

# **Parish of St Mary Without-the-Walls Handbridge Chester**

## **St Mary Without-the-Walls Handbridge Chester    Vacancy Profile**



### **Introduction**

We are an active Anglican Church, of the modern catholic tradition. Our aim is to grow together in faith and in fellowship. As a Eucharistic Church, Holy Communion is at the heart of our worship. We are a Christian community in which everyone is welcome, growing together in Christ in our worship and fellowship through the many lay-led activities that we are fortunate to have. Worship is traditional. The parishioners are aware of the need to embrace change, but for some this will not be easy.

Our vision is to reach out even more to the local community and the recent building of the new St Mary's Handbridge Centre is an expression of our love and care for the whole community.

### **The Parish**

The Church is located in Handbridge, a pleasant suburb of Chester, on the south bank of the River Dee and close to the city centre. As well as Handbridge, the Parish consists of a number of housing areas – Queen's Park, Belgrave Park and the majority of Westminster Park and Curzon Park. Overall, the Parish is affluent, but there are also residents with financial and personal issues. Unemployment is low.

Within the Parish, there are a number of educational institutions - Queen's Park High School, Chester International Studio School, The Catholic High School, Belgrave Primary School, Church of England Controlled Overleigh St Mary's Primary School and Chester University Business School. The independent King's School is within the Parish. There are close links with Overleigh St Mary's School, as there are three Church members on the Board of Governors.

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Within walking distance of the Church, there are two retirement homes. A large housing development on the Wrexham Road has recently been approved, consisting of 1,200 new homes, including some affordable housing. This is less than one mile away from the Church and a small part of which will be within the existing Parish boundary.

### **The Church**

The Church of St Mary Without-the-Walls in Handbridge was built in 1887 and is sited on land within the original parish of St Mary On-the-Hill in Chester. The first



Rector was instituted in the reign of King John ( 1199-1216 ). The Duke of Westminster is the Patron of the Church. The Church is well maintained. The chairs were replaced in 2009 and a new heating system was installed in 2017. Reredos panels are a unique feature of the

Church. These are a very rare example of large-scale Cloisonné enamel work from the 1890s and only three other known examples exist in Europe. The Church is surrounded by well-maintained gardens and does not have a graveyard. St Mary's Tower has 8 bells and an enthusiastic band of ringers.

### **The Clergy and Staff**

St. Mary's is very fortunate to have a team, led by a full-time Rector, of four Honorary Clergy, a part-time SSM Assistant Priest, one Reader and one Reader Emeritus.

The PCC is supportive of the ministry of women at all levels in the Church.

The Rectory is a modern four-bedroom house in Queen's Park just half a mile from the Church. The Rector has an office in the new St Mary's Handbridge Centre next to the Church.

There are 22 members on the PCC, including two Churchwardens. There are also four part-time paid staff - the Parish Administrator the Verger and two cleaners. In 2018 there was a very successful PCC day meeting at the Foxhill Christian Centre

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near Helsby, Cheshire. This provided the opportunity for the clergy and laity to assess and reflect on the work of St Mary's in the community and follow-up actions from the day are ongoing. Over recent years the Church has taken part in the Chester Diocese GAP (Growth Action Planning) initiatives, as well as having two 'Healthy Church' days.

### **Services and Worship**

Every Sunday there is Holy Communion at 8am, followed by Parish Communion at 10.30am. Every fourth Sunday, there is Choral Evensong at 6.30pm. On Thursdays, there is Holy Communion at 10am.



The 9.30am Storytelling Service, for small children, takes place on the 2nd & 4th Sundays of the month. Messy Church takes place on the 3rd Sunday of every month at 3pm. The average number of communicants for the main 10.30am Sunday service is 93. Regular congregation

numbers have been maintained, more or less, although age disparities continue to be noticeable. The congregation is mainly in the upper age range. Some Church-based groups for younger people have flourished in the past, but they have declined in recent years. However, Messy Church and Storytelling are both very popular and well-attended by young children and their parents. A growing number of families attend these services. The Youth Group meets during the main Sunday morning service to consider different ways of exploring prayer, Christianity and world issues. The Youth Group was set up for young people aged 11 upwards, but as regular attendance has diminished (now less than 10 children) the age range has been extended down to 8 years of age. Formal Sunday School ceased to operate about 6 years ago, when Storytelling and Messy Church took its place.

