



St Mary without the Walls, Handbridge, Chester

Our Christian belief is at the heart
of everything we do

2024

PARISH PROFILE

Our Vision

We look forward to welcoming a new Incumbent who will lead us in forming a new vision for our Church.

Appraising opportunities, planning effective action, and empowering us as a living church community to create real change in the world and in our community.

Enabling us to have a greater impact transforming God's world.

It is important to us that our vision encompasses a means by which we can live out our Christian faith in our daily life, Monday to Saturday, not just on a Sunday.

We aspire to do God's work by loving our neighbours and recognise that means serving our community beyond the church walls, including those of all faiths and those of none, in whatever way we can.



Our Church Building

St Mary's without the Walls, Handbridge, is a beautiful, Grade 2 listed, Victorian sandstone building. Occupying a dominant position on a sandstone outcrop south of the river Dee, it is one of the landmarks of the historic city of Chester. Designed in the Early English style, its construction was funded by the first Duke of Westminster, and it was completed in 1887.

There is a planned maintenance programme gradually to replace old repointing work to the exterior sandstone work and replace eroded areas. We spend as much as funding priorities will allow each year.

It does not have a graveyard and stands in lovingly maintained grounds, with the newly built Parish Centre, and car park, located immediately behind it.

A complete new heating system was installed in the church in 2016.

In January 2024, new PA and AV systems were installed.



Our Parish

Predominantly a residential parish incorporating the whole range of schools, Higher Education College, University, older people's supported living facilities, local shops, pubs and parks. Around 9500 people live in the parish, spread across about 4300 households. A quarter of the population are aged over 65, with 14% aged up to 15 years, leaving 60%, or about 5700 people, aged 16 to 65.

This split of ages is not reflected in the St Mary's regular worshipping congregation, where about 80% are aged over 65.

The parish has a number of distinct residential areas, each with their own community groups.

Handbridge village is the oldest part of the parish, mostly built in the 19th century, immediately around the church. There are close links with the Handbridge Community Association.

Queens Park and Curzon Park are residential areas bordering the river, growing up from the later 19th century when the more affluent Cestrians started to build their homes outside the city.

Westminster Park is a large area of housing built from the 1970s onwards. It has its own hub centred around the local shopping parade, Belgrave Primary School and Westminster Park Community Centre. Many regular St Mary's worshippers live in Westminster Park but the links with the Westminster Park community groups are not as close as they could be. Then there is 'wider part' of Handbridge itself - estates where some of the most economically and socially challenged families live.

A large new housing development, Kings Moat, is being built at the southern end of the parish, towards Wales. This will bring several hundred new households into the parish. The population of the parish is largely comfortably off. The median household income in 2021 was £40,257. But not all are well off. 12% of households are in fuel poverty and 8.9% of children are in low income families.

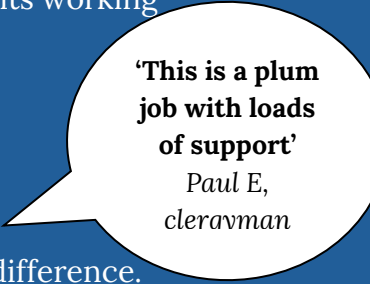
What we would like from our Rector

The opportunity to lead us as we are moving forward together on our journey towards being a fully inclusive church, welcoming all and developing our worship to include prayers in Love & Faith. The person we would love to have leading us will be:

- Joyous, full of faith and prayerfulness.
- Creative and imaginative in worship.
- Sensitive in understanding diverse personal circumstances and committed to inclusivity and respect for everyone.
- A 'people person' who communicates well with everybody, nurtures and grows positive relationships and inspires us to be outward looking.
- A delegator who will keep on top of the detail of running a parish but will delegate the routine to staff, PCC and cluster groups.
- Energetic and resilient, able to bounce back when dealing with challenge.

