



Thatcham Annual Parish Meeting
Annual Report
APCM 2026

Introduction

Thatcham Parish is made of up two Churches. St Mary's on a site which has been a place of Christian worship since 675CE and has a traditional feel, and St Barnabas which is housed in Thatcham Park school and has a more contemporary feel. But both Churches are united in their mission to follow the command of Christ to love God and love their neighbours. This report is a record of all that has happened in the 2025 in the Churches.

It records the community groups we run for the people of Thatcham and, lastly, a brief overview of some of the charities we support.

The PCC and the clergy express their thanks to all who contribute to the life of the Church and the community, whether seen or unseen.

Thatcham Parochial Church Council 2025/6

Parochial Church Council – Background and Proceedings

Thatcham PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Team Rector and the Team Vicar in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church – spiritual, pastoral, evangelistic and ecumenical.

The PCC met at St Mary's Church six times during 2025.

Membership

Members of the PCC are either ex officio, co-opted or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. St Barnabas Church is represented on the PCC by up to 5 members elected by their own church meeting.

- Ex-officio – Revd Mark Bennet, Rev'd Brenda Harland, Revd Angela Brennan
- Churchwardens: Sarah Goode (resigned October 2025), Colin Waters (2025), Michael Watson (2023)
- Deanery Synod Reps: Chris Watts. Three vacancies
- Elected Lay members: St Barnabas: Jeremy Cottam, Lourdes Cottam, Amey Tunney. St Mary's : Smon Stagg, Judith Bennet, Steve Rice.
- Co-options: Mark Backhouse (Tower Bells), Ann Dibble (safeguarding), Mary Stagg (PCC Secretary)

Committees

The PCC operates through a Standing Committee and working groups on Safeguarding, Appeals (Organ and Major Repairs), Buildings and Finance which met between full meetings of the Council. The Standing Committee is the only Committee required by law; it has power to transact business of the Council between meetings, subject to any decisions made by the PCC.

Rectors report

2025 was a varied year, with signs of hope amidst the challenges. One highlight was seeing Revd Nicola Hulks move on to take on the role of Team Rector in the Hermitage team, but that, of course, left us with fewer clergy to cover the services. Brenda and Angela have stepped up to cover as necessary, and Michael Harley has also stepped in to help, which is welcome, but even so Nicola's departure leaves us all more stretched. Numbers at our main services were modestly increased, and we have a few tentative occasional worshippers who have been dropping in to see what we have to offer. However, as noted below, other services like funerals have reduced significantly in number.

With Tim Cooke having stepped down as our organist, Gill Blythman has proved a more than capable replacement who has brought a sense of fun to the role (concluding her first service on 4 May with the Star Wars theme music – which brought a smile to my face). The choir continues to lead our singing and to contribute wonderfully to special occasions – we are very lucky to have the quality of music we currently sustain.

The summer brought the devastating news of Paul Goode's death on holiday, which meant that Sarah, who had made an excellent start as a new churchwarden, had to step back from the role. We continue to pray for Sarah, who has been a key part of the community at St Barnabas for many years.

We made it through the year without a permanent treasurer or administrator – Mike Watson took on the treasurer's role to keep it ticking over. Rachel Backhouse has done sterling, and much appreciated, work as bookkeeper. However the finances are not in a healthy state, and it has proven difficult to get the accounts in order for examination. We have been fighting these issues through into 2026, and I am very pleased that we have a new treasurer just taking the role on, which should enable us to develop a clearer understanding of our financial position.

Mark Backhouse and Colin Waters have made great strides in making sure that the routine maintenance of the church is attended to – we have also been raising money to do some more substantial work – on damp, the organ and the meeting room, all of which need attention.

2025 saw just two weddings at St Mary's and 40 baptisms. There were also 16 Funerals including Brian Barnes, Paul Goode, and Rita Leroy (who created some beautiful flower arrangements and also polished the brass). As we remember those who have died, we remember the contributions they have made to our community over the years.

Safeguarding has continued to move on under Ann Dibble's excellent leadership, but faces a challenge that church groups tend to see the burden of this more than the benefit. It can certainly feel like that (I have to do everything pretty much three times because of my schools work), however we need to step into this and deal with it positively. It is a protection both for our volunteers and for the people we serve. If we build a positive culture of safeguarding, we will all be more confident about what we are doing. I remember my days running youth groups, before everything got quite so formal – all the new regulations and processes felt like a burden, and seemed to get in the way, but now they are a necessary piece of the infrastructure of a group, and I wouldn't be without them. Part of that is seeing how badly things can go wrong – not that we expect or fear errors, but many of us grew up learning the motto "be prepared".