Young children are welcomed to all our services and there is a well-equipped play area at the back of the Church. However, apart from Storytelling and Messy Church, there is currently no Church-based teaching for children aged between 7 and 9 and this situation needs to be addressed.

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Special services, for example, Remembrance Sunday, Crib Service, Mothering Sunday and the Midnight Christmas service are very well attended. Some 420 people were at the 4pm Crib service on Christmas Eve 2018.

The uniformed organisations are involved with the Remembrance, Harvest and Mothering Sunday services. There are two Bible study courses planned for 2019, one prepared by our Reader and the other by a retired member of the Chester Cathedral clergy, who is in our congregation.

Four Parish summer weekends have also been organised in 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016, to the Rydal Hall Christian Centre in Cumbria. These weekends were very popular, well-attended and successful. Guest speakers were invited to lead discussions on faith-based themes and to give time for prayer and reflection in beautiful and peaceful surroundings.



There is a Meditation Group following the theme, 'When God seems distant'. This ecumenical group meets on a monthly basis.

Julian meetings are also held once a month in different members' homes. This is another ecumenical group and is part of the international network of Julian Meetings supporting the practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition - a time for quiet reflection and calm in the presence of God.

Our GAP objectives have been to be a more outward-looking church, to engage with younger families and to make connections within the community.

A priority for the future is to review the pattern of services to engage and encourage more young people and families to attend the main services of worship. This may also provide the opportunity to increase the numbers in the youth group.

### **The new St Mary's Handbridge Centre**

#### **St Mary's Handbridge Centre**

The original St Mary's Church Hall was built in 1969 with an intended 20 year lifespan. By the 2000s, it was in need of constant repair and no longer fit for purpose.

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In 2013 we held a 'Healthy Church' consultation and this highlighted the need to reach out much more to our local community.

There was an obvious need to replace the old Church Hall with a larger, multi-purpose Parish Centre, which would fulfil the traditional function of a church hall, but which would also provide a multi-purpose facility for much wider community use.



In 2014, the PCC took the bold decision to demolish the old Church Hall and to build a new Parish Centre at a cost of £1.5million.

Raising the funds was a real challenge of faith, but the objective was achieved and building work started in late 2017. In June 2018 the new Centre was opened by the Bishop of Chester.

Our vision is to do God's work by loving our neighbours and to recognise that means serving the wider community, of all faiths and none, in whatever way we can. We believe that building a Centre that is accessible to the whole community, providing inclusive hospitality, helps us to do that.

The Centre is already becoming a thriving hub for both church and community activities across the whole age range.



To raise the full amount needed, a loan of £250,000 was taken out with the Methodist Chapel Aid Limited. This is an unsecured loan, repayable over 20 years. Our Business Plan demonstrated that the Parish Centre will generate enough income from room lettings to cover the costs of running the Centre and also to meet the loan repayments. Seven months on from the opening of the Centre, it is more than paying its own way and is generating a surplus of income over expenditure, which will help the PCC to meet the church costs.

There is an office for the Rector in the Parish Centre, which brings our Rector right into the heart of the parish. The Parish Administrator also has an office in the Centre and organises most of the day-to-day running of the Centre.

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The challenge of building a new Centre has brought together many people from across the Parish to instigate and to support funding initiatives.

There is a Centre Management Committee, made up of the Incumbent, the 2 Churchwardens, the Parish Administrator (all ex-officio) and 3 people from the Electoral roll who are appointed at the APCM each year. This meets every month to monitor the management, maintenance and finances of the Centre.