The key tasks will be:

- To guide us, direct & stir up our Vision for the future of St Mary's, reaching out beyond our walls, into the diversity of this parish.
- To lead us and help us to increase our own ability to witness to and speak about our faith.
- To lead us in our aspiration to live out our Christian faith in our daily life, Monday to Saturday, not just on a Sunday.
- To work with us to shape St Mary's worship and music, reflecting the demographic of the community outside the church walls as well as those within.
- To work collaboratively to encourage everyone to play an active part in all aspects of church life. To see the gifts of those who are quiet and unassuming and give them the confidence to use those gifts in church life.
- Commitment to develop our work with families, children and young adults working alongside our new salaried Children & Families Lead, when appointed.
- To foster a good safeguarding culture in the parish.



'This is a plum job with loads of support'
Paul E,
cleravman

What we can offer our Rector

- Firstly, we offer a very warm welcome.
- An exciting opportunity in a growing parish where you can make a real difference.
- There is a wide range of skills and experience within the PCC
- A series of Cluster groups focus on the work of specific aspects of parish life.
- Our new Parish Centre, opened in 2018, has within it a Rector's office as well as a large hall and smaller community rooms, all with internet access. The Parish Centre has become a community hub and puts the Rector and church at the heart of the community.
- The Rectory is a 4 bedroom detached house in Queen's Park, one of Chester's sought after residential areas. Located close to the river, a 10 minute walk to the church and a 10 minute walk across the nearby footbridge over the river into Chester City Centre and Cathedral. There is a large rear garden, integral double garage and off road parking.
- It is in the catchment area of Overleigh St Mary's Primary CE Primary School (includes Nursery provision) and multiple esteemed secondary schools. Also close to University of Chester and West Cheshire College.



Running our Church

Our Rector shapes and leads the spiritual and pastoral life of the parish with the active support and help of the people of St Mary's, who are:

Clergy: We have 3 Honorary Assistant clergy and one Honorary Parish Reader who support the Rector in leading worship.

Laity: we also draw on the services of lay members for readings at services, leading the intercessions, serving, administering the chalice and occasionally leading services that do not require an ordained minister.

Director of Music: our organist and choir master who leads and develops our musical tradition.

Children and Families Lead: we have budgeted to employ a person to work for up to 20 hours a week to assist the Rector with the vital work of ministry with children and families in the parish. The job description has been written and when our new Rector is in post we will advertise to recruit for this position.

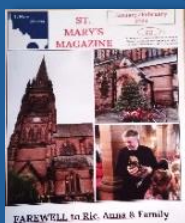
Parish Centre staff: We employ a Parish Administrator who also manages the Parish Centre, 2 Parish Centre Co-Ordinators, 1 Parish Centre Assistant and 2 Parish Centre Cleaners. All are part time.

Volunteers: everything else that happens in the church is done by volunteers. A dedicated band of Church cleaners dust and polish weekly. The grounds are well cared for by our team of volunteer gardeners known as the Unlicensed Lay Weeders who gather as a group once a month but can often be seen tending the grounds at other times. We have flower arrangers, bell ringers, handymen and women, hospitality providers.

Standing Committee: made up of Rector, Churchwardens, PCC Secretary, PCC minutes Secretary and PCC Treasurer. Meets 4 times a year.

PCC: meets 4 times a year. Has 15 members including our 2 church wardens and Deanery Synod representatives.

Cluster Groups: focus on particular aspects of the work of the parish, listed below. Made up of a minimum of 1 PCC member plus other members of St Mary's with an interest or expertise in that particular area. The clusters are: Music and Worship; Community, Mission & Charities; Children and Young People; Communications; Buildings and Environment; Finance; & Centre Management Group.



Worship at St Mary's



Worship at St Mary's is at the heart of our parish life. Our tradition is central to modern catholic, with a focus on sacramental worship. We aim for an inclusive form of worship where you may find the 'traditional' and the 'informal' juxtaposed within one service. Clergy lead our two Sunday morning services.

- 8.00am Holy Communion: a said Common Worship service with a loyal attendance of up to 20 people. Once a month this is followed by Bacon Baps in the parish centre.
- 10.30am Sung Eucharist: a Common Worship service attracting around 80 people. On the second Sunday we offer a simple sung Family Eucharist service. After both 10.30 services, there is coffee and biscuits, to both welcome new faces and socialise with 'catch up chat'. The three 'parade' Sundays a year at Harvest, Remembrance and our Church Dedication include the participation of children and young people from our uniformed organisations, who contribute to the service.