As I write I have been preaching recently on the hope and promise of abundant life – not of an easy life, but of an abundant life. Jesus said "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" and we have been recalling also his saying "I am the way and the truth and the life".

Part of the point of our annual review is to reflect on our common life and to notice the signs of hope and abundance which can pass us by if we are busy and pressured. Do read our reports with your eyes and hearts open to God at work amongst us, and pray for God's continued blessing in the year to come.

Mark Bennet

St Barnabas Church – Serving to Build Community

2025 for St Barnabas was a roller coaster year with times of sadness and times of great exhilaration as well as calm and rhythmic times as we progressed through the seasons of the church's year.

January began on a sad note with the knowledge that we would be saying goodbye to the Hulks family as Nicola had been accepted to take up an amazing opportunity to lead the Hermitage team of churches. We were dismayed to lose them but at the same time excited for their future coupled with the knowledge that they wouldn't be far away.

We said goodbye at two festival services. One in St Mary's at the service of light and the other at St Barnabas the next day – Easter morning – what a great celebration of appreciation and love that was. An Easter extravaganza in saying goodbye and remembering what Jesus did for us through His resurrection!

After Easter the St B's congregation pulled together to make sure everyone was supported and we were blessed to have Angela, Mark and Michael come over to join us and lead services once a month or so, with me (Brenda) filling the gaps until further notice.

As we progressed through the year, we remember the month of June as being standout special. We had ordinations, confirmations and Nicola's induction, Alison and Leanne priested and their first communion services to attend. 5 people were taken through the confirmation process at the end of which they were confirmed at St Mary's by the new Bishop of Reading, Bishop Mary. Leaver's day for all the year 6 pupils in the area followed shortly after with many St Barnabas people attending and using their skills in serving to build community. More news about this later in this report.

In July we attended the leaver's service for Thatcham Park year 6 pupils who are presented with Bibles provided by St Mary's and St Barnabas – each Bible has a personal message inside to send the pupil on their way to the next stage of their lives and of course we commit to pray for them.

During August we received the devastating news that Sarah Goode's husband Paul had been taken ill while on holiday in France and sadly died. Although shocked to the core, the whole church family quickly rallied to offer support to Sarah and the family. At the funeral on 15th September in St Mary's the whole church was involved with the event so we could make it the best we could for everyone. The music group excelled themselves, zoom and sound were ably managed and Leanne Fowler came back as officiant at her first ever funeral. The people of St Barnabas truly living up to the example of Barnabas the Encourager.

As 2025 progressed we were involved with many activities. We use the skills honed during our SOS years in events like Muddy Church, Creative Café (an exciting new joint venture held at St Mary's on two Sundays in August) and Vintage Adventure. The latter is a monthly group held in the Methodist Church for the young at heart. There are stories, songs, craft, much chat all topped off with home made cake. Several St B's folk are helpers at this ecumenical collaboration. It also has the added bonus of being enthusiastically attended by 6 children and their teacher from Thatcham Park which strengthens our links to that school and makes it truly inter-generational. The attendees say that they love to see the children coming and appreciate their help with craft and serving the refreshments. The children also enjoy their time with us and often volunteer to come numerous times.

We also have involvement in events like ABC and Baby Café – see reports elsewhere in the booklet.

There are many groups that facilitate pastoral care and build community like the crochet, coffee and

chat group, the knitting group and attending the community Café at Waitrose which is a once a month offering at Waitrose (1st Wednesday of every month 1-2pm.) and supporting dance shows with our friends from Kestrel and Chaffinch houses.

Thanks go to all who attend our church, to those who keep it running so well, to those on the PCC including Bernie as treasurer and to Colin as church warden for supporting us in many ways especially being keepers of the keys!

Finally, thanks to our talented; enthusiastic and dedicated music group for enabling us to get lost in worship to our amazing God.

Appreciation to all of you who go above and beyond as we look forward to using our gifts while we discover where God will lead us in 2026!

Brenda Harland

CHURCHWARDENS REPORT

We would like to give our heartfelt thanks to all the clergy and volunteers, for their hard work in keeping St Mary's and St Barnabas running over the last year.

It has been a challenging year with reduced clergy following Revd. Nicola Hulks move to Holy Trinity Church, Hermitage as Team Rector. There have also been long term vacancies in the Administration and Treasurer roles. The Churchwardens recently had a successful interview with Patrick McGrath and welcome him to the Treasurer role. We continue to work towards creating an administrative team.

