

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

Report to the Annual Village Meeting 13th May 2025

St Mary's Church continued to play a central role in our North Marston village life and community in 2024

As a church, we are united together through times when we gather for worship and fellowship, but also times when we reach out beyond the walls of our church building to the wider community, hoping to share God's love, offering to care for others, willing to respond to the needs of our world in prayer and through action.

Worship and services

Our regular worship provides a mixture of Holy Communion Services and Family Services, with one Family Service a month taking place at the Wesley Centre and 'Messy Church' services once a month in the afternoon. I feel privileged to work closely with Reverend Janet Bayly and am grateful for her wisdom and continuing support to our church family by leading worship and preaching as well as through her pastoral ministry. We are blessed by having a competent team of lay leaders who contribute by leading and preaching at our Family Services. We offer our thanks to David Heffer, David Bayly and also Peter Evans and Richard Webster from Granborough, for their ministry and the gifts of teaching they share with us.

As a Local Ecumenical Partnership, we enjoy the ministry of Reverend Richard Atkinson, who is the Superintendent of the Vale of Aylesbury Methodist Circuit. Through the past 3 years, Mark Payne has been in training for Ordination at Cuddesdon College and will be ordained deacon in July 2025. He will start his curacy in Schorne Team Parishes based in North Marston and Granborough immediately after his ordination. We are excited for Mark and anticipate the beginning of his ordained ministry.

The Remembrance Sunday Service at the Memorial Hall, and the Christmas Eve 'Carols by Candlelight' Service continue to be important events in the village calendar, each attracting around 200 adults and children. We also held several other special services in 2024. The Rogation Sunday Family Service at the Dancers' farm was a great success and we are grateful to the Dancer family for their support at this important service. In October, we held a special service of Prayers for Peace,

with prayers focused on the conflict in the Middle East, and in November we held a Service of Light and Thanksgiving, remembering those who have died.

In 2024 we held one baptism service in our church, one funeral service followed by a burial, and our team of clergy conducted three funeral services in the crematorium and five interments of ashes in our churchyard. There was no wedding service in 2024.

We continue to work closely with North Marston School, a team from our church regularly leading Collective Worship. We held special school services celebrating Harvest, Christmas and Easter in our church and of course the Leavers Service in July 2024. The leavers received their Bibles during that service.

Outreach

'Messy Church', held once a month on a Sunday afternoon, aimed at primary school-aged children, who can enjoy craft activities, worship and refreshments together, has grown steadily over the past two years, attracting new children and parent helpers. We welcomed Beavers and Cubs to our church for occasional sessions and organised another successful Autumn Trail around the village for families, this year focusing on Village History.

The members of the Church 'Eyes and Ears' team have provided excellent support to our ministers in their pastoral work, dropping cards and paying visits to those around them in need, and those celebrating joyful events.

Outreach is an important part of our focus and has continued to flourish in the past year. The regular weekly coffee mornings and monthly community lunches are popular. The Fundraising Committee has staged a wide range of events enjoyed by the village community. In the last year, this has included a Burns Night Supper in January, the 'Bubbles and Bangers' party on the green outside the Wesley Centre in July, the Poetry, Prose and Song Evening in October, the Beaujolais Evening in November, and Lights of Friendship in December. There was a huge turnout again this year for the traditional Easter Egg Rolling, Decorated Egg

Competitions and Easter Egg Hunt in March - the Wesley Centre was packed, with everybody enjoying the selection of home-made cakes and bacon butties.

As part of our wider outreach work, we have supported a number of local and national charities this year: The Royal British Legion, The Children's Society, The Salvation Army, Crisis, Link for Hope, Clearly Speaking, the Aylesbury Foodbank, the Bucks Historic Churches Trust and Water Aid. We also continued with a collection for Ukraine throughout the year and are grateful for all support from the village community to help us to support these worthy causes. We are always mindful, practically, and in our prayers, of the poverty and injustice in the world outside our village.

Sad News

Very sadly, we report that our Team Rector, Canon David Meakin, died on 7th August, following a short illness. David had served in the Schorne Team since 2004, first as Priest-in-Charge, and from 2011 as Team Rector. He was Area Dean of Claydon from 2011. On 2nd July David was installed as an Honorary Canon at Christ Church Cathedral in recognition of 35 years' humble service in the Diocese of Oxford and the wider Church of England. His funeral took place on 3rd September at Whitchurch. David will be greatly missed.

We also remember the Rt Rev Bishop of Buckingham, Dr Alan Willson, who died unexpectedly in February 2024. Bishop Alan served as the Bishop of Buckingham since 2003. The new Bishop of Buckingham, the Rt Rev Dave Bull, was appointed in October 2024 and consecrated in February 2025. We look forward to his ministry.

St Mary's Church Building and Churchyards

Through 2024, we continued to give much attention to the condition of our Grade 1 Listed Church. In the past year we have continued to monitor the cracks in the South Wall under the direction of our structural engineer. We also appointed an Arboriculturist to inspect the copper beech tree to find out if the tree roots are impacting the cracking in the South Wall. We are also working closely with the Diocesan Advisory Committee, who offer support with any problems related to the fabric of church buildings. Unfortunately, all investigative work and decisions to

proceed with any repairs take time. As the problem itself is so complex, the solution, too, is not straightforward and needs careful consideration. We hope that by the end of 2025, early 2026 we may be able to move forward with the steps necessary to start on the repairs to the Wall. Meanwhile, the stained-glass window that has been removed continues to be safely stored.

The main churchyard and the 'new' churchyard have continued to be maintained to a very high standard by our team of sextons. We are desperate for more volunteers, however, to mow a section of the churchyard, and trim and strim around the graves. We are very grateful to all who look after our churchyards.

Our church bells, much admired by bell ringers across the diocese for their lovely sound, continue to ring out three times a month, and for special services. We rely heavily on ringers from other parishes and would love to hear from anyone who would like to give ringing a try! Training is available!

Our teams of flower arrangers and cleaners have continued to ensure that our beautiful church always looks its best for Sunday services and special occasions, we are grateful for their dedication and service they offer to our church community.

The Wesley Centre

We enjoy, as a church community, using the Wesley Centre for regular monthly worship and many social gatherings, including the Wesley Lunches, Coffee Mornings and many fundraising events. We are also committed to promoting this attractive venue to potential hirers in order to generate more income.

I am grateful to the volunteers who continue to support the work of our Church in so many different ways and we appreciate the support from the village community. We pray the church will continue to be an important part of the life of our village.

Rev. Petra Elsmore

May 2025