

Great Brickhill Annual Parish Meeting, Tuesday 6th May 2025

Parochial Church Council Report

I am pleased to say that the church is in a much better state of repair than this time last year. On entering the church a year ago, one was faced with looking at something resembling a building site, with internal scaffolding covering most of the church.

With the work on the outside roof complete, the internal works started in earnest last April and for the next two months everything was moved round in the church, and finding things was at times quite a challenge. The damaged ceiling panels were repaired, and preparation work was carried out to the outer walls, ready for painting once the walls had dried out. The work was completed and the church back to normal by the beginning of August.

We were successful in obtaining grants from several sources, totalling £75k. St Mary's was chosen as one of 18 churches in the country to share in a £1 million urgent funding pay-out from the National Churches Trust. This grant of **£30,850** for the urgent roof repairs enabled us to carry out all the necessary repairs in one go. The internal walls were decorated at the same time, taking advantage of the scaffolding already in place. The total cost of the work was £130k excluding VAT, which was recoverable via the Listed Places of Worship Scheme.

General Maintenance Work:

The work to the Chancel Roof and tower identified in the Quinquennial Report has been carried out, along with the required electrical rewiring work.

Two successful Workdays were held on Saturdays in the summer, and a lot of general maintenance work was achieved, both inside and outside the church.

NATIONAL CHURCH AWARDS:

We were "pipped at the post as a finalist" for this year's National Church "Care & Conservation Award". The results were announced at the National Church Awards ceremony at Lincoln Cathedral on Tuesday 22nd October. Whilst this was a little disappointing having made it to the short list, it is flattering to think that the work carried out in our church has been recognized at national level.

SERVICES ETC:

The Rector had a sabbatical leave, from 13th April to 1st July. Visting clergy came for our Communion services, and other services were lay led during these three months.

The general pattern of services remains the same. The average weekly attendance figure remains static. There is a marked increase in attendance whenever there is a special element to the service.

During the re-roofing work, there was a lot of disruption, dust and rubble, requiring a huge amount of work to prepare the church for the services but we were pleased that we did not have to cancel any services.

During the last twelve months, one wedding, one baptism and three funerals were held.

The highlight of the year was the Service of Thanksgiving held on 13th October for the completion of the roof work. The Archdeacon of Buckingham, the Venerable Guy Elsmore came and gave the sermon.

In addition to our annual services such as Remembrance Sunday, Nine Lessons and Carols, all of which were well attended, two outdoor services were held:

- A Pimms & Hymns service was held in the churchyard where there was plenty of shade from the heat of the sun. The hymns and songs were chosen by those who were going to be present, and we had a good mix of traditional hymns but also a number of songs that were new to many but with lovely tunes, they were easy to sing to.
- The Village Nativity on Sunday, 15th December. The Cricket Club kindly hosted this event again. We were fortunate with the weather, a nice sunny day and as usual it was very well attended and a great start to our Christmas celebrations.

High Ash Services:

We have been pleased to welcome pupils from High Ash for their four services - Harvest, Christmas, Easter and end of year Leavers' service.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT BISHOP OF BUCKINGHAM:

In November, the Revd Canon Dave Bull was nominated as the next Bishop of Buckingham. Former Team Rector of Marlow and Area Dean of Wycombe, he began his new ministry at the end of February. The consecration service was held at Canterbury Cathedral on Thursday 27th February. He now lives in Milton Keynes, much closer to us than previous Bishops who were based in the south of the county. We are hoping that he will join us for a service later this year.

EVENTS IN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS:

Our events were similar to last year. We were fortunate that the weather was good for our two big fundraising events, the Snowdrop Walks and the Plant Fayre. Our third big event, the Christmas Fair was also successful, as were the teas at Brickstock, the teas at the Open Gardens and the Carol singing.

Unfortunately, our regular Monday Morning Coffee Club in the church has stopped. It was originally planned for mothers with young babies but was then mainly attended only by people who go to the Monday Drop-in at the Parish Hall, and so being on the same day, it was not sensible to keep it going.

With all the work carried out in the church we are now in a position, particularly in the summer months when we don't have to think about heating the church, for the refreshment area to be used for meetings etc. We would welcome any enquiries.

ANNUAL MEETING, NEXT TUESDAY:

The Church Annual Meeting is next Tuesday evening, in the church at 7.30pm, refreshments from 7.15pm. A photo presentation will be given showing the various events, which have been held throughout the year.

We would welcome new members to join the PCC and we are also looking for two people to take on the role of Warden. Julia Turner will be stepping down having served two terms, from March 2004 to 14th April 2011 (7 years) and from April 2016 to May 2025 (a further 9 years). We are indebted to Julia for all the time she has given to the church as she has done far more than just being a Warden. Fortunately, she has said that she will still be around to help!

The Accounts for the year will be presented showing a deficit for the year of £1,286. It was again not possible to pay the full Parish Share to the Oxford Diocese, £14K (the same as in 2023) was paid towards the allocation of the £20,783 Parish Share to the Diocese. The Parish Share due for 2025 has been confirmed as £21,885, a 5.3% increase.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE:

With all the work done over the last few years, the church is now in a good state of repair, and we are not expecting any major repair work.

As reported last year however, we are embarking on a project to reduce our carbon footprint. We have been awarded a Net Zero Carbon Preparation grant from the Diocese to help with this. Andrew Smith has just carried out an audit of the energy use and a plan for decarbonisation. There will be some things that can be done quite easily, and a larger project looking at replacing the old gas boiler, which will soon need replacing anyway, with a heat pump. There should be funds coming available nationally and from the Diocese that we can apply for to help with the funding of this work.

A final thing to report is that The Willen Hospice Messiah is back. Jerry Breslin is planning to resurrect the Messiah, which pre Covid was held annually and raised a terrific amount of money for Willen Hospice. Jerry thinks this will be the final performance and has asked if it can be held here at St Mary's, the very first venue for The Messiah. The date of the performance is Sunday, 28th September.

Phillipa Cook
(Great Brickhill PCC Secretary)