This last year has felt like we have been 'holding the line' as we take stock of where we are and what we do, with an eye on the future. The Churchwardens have been involved in leading the Parish Review. This will be an ongoing process and will give everyone an opportunity to be heard.

We would encourage everyone to think about the gifts they have to help the Parish move forward over the next year. Why not get involved in doing something that you wouldn't normally do.

ABC & Cameo

We are appreciative of the role that ABC has in bringing new families to our church. CAMEO plays an important role in bringing elderly people together in fellowship; we thank very much the volunteers in CAMEO & ABC for their hard work

The Building

Thanks to the building team for keeping our church properly maintained throughout last year. At last we now have hot water in the kitchen and toilets. We are nearly in the position to go ahead and repair the French drain and sort out the damp.

Also thanks to all the volunteers who help keep St Mary's and St Barnabas clean, tidy and the grounds looking good, throughout last year.

ORGAN

Thanks to the Pipedream team for another successful fund raising year and launch of Adopt a Pipe scheme.

Pilgrimage

For a second year we joined St Georges, Newbury in a joint Pilgrimage 2025 from Winchester to Guildford Cathedral from 21st to 24th August and total walking distance 42 miles. Our Pilgrimage started from an interesting place. Commissioning service was held at St Swithuns upon Kingsgate Church, above a medieval gate in Winchester. Overall the Pilgrimage was spiritual and physical challenging, along the way we had some fantastic hospitality given and the countryside was uplifting and beautiful.

Peter & Sue Wright came to St Mary's last February to talk to us about their ambition and experience of walking the Camino Portuguese (Porto to Santiago de Compostela). Hearing how they planned, prepared and undertook this amazing physical and spiritual journey and their experiences along the way.

Colin Waters and Michael Watson

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is an action: *the proactive process of ensuring the safety, well-being, and protection of individuals, particularly children and vulnerable adults, from harm, abuse, or neglect* and yet it seems to require a lot of words. I am going to add to them here, but I will try and be brief. Please speak to any member of the safeguarding committee if you want to know more on any of the points touched on.

All those who volunteer in situations where safeguarding may be an issue, are asked to complete the basic safeguarding course written by the Church of England. It is available online and many people complete it there: [Home | Safeguarding: Training Portal](#) During this year, a group from the bell ringers and a group of volunteers with CAMEO met separately with Ann Dibble to complete the training as a group activity. The CAMEO volunteers also needed to complete the Foundation training and so we welcomed Joy Mawdesley from St Nicholas Church in Newbury to lead a session in January.

For many, DBS checks are also required. In August we were shocked to hear that the provider used by Oxford Diocese had experienced a data breach. Most of the issues that this raised have been resolved and we are pleased to report that we now have a contract with a different provider. This is called Verifile and our initial trainings and contact with them have been encouraging.

Bishop Mary has been exploring the parishes within Berkshire and in November she invited parish safeguarding officers to meet with her and have a chat about our role. There is now a one-year project, led by Oxford Diocese, to understand the role and support needs of parish safeguarding officers. An initial meeting at St Georges in January, may well lead to the establishment of a supportive network.

The parish safeguarding committee has continued to meet regularly. Jo Bettington volunteered to undertake the annual review of our activities that involve children or vulnerable adults. We were disappointed to find that safeguarding is still not embedded but we are grateful for the willingness shown by our volunteers. We are on this steep learning path together. We would like to congratulate those who volunteer with ABC. You have established exemplary practices and came top of the class with the review.

My thanks to Colin Waters, Steve Rice, Sarah Bennet, Jo Bettington and Brenda Harland who provide cheerful and committed support as the safeguarding team, in the various roles that they have undertaken.

Ann Dibble

FINANCE Report to the Accounts December 2025 (summary of accounts app 2)

St Mary's accounts showed a small increase in funds at the end of the year. The St Barnabas General Account shows a positive balance of £3,456 at the end of the year.

Unfortunately we have not been able to pay the Parish Share (our contribution to the diocese for clergy stipends, housing and pensions) which was set at £106,829. We actually paid £78,000 (deficit of £28,829). However, this has increased from 2024 by £6,876.

Income from Services and other activities has declined through the year compared to 2024.

Further donations were attracted to the Organ Pipedream Repair Project. The total fund available in organ funds at 31st December 2025 was £73,748 (£4,720 designated funds and £69,028 in restricted funds). The cost of electric and gas has reduced in 2025 to £6,153 from £6,252 in 2024.