### **The Life and Activities of our Church**

St Mary's has been very fortunate, over a period of more than fifty years, to have had a large number of volunteers willing to help with both Church and community activities. For example:

**Luncheon Club** for the elderly meets on Wednesdays at the Centre for lunch at 12.30. A two-course hot lunch, plus a cup of tea, is provided for £3. The food is freshly prepared each week by volunteers who attend on a rota basis.

**Church Music:** The Church Choir sings at the 10.30am Communion service on Sunday morning, at Evensong at 6.30pm on one Sunday each month and often sings at weddings and funerals. A new Director of Music was appointed last year. The **Servers Team**. Our teams of servers assist the Clergy during services with the preparation of the bread and wine for the Eucharist.

There are 5 teams of **Flower Arrangers** who are, in their own words, "enthusiastic amateurs". They decorate the church with floral arrangements throughout the year, on a rota basis.

A **Gardening Group** of volunteers meet on a regular basis to maintain the grounds of the Church and of the Centre.

**A Church Cleaning Team and Premises Committee.** A group of volunteers clean the Church every week and the Premises Committee oversees the upkeep of the fabric of the Church.

The **Baby and Toddler Group** is a friendly, informal group that is registered with the Pre-School Play Groups Association. It is for all children up to school age, together



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with their parents or carers. The group meets on Thursdays, in term time, from 10am to 11.30am in the Centre. Each week there are varied activities. This group is not a Church-based activity, but it does have the support of several volunteers from the congregation who help on a weekly basis.

The following uniformed organisations meet regularly at the Centre:

**Rainbows** for girls aged 5 to 7 involving a range of fun activities, including craft projects, singing, dancing and games.

**Brownies** for girls aged 7 to 10. They meet on Wednesdays from 6pm to 7.30pm to enjoy a wide range of activities, including arts and crafts, trying out recipes, playing energetic games and taking part in community-action projects.

**Guides** are for girls aged 10 to 14. Activities include everything from taking part in adventure sports, to playing fun games and taking part in community-action projects.

There is a close link with **Beavers, Cubs and Scouts** of the 18<sup>th</sup> Chester (St Mary's) Scout Group, who meet regularly in their purpose-built HQ in Westminster Park.

The Beaver colony is for 6 to 8 year olds. There are two Cub Packs for 8 to 10 year olds and two Scout troops for 10 to 14 year olds.

There are many other groups and organisations, not directly linked with St Mary's, but part of the local community, who meet regularly in the new Centre. These include dance and music classes for children and adults, singing for enjoyment, several Yoga groups, a number of groups for the elderly to address social isolation, NHS Mental Health Counselling, Slimming Group sessions, Age Concern activities, Brightlife, Flower Club, a History Group, the Women's Institute and community meetings arranged by local councillors.

The local Community Police Officer uses the Centre regularly as a base.

For the Parish family, a number of **social events** have been organised over recent years including, beetle drives, quizzes, parish picnics, summer fairs, craft fairs. and coach trips.

During the past four years, there has been a very active focus on raising the £1,500,000 required to build the new Centre. This was a real challenge of faith, but the outcome has been justified, as the Centre is now meeting our aim of serving the community.

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On **Christmas Day 2018**, a free festive turkey meal and entertainment was provided at the new Centre for 75 people, who were on their own or living away from home. This initiative was suggested and organised by members of the local community. St. Mary's Church was delighted to support their venture.

For the past two years, the Church has been involved with the Overleigh St Mary's School **Lantern Parade**. It is a community event funded by the council. This has been very successful, with the parade finishing at the Church for refreshments and mince pies.

Trustees of **St Mary's Parochial Charities**, officially known as the Llay Estate, meet annually to allocate money to deserving causes in the area.

Members of the Church are also involved with food collections for the **Chester Foodbank** and collecting for Christian Aid.

Although we have been fortunate in the past to rely upon people to undertake roles on a voluntary basis, it is becoming more difficult to encourage younger people to become involved in leading activities and initiatives.