This service is streamed on YouTube. It also goes out to a regular Zoom group, a practice which started during Lockdown. We have continued with Zoom as a growing number of our regular congregation are elderly, or carers and can no longer attend in person. They value the 'Together Apart' sense of being part of the service through Zoom.

- 6.30pm Choral Evensong: the Book of Common Prayer service offered on the second Sunday attracting up to 45 people, including the choir.
- 3.00pm Messy Church: a monthly service on the third Sunday attracting 40-50 children and adults and supported by a dedicated team of up to 15 volunteers. The annual pet service is particularly appreciated.
- Thursday Eucharist: a BCP said service attracting up to 25 people and followed by refreshments in the parish centre.

St Mary's marks Lent with talks, reflections and the service of Compline. We celebrate Holy Week with a Eucharist each evening, to include foot washing on Maundy Thursday. We hold an Advent Carol Service, a Nine Lessons and Carols Service and an Epiphany Carol Service, each of which attract up to 100 people, many from the wider community. In recent years we have introduced a 'Longest Night of the Year' service, a reflective service that recognises Christmas is a difficult time of year for many people. It has attracted up to 50 people and has been well received. Our very popular informal Crib Service on Christmas Eve attracts over 200 children and adults. Our celebration of Christmas at Midnight Mass follows later.



Music at St Mary's

St Mary's has a long tradition of a robed choir leading worship. Members of the congregation frequently comment how much they value the choral tradition and its place in the liturgy. However, we are open to develop & expand our range of music and worship to reflect the wide demographic within the growing parish, drawing in the younger age group

- At the sung Eucharist the choir leads mass settings composed by Peter Nardone (The Kilcreggan Mass), David Thorne and Michael Reynolds, our Director of Music.
- An initiative by the Director of Music has led to the success of choral scholarships, now in its second year. The choral scholars have augmented the voluntary choir enabling us to revive the Anglican tradition of Choral Evensong once a month.
- The Youth Choir (7-14) is invited to sing with the choir once a month during the Family Eucharist service.
- Our well-attended 'Music by the Bridge' monthly evening concerts have a varied content and are a valued contribution in funding the choral scholarships.
- The church is a great space and is used for concerts from outside organisations, which is much valued by the wider community.





Our church without walls



- Luncheon Club every Wednesday – is open to all & well attended by the local community attracting up to 50 people
- Every Friday morning Baby & Toddler Group is a play group for preschool children with their carers (many of which are their grandparents, fathers and child minders.) There are toys, arts and craft activities, music and songs and refreshments. All free of charge
 - We are part of the Churches Together Network in Chester
- We allocate 10% of the surplus income for Parish Centre room hire to charitable causes, choosing 3 charities to support at local, national and international level each year. In 2024, we will be giving to The Larder, Alzheimer's Society and Médecins sans Frontières
 - We support Christian Aid fund raising activities and host some of their events
 - We support the McMillan Cancer Big Coffee Morning
- We support West Cheshire Food Bank having donated several tons of food over the last 12 months



Discover what goes on at St Mary's

- Our newly built Parish Centre, opened in 2018, is a much-needed Community Hub, used by a wide range of groups and has room hire bookings for everything from social events to support groups to everything in between
- Neo Natal Baby Unit. Following a request for baby hats for the neo natal unit at the local hospital we worked in collaboration with the WI to knit them. At the request of the hospital, we extended our efforts to include baby jackets and blankets, for both the neo natal and the maternity wards. Our knitters were just as pleased to be able to knit for a good cause as the hospitals were to receive the items and we now support 3 hospitals in this way.
- Our annual Christmas Fair raises funds for the work of the church and is well supported by the wider community
- Barn Dance & Thai Evening Fundraisers both attracted the community beyond the church walls



Who might you find within or without our walls?



- Uniformed organisations
- The Unlicensed Lay Weeders
 - Bellringers
 - Servers
- Cleaning Brigade
 - Florists
- Maintenance Team
 - Coffee Makers
 - Clergy
- St Mary's Handbridge Centre Team
 - Choir



Everything at St Mary's is underpinned by a robust Safeguarding Policy. We have a dedicated member of the congregation who undertakes the role of overseeing its implementation.