A particular vote of thanks is due to the small team maintaining the books Rachel Backhouse, Bernie Ellison St. Barnabas, Revd. Mark Bennet and Ann Watts banking cash – and to all who so generously support the work of the Church in this parish.

Investments and Fund Structure

There were no changes to the structure of the St Mary's PCC investment funds during 2025. The value of investments held by the PCC has begun to recover following significant international impact on markets. There follows a brief description of the history, management and restrictions of each of these PCC managed funds.

Curates Housing and Expenses (formerly known as the Hatherley} Fund

The capital arose from the sale of a house given to the Church in 1935 for a succession of curates to live in. The PCC has a 29.4% share of the rent after deduction of expenses on a property in Station Road which continued to be let by the Diocese while it is not required to house a curate. The income is applied for general parish purposes and so is unrestricted. However the first call on any surplus income is the payment of curate / clergy expenses.

Thatcham Church of England Charity

The original capital arose from two-thirds of the sale proceeds of the Old Infant School in the Broadway; one-third is administered separately by the Diocesan Board of Education.

This charity is governed by a Charity Commission Scheme sealed on the 21st May 1980; the clear income from the permanent endowment is for furthering the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England in the ecclesiastical parish of St Mary's Thatcham and is therefore an unrestricted fund. All the income is applied in the parish.

The Church Estate Charity Charity Commission ref – 00436

This is an ancient charity referred to in the Charity Commissioners Report of 1907; the income is to be applied to the upkeep of the church and the churchyard so this is a restricted fund.

Income is derived partly from investments and partly from 6/16ths of the income from Moor Meadow Charity, administered by Thatcham Parochial Charities.

The Rookery Church Fund

The small amount of income arising from this legacy from Mrs Hall who died in 1916, is subject to the income being restricted to the fostering of the Sunday school. The Rookery was the name of the house.

Bankers: St Mary's PCC - Lloyds Bank plc & St Barnabas - HSBC

Independent Examiners: Tax Avenue, Turnfields Court,

Thatcham Investment Managers:

BlackRock Investment Managers, 12 Throgmorton Avenue London EC2N 2DL

CCLA, Senator House, One Angel Lane, London EC4R 3AB

Michael Watson.

Stewardship Secretary's Report

A total of £70,451 was given through the Stewardship Scheme in 2025 (£74,909 in 2024). This included £28,683 through the Parish Giving Scheme. Giving through weekly envelopes was £2,690 and standing order payments were £17,987.

Contactless giving using a debit or credit card amounted to £2,714 (£1,637 in 2024). The card machine is to be enhanced to enable donations for particular purposes including appeals for Organ Repair or kitchen and drainage improvements.

By the end of 2025 there were 19 donors paying by Direct Debits through the Parish Giving Scheme. 26 donors gave to St Mary's through Standing Orders. 5 donors use weekly envelopes. Unused coloured or white 'visitor' envelopes from previous years will be available for 2026. We can still pay cash into the accounts using the Post Office but cheque payments have to be deposited at Newbury or be sent by post to Lloyds Bank.

Great thanks are due to the faithful members of the Stewardship Scheme who by regular and sacrificial levels of giving keep St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches going.

Please continue to review your giving at least annually – index linking is a principle worth considering. Occasional donations are greatly welcomed, but commitment to regular giving is essential if we are to budget for paying for our priests through the Parish Share, maintain the fabric and support sustainable growth of the church in Thatcham. If you are able to help with this please speak to a Churchwarden or to me – Chris Watts

'Donate' facilities have been incorporated into the website for St Mary's and ideas to encourage other ways to enable online payments are in development.

I continue to positively recommend the Parish Giving Scheme to all regular givers. Over half the Dioceses in England have joined and together they cover the costs of the small administrative team based at

Gloucester Diocese. All that is donated is paid direct to the nominated parish by the 10th of each month and income tax is reclaimed from HMRC through the GIFT AID scheme and distributed to the parish about five days later. This significantly reduces costs and administration at the local level.

Other bonuses are:

- the donations can be index linked if the donors so choose,
- the donations are paid as a single sum to the parish bank account thus avoiding the checking of multiple pages on Bank Statement entries,
- it reduces the bank charges for handling cheque or cash donations minimising the handling of cash and cheques, and delays in payment to the bank account via the Post Office.

I would again encourage everyone to make a will and to consider making a bequest to St Mary's. It is not difficult to arrange and can make a significant difference to the future of a growing church in Thatcham.