The Church website [www.stmaryschester.co.uk](http://www.stmaryschester.co.uk) provides information on Church activities and the new Centre. It is updated regularly. St. Mary's is also in the early stages of using social media in an attempt to reach out to the younger generation.

There is a monthly Church Magazine produced by a volunteer editor with a team of distributors.

### A Summary of Strengths and Issues

#### Strengths

- The involvement of families in supporting Storytelling and Messy Church. The foundations are in place for Children's Ministry to be developed.
- The very good maintenance and care of the Church and grounds by the Verger and volunteers. Both the church interior and exterior are kept up to a high standard.
- There is a strong Ministry team of active retired clergy and readers



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- The administration of the Parish. There is a good team of paid support staff, with a very able Parish Administrator, Verger and 2 cleaners for the Parish Centre.
- There is an effective management structure for the Standing Committee and PCC. There is a wide range of professional and practical skills within the PCC and a wealth of experience and knowledge of St Mary's history.
- There is an active laity participation in worship with lay-led Bible study and prayer groups.
- There is a core of longstanding and faithful worshippers.
- There is a large 'fringe' congregation, who do not worship regularly, but are there for Messy Church, Story Telling, Christmas services, Remembrance Day and other occasional services.
- Community outreach is taken seriously and members of the congregation take an active part in the running of various local groups using the Church and the Centre.
- The Church is a focal point in the community and its presence is recognised. This has been enhanced with the development of the new Community Centre.
- A good level of pastoral care is shown through visiting the sick and the elderly, with Communion in the home, and the family contact after Baptisms.
- The support and dedication of the congregation over the past four years in the initiative to fund the building of the new Centre.
- There is a well-established planned Giving system in place.

### **Issues:**

- The age profile of regular worshippers. The majority of worshippers at the 10.30 am Parish Communion are aged over 60.
- Messy Church and Story Telling cater for families and young children. However, very few of the younger adults or families attend other church services.
- There is a lack of provision for teaching young people, or for the Messy Church and Story Telling congregations once they outgrow those services.

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- There are no services or teaching accessible to those unfamiliar with Anglican liturgy or in the early stages of finding faith.
- The need to 'risk' adding different formats of worship to our traditional patterns, which may be more accessible to the wider 'non-church' community and to do this without alienating our existing worshippers.
- There need to be stronger relationships with Overleigh St Mary's School, our church-supported school, and with our linked uniformed organisations.
- Links with the other schools within the parish are very limited.
- Regular giving is reducing as the number of 'Planned Giving' parishioners declines, a consequence of having an elderly congregation.
- Regular giving no longer covers the running costs of the church. The surplus from the Parish Centre is helping to cover the gap, but the Centre is unlikely ever to cover completely the church running costs.
- St Mary's is financially very reliant on a small number of very committed regular givers. Most regular givers give well below the average weekly-giving figure.
- A limited number of people are prepared to take on leadership or management roles in the parish, for example, on the PCC or as office holders. The majority of those who do are aged over 60. Unless younger people become more committed to the church, there will be a shortage of PCC members and office holders in 5 to 10 years' time.
- As the Parish Centre continues to flourish, its management structure, systems and procedures will need to be kept under review.

## Parish of St Mary Without-the-Walls Handbridge Chester

### We offer our Rector:

A well-run Parish with a hard-working and experienced support team of Parish Administrator and Verger, plus committed Churchwardens and PCC, together with a band of enthusiastic volunteers.

The dedicated support of a Ministry team, comprising an Assistant Priest (SSM), 4 retired Assistant Clergy, a Reader and an Honorary Reader.

A well-maintained church building with a recently installed new heating system and an updated electrical system. A Quinquennial Report in 2016 identified no major issues.

A new, state of the art, Parish Centre, where the Rector's office is located, placing the Rector at the heart of the community.

Sound financial management of the Parish and financial forecasting in place.

A comfortable 4 bedroomed house in Queen's Park, very close to the River Dee and Meadows, half a mile from the church and a short walk into Chester city centre.



Remembrance Poppies



Children's Service



The Summer Fair



Seaside Parish day out