 9.30 am Parish Communion at St John's

**3rd Sunday of the month:** 9.30 am Morning Worship at St Mary's

4.00pm Outdoor Church at St John's

**4th Sunday of the month:** 9.30 am Morning Worship at St John's

**5th Sundays:** 10.30 am Langtree Team Service in one of the Team churches.

Coffee and biscuits are served after services: in the Old Stables after services at St Mary's, and in church after services at St John's. All welcome!

**For more details see the Langtree Team website at**

**langtreechurches.org or the church website achurchnearyou.com/42**

**If you would like to give to the work of the church locally you can do so using this QR code. Registered Charity Number 1213356**

You can also make a lasting gift by including a legacy in your will. For more information contact Ken Baker baker_kenneth2@sky.com

***The magazine can be viewed online in the Church section of the village website, whitchurchonthames.com.***