Chris Watts

Deanery Synod Report

Thatcham Parish is part of the Newbury Deanery – a group of parishes in West Berkshire running as far as Hungerford and Lambourn and up to Compton and The Ridgeway. In some recent documents the Deanery has described itself briefly as follows:

Newbury Deanery covers some 105 square miles of the western part of West Berkshire. It includes the urban centres of Newbury and Thatcham, the market town of Hungerford and an extensive rural hinterland. The eleven benefices (roughly speaking groups of churches overseen by a single priest) encompass 36 parishes ranging in population from over 25,000 to under 100, together with 42 church buildings, and one church which has no building of its own.

The Deanery is an administrative unit of the Church of England which is part of its structure of “synodical government” – the way the Church makes decisions about its internal workings where they affect more than a single parish. Traditionally the Deanery has had two functions – (the money function) allocating the parish share which pays for the clergy and support costs and then collecting it; and (the people function) negotiating the deployment of clergy at a time when clergy numbers nationally have been declining. More recently the people function has been developed into a more positive mode of mission planning (The Mission Action Plan) – actively supporting parishes and their people to meet the challenges we all face.

It is stressed that this is the Deanery’s plan to support and encourage benefices and parishes rather than to direct or impose requirements from the Diocese. Synod had identified four action groups and work was continuing on putting these into being. These are:

Finance

Schools and Education

Lay Training

Environment

(Consideration on new housing developments and also communities will be incorporated in due course.)

Revd John Toogood leads the Synod as Area Dean together with the Lay Chair Evelyn Bracey and Paul Thame as Treasurer

Deanery Synod elects representatives to Diocesan Synod – notably our own Team Rector. The Deanery is run by the Deanery Synod. Like the PCC this is a mixture of clergy and elected lay members, but in the Deanery case the members represent the different parishes. The Deanery Synod elects a standing committee and appoints officers to act as an executive, and to progress the various aspects of its work. It may also receive requests from the Diocese of Oxford or from the National Church to respond to matters of interest. The Deanery Synod can also raise matters of concern and ask for these to be addressed at a Diocesan or national level.

In 2025/6 the Synod considered issues arising from progress on the Living in Love and Faith Report, the development of projects supporting children, Eco Church initiatives, young people and families, updates on the link with the South African parish of Batlharos in the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman and, of course, finance.

In 2025 Thatcham was only able to pay £78,000 of its Parish Share as allocated by the Deanery The shortfall was £38,000 from the its allocation of £106,829. The Deanery was kept informed of the

difficulties in 2025 and that the situation would continue into 2026 when the Deanery allocation for Thatcham rises to £ 106,829. Thatcham is not the only parish in the Archdeaconry or in the Diocese to be experiencing this challenge. Prayers and support are requested as work continues on developing a recovery plan.

Chris Watts



Choir

Sung services continue to be supported by our very committed choir and organist. 2025 saw the departure of our incumbent organist Tim Cooke after 20 years. His final service was Easter day, a feast of fine music. We also saw the departure of our rehearsal accompanist Alice who begun studying at Cardiff conservatoire in September. We once again give our heartiest thanks to both. We have been very fortunate in securing the services of Gill Blythman as organist which she has done with aplomb, playing at services and at rehearsals.

Choir numbers remain stable but we would always welcome new singers. We are very fortunate in having many very experienced singers (if you add up all the years of experience it runs into the hundreds!) who are able to support less experienced ones. It's a good place to have a go. The ability to sight read is not needed neither do you need to be able to read music.

Many thanks to those who have expressed their enjoyment of the choir to me. We very much appreciate it and hope to continue to enhance our worship at St Mary's for many years to come.

Mary Stagg

Service Support Teams

A quietly dedicated band of helpers have supported the clergy team in a variety of ways at Sunday, mid-week and evening services, baptisms, weddings and funerals by reading, leading prayers, handing out books, making people welcome, administering the chalice and operating IT equipment to enable those at home to participate in worship. A big thank you to you all!

Additional help would be very welcome in any of the teams, particularly sides people and baptism helpers which are the smallest teams. We all recognise the value of a welcoming smile and greeting, it can make an enormous difference, especially for people coming in for the first time.

Can you help?

Just get in touch if you'd like to find out more.

Sue Stevenson



Bellringers' report

We have rung every Sunday over the last year including half muffled on Remembrance Sunday. There was late night ringing for New Year and prior to the Christmas midnight service. We have had one wedding to ring for.