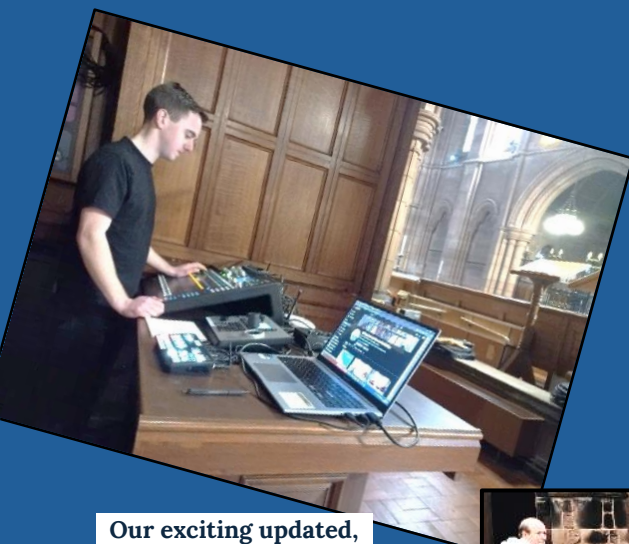
Our Finances



Helen (Treasurer) with Linda, counting the pennies! All money counted under dual control, as per best banking practice!

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.

- Nearly every year since 2012, our income has exceeded our expenditure, an exception being in 2018 when most of the building cost of our new Parish Centre was paid out and in 2016 when a new heating system was installed in church.
- Most of our income comes from our Planned Giving Stewardship programme and the associated Gift Aid.
- Planned giving is entirely by standing order.
- Regular teaching and preaching on Christian Stewardship principles maintains giving levels.
- Systems are in place to ensure careful stewardship of our financial resources through annual budgeting. The cluster groups manage their own spending. A rigorous authorisation system is in place for any sudden, unforeseen expenditure.
- We try to spend money wisely directing as much as we can towards mission and ministry.
- Contactless card giving now in place and increasing. There is scope to do more with electronic giving. We do not yet have a donation button on our website, Facebook page or YouTube Channel.
- We are currently advertising for a Children & Family Lead (salaried) to bring the next generation to know the love of God & to be part of the family of the church.



Our exciting updated, newly purchased Audio Visual system hot off the press!



Looking out from St Mary's into the community



Matching the mortar of the brickwork for re-pointing





Our School Overleigh St Mary's

**"Our
relationship with
our church goes
much deeper"**

So says Emma, our Head teacher

'At Overleigh St Mary's CE Primary school we consider ourselves very fortunate in having the parishioners and clergy of St Mary's Without the Walls as very much part of our school family. The relationship is very active and mutually beneficial to the lives of our children and all in school and church alike. Our children visit church for special services and celebrations as well as part of their learning in history and RE and the incumbent is on our governing body.

However, our close relationship with our church goes much deeper than that, with the incumbent leading weekly worship in school which is embedded into the whole school termly plans. It is demanding and requires plenty of creativity to engage with nearly 500 children from 3 years to 11 years of age! It is wonderful to see members of the church getting to know the children, staff and families as individuals by name, and being positive role models living out our school Christian values. Church members are also key in widening enrichment opportunities for our community; for example together we founded and continue to run a community pop up clothes shop serving all ages from tiny babies to adults.

The relationship and support for school from church has grown significantly over the last four years. However, we are not complacent and wish to continue to grow together and further strengthen opportunities for clergy and parishioners to actively support school and the work of the children in positively impacting on their community. For example, we would like to establish a weekly prayer space, strengthen the development of our Peace Garden and work together on projects to enable the children to actively promote and demonstrate their values in the community, enriching lives for all.'



Contacts



The Parish of St Mary Without-the-Walls
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Website: <http://www.stmaryshester.co.uk/p/contact.html>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StMaryHandbridge>
Youtube: [@stmaryschurchhandbridge8838](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8838)

The Parish Office is open as follows:

Monday	9am - 3pm
Tuesday	9am - 3pm
Wednesday	9am - 3pm
Thursday	9am - 3pm
Friday	9am - 3pm

Churchwardens

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David Gilburt

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