We rang one quarter peal to congratulate Rhiannan and Ben on the birth of Morwenna and for a few months Morwenna was a regular attender on practice night.

We entered the branch striking competition held at Beedon and to our surprise were declared the winners. We were unable to represent the branch in the Oxford Diocesan Guild aix bell competition due to diary clashes.

We have managed to ring eight bells (or more) on most Sundays and numbers on practice night have varied between six and sixteen. We usually welcome one or more visitors to practice.

The Tuesday peal band have made occasional visits and we have had several visiting bands.

We are grateful to the members of the clergy who brave the stairs on a Sunday morning to say belfry prayers with us.

Rachel Backhouse
Tower Captain

St Mary's Church Website

Similar to 2024-2025, there has been little change in the structure and management of the web site. The content remains fairly static with most of the updates being the Bulletin, Connect and the Choir schedule. The What's-On page has been discontinued because there was insufficient information being provided and where events are required to be advertised, icons are now placed on the home page that link to a full-page display.

The following chart shows the number of unique visits and the number of page views over the period 1-April-2025 to 14-February-2026. The peak activities occur in the Easter and Christmas periods. The information that is shown indicates that many users know what they need and don't browse the web site.

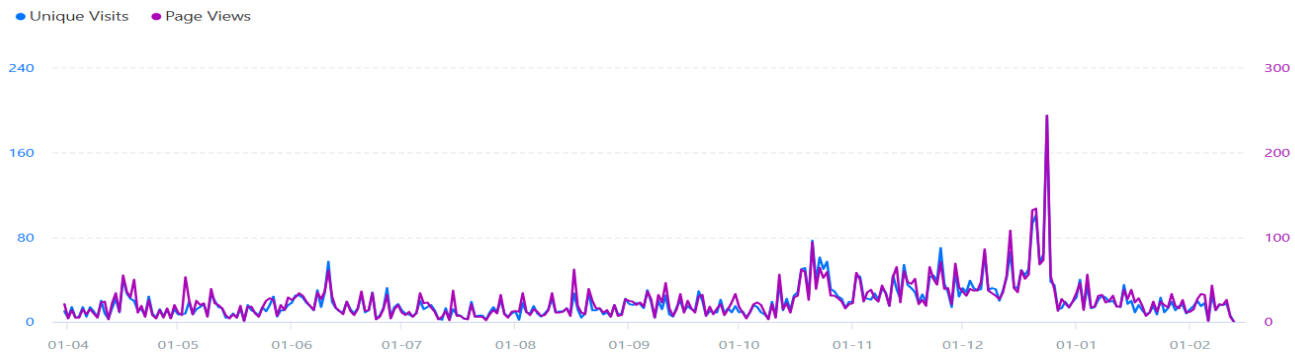


Figure 1 - Web Site Summary March 2025 to February 2026

The traffic breakdown is shown in the charts below. Compared to the last reporting period, there has been a slight increase in the number of unique visitors, resulting in an increase in page views. However, nearly all visits result in a single page view. This implies that visitors expect to see what they need on the page that they land on. There is no way of telling if a visit yields what is wanted or not.



figure 2 - Web Site Activity March 2025 to February 2026

The web site is wholly reliant on its content from all those who are directly and indirectly involved with St. Mary's and who produce information for general consumption and those who organise events. The web site is the public face of St. Mary's and needs to reflect the life of the church community and be up-to-date.

In the coming year the web site will undergo a "make-over" inaugurated and guided by the PCC. A second / back-up web manager-editor is still needed. For those who are not contributors, please could you think of ways in which you could contribute.

Grateful thanks to all active contributors.

Mike Stephenson

ABC Annual Report

We have had a good year all round with many happy and memorable moments. We said goodbye to several children at the end of the school year in July last year. Brenda did a lovely, informal, leaving service where they all received a book. It was sad to see them go, but they were ready to take the next big step in life, of starting school.

This year has seen a steady growth of new mums, dads and grandparents, with their babies and toddlers. Most week we welcome new faces. Many mums, dads and grandparents have returned with their second or third child. There is always a happy atmosphere, and it is lovely to see new relationships being forged.

The worship session at the end, with action songs and a simple bible story, always goes down well with both the children and the adults. The crib service was well attended as always.

Here are a few of the comments that we have had: 'I like the companionship, the children love mixing and playing, we adults like chatting. Wednesday morning is a lovely experience, a nice social time'. 'Very friendly atmosphere, good coffee and cake. Very welcoming. We feel safe, it makes the children feel happy'. 'The songs get stuck in our heads all week, but we love it!'

'You guys are always so welcoming from the door all the way through to the end as we say goodbye. It always feels personal'

Debbie Harley



Baby Cafe

The weekly Baby Cafe at Bluecoat School is going strong. We are into our fifth year and continue to see parents from our first cohort come back to Baby Cafe with their second or third child. It amazes me how little advertising I need to do for the group, occasionally numbers get quite small (usually following the summer holiday or when a large friendship group of mums all return to work at the same time) but its never long before word spreads and new faces appear. Baby Cafe cannot run without volunteers and grant funding, and I am grateful to have such a lovely team running the cafe. I am late applying for grants this year, but will be seeking money via The Good Exchange for the next period. Huge thanks to our faithful band of volunteers who make this community outreach happen.

Angela Brennan

The Nest

The Nest, for foster and adoptive families, continues to run monthly at St Mary's Greenham. We have leaders from Thatcham as well as other churches in the area, and also, now, a former Nest parent who comes back to help as she found the group so valuable. We are grateful for St Mary's Greenham for providing the space free of charge, and volunteers who donate refreshments — its means we can run without a grant. We have experimented with a summer session in the holidays to enable school-aged adoptive and foster children to come along and meet others, this was well received and we hope to do this again.

Angela Brennan

CAMEO (Come and Meet Each Other)

If you are lonely, unable to get about or just looking for something more in your life and are free on Monday afternoons why not come and join us. We meet at 2.00 pm in St. Marys meeting room. Once the initial hubbub has died down we usually have an activity either games, quizzes, singing, puzzles or crafts which is followed by tea and cake and a weekly raffle. This year we also had visitors to entertain us. A U3A choir sang for us at our Christmas party, Nick Young gave an interesting talk 'Then and Now' about changes to the face of Thatcham and Clare Bromley from Newbury Museum brought a project box full of artefacts for us to see and handle and told the story of the Newbury Coat and Jack of Newbury.

As you can imagine tea and cake feature largely at each session and this is enhanced on occasion – we never pass up a chance for a celebration.. This year we had our very popular fish and chip lunch in March, a summer cream tea in June, harvest tea in September and not just one but two Christmas tea celebrations!



This year, we organised an outing to the discovery centre for tea. The weather was reasonable so those who wished could take a short walk. The shop and snack bar were very popular. It worked well and even those in wheelchairs were able to enjoy the afternoon.

We have some excellent helpers including several members who are drivers for those who need transport. All are DBS checked and have completed the relevant safeguarding training. So if you are tempted or know of somebody who might be and would like more information please contact Theresa Lucas on 07716 846529 or Viv Druce on 07468 566341.

Schools Work

We held a successful Leavers Day event in June 2025, with children from nine local primary schools and helpers from three local secondary schools coming into St Mary's. Leavers Day is an ecumenical event, hosted by Churches Together in Thatcham and we had volunteers from all the churches in Thatcham in hosting over 450 school children. Plans are afoot to repeat the event this summer.

Over the past year I have taken RE lessons and collective worship for Thatcham Park School, and this year will also be hosting iCollege in St Mary's. I also represent the Anglican Church perspective on the West Berks SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for RE) which sets the curriculum and monitors the teaching of religious studies in local schools..

Angela Brennan

Pipedream Organ Project

Fundraising continues, with events and external grant sourcing. Last year we held a successful Organ Gala as part of the Thatcham Festival, and welcomed over 200 visitors to St Mary's to hear local organists, including our own Gill Blythman and Tim Cooke, two young organists from the area and contributors from the Newbury Organists Association. Midgeham church hosted a recital in aid of our organ restoration and Gill is giving a further recital at St George's Wash Common in April, also in aid of the organ fund. I am very grateful for such commitment and support — from Gill and our local organists, to our neighbouring church communities, and to the Organ Team for organising and running these events. The total required for the restoration is in the region of £200,000 (depending on the scope of work we agree upon, and can fund), we have hit the £70,000 mark so far. We also have an eye-catching organ pipe totaliser in church keeping track of our progress. The Organ Team were disappointed to hear the outcome of our application for Heritage Lottery Funding, which was unsuccessful, but we are hopeful of a contribution towards the work from other sources that we are currently exploring. This year we have also launched the Adopt A Pipe Scheme, which has so far raised £2655 plus gift aid.

Angela Brennan



Drainage Project

This is the least glamorous, but most necessary project, for the future of St Mary's. In 2025 we launched a fundraising effort to raise circa £10,000 to install a French drain on the north side of the building. I'm pleased to report that we have successfully met the target and the wheels are in motion to appoint a contractor and begin the work. Money has been raised by a combination of local fundraising initiatives, including the Easter Chicks and stalls at The Broadway, an appeal via the Good Exchange and a contribution from St Barnabas Church — huge thanks to all for donations, effort and determination. The drainage works will resolve the ongoing issue of damp on the north wall of the church and enable us to begin thinking about a long-awaited project to update the kitchen.

Angela Brennan



The Thatcham Parochial Charities

This ancient charity has played a significant role in the life of Thatcham for some centuries. It is also significant in the work of our churches, here in Thatcham, as the Rector and all Churchwardens are ex-officio members of the Board of Trustees and I (Chris Druce) am also on the Board as a representative of Thatcham Town Council. Other Trustees are appointed by the local councils of Cold Ash, Midgham and Greenham. This total area comprised the Ancient Parish of Thatcham, which the charity was formed to represent. The trustees have a wide remit of responsibility, seeking to help mitigate various needs of our local community. There are 2 principal charities:-

The 'Thatcham Parochial Almshouse Charity' and the 'Thatcham Relief in Need Charity'

The Almshouses

The object of the charity is to provide affordable accommodation for people aged over 55, who are in housing need and currently live within the area of 'Ancient Thatcham'. There are currently two blocks of 4 flats in Chapel Street and a further 6 flats in Glebelands (9 Shilling House), off Lower way.

This year, following the completion of several flat renovations, by April 2025, all flats were fully occupied & a register of interest is in place for any future vacancies. The trustees are continually reviewing the costs and household and personal needs incurred by the residents in order to minimise any financial hardship.

Significant projects this year have included roof repairs and garden enhancement in 9 Shilling House and a visit from the Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue & Wellbeing Technician providing advice & support for fire prevention and general safety and well-being.

Early in 2026, new addressable radio fire alarm systems are being commissioned in all properties with latest smoke detectors, heat sensors and a central control system to pinpoint the exact location of any triggered device.

Relief in Need Charity

The trustees have a wide remit regarding the type of 'Need' to be addressed. During the past year, the Charity made grants of just over £21,000. These grants included some larger community grants which benefited both the older and younger generations within our community. Grants were primarily distributed via the West Berks. Food Bank, NWN Over 80's Christmas Parcel Fund and local schools. In 2025, the highest demand was for support of the younger residents, the majority of whom live within our most deprived areas. The trustees were very happy that, through the grants, they were able to support the good work of the local schools to ensure that these young people were able to participate in the trips which offer significant social, emotional and educational experiences to the child where they can participate alongside their peers and are not disadvantaged or excluded.

So, as you can see, it has been another eventful year. If you know of anyone who may need a helping hand, anything otherwise unaffordable, do, please, have a word with me, a member of clergy or a churchwarden.

Thankyou – Chris Druce



CHRISTIAN AID

In our financial year from October 2024-25, we raised £3195 for Christian Aid, to help other people overseas (in desperate circumstances) to help themselves. This was slightly up on the year before.

In the last Church year, we have: collected in Christian Aid week (including Church coffee and cakes), and for emergency and Christmas appeals (for refugees in the DRC, Gaza, and South Sudan), hosted cash-in-lieu of Christmas cards, and by the time you read this will have run a Beetle Drive at the URC and a Good Friday soup lunch at St Mary's, and also have just finished the 2026 Christian Aid week.

Then we are also planning another Quiz & Soup evening at the Baptists in October, and Carol Singing in December, probably another Beetle Drive next Spring.

We could not do this without the generous donations and support of St Mary's congregation, and above all your prayers. So we are deeply thankful to you all.

If you want to know more, please talk to me, or one of the Committee in St Mary's (by whom I am richly blessed): Mary Baker, Steve Rich and Mary Stagg.

Thank you to you all

Sarah Bennet



USPG

£302 was donated to USPG in 2025. USPG is working with the Anglican Church in Zambia to develop healthcare and leadership programmes that will have an impact on the life and outreach of the church and community. Support was given for training of specialists and other health projects in Zambia.

Children's Society

The use of collecting boxes and globes has significantly declined in recent years, probably as a result in the reduction in the use of coins. Support for Missions has increasingly transferred to event such as the ever popular Cream Teas and to direct donations including those made online. *Collecting boxes continue to be available however for anyone wanting to support Missions in this way.*

If you would like to help with either of these Missions please speak to the Treasurer

Chris Watts