

ST MARY'S BILLINGSHURST



Photo: Elizabeth Connor

Annual Review – 2025

Introduction (David Beal)

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel." (*Philippians 1.3-5*) When he writes to the churches, Paul often includes a thanksgiving for the church towards the start of the letter. This one, written to the church in Philippi, is particularly warm and heartfelt. Not surprising, the church at Philippi had grown from the conversion of Lydia through Paul's preaching, and Paul had spent some time there growing this new church.

These words of Paul's reflect my sense of thanksgiving as we look back over 2025 at St. Mary's. The pages that follow tell the story of the life of our church during the year, and it is a story that would not be possible without the talents, the commitment, and above all the faith of each and every one of you. Our life together is a real partnership in the Gospel, and there is so much to be thankful for. Through the work that we all share in we reach out to people in our community, we provide help to those in need, we share the good news of Jesus, and we care for the buildings and the environment that we have been blessed with. All this, and more, is contained in the reports that make up this review. I am truly grateful to be a part of this church fellowship.

And why do we do all this? Simply out of gratitude to God for his great love for us through Jesus Christ; out of a desire to grow closer to God, and the need to draw others to encounter Jesus.

Just as I share Paul's sense of thanksgiving as I reflect on our church, so too I share his prayer for the future: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God." (*Philippians 1.9-11*)

Churchwardens Report (Stuart Wallace and Tony Duffy)

It has been a full and encouraging year in the life of our church, with much to give thanks for across the worship, the community life, and the stewardship of our buildings.

Our programme of social events continues to flourish. We were delighted to host two excellent concerts: the Rock Choir in the spring and the Slinfold Concert Orchestra in the autumn. Both were very well received and drew strong attendance from within the parish and beyond. Following this success, we intend for the orchestra concert to become an annual fixture, with the Rock Choir returning on a biennial basis. Our two parish quizzes were once again sold out and remain a popular and enjoyable means of bringing people together while raising valuable funds.

The major festivals were marked with well-attended and meaningful services. Our Easter celebrations included the now-established Sunrise Service in Jubilee Fields, followed by a joint 10:00am service, both of which were supported by good congregations. At Christmas, the Carol Service on Christmas Eve filled the church to capacity, undoubtedly helped by its timing and its place within a wider sequence of seasonal events, including the Walking Nativity. Now in its third year, the Walking Nativity saw around 1,000 people follow a new route across the community, despite challenging weather. Improvements to staging helped the event run smoothly and made it a memorable occasion for all involved.

Within the church buildings, a great deal has been achieved. Stuart has worked tirelessly in redecorating the church hall, kitchen, and lavatories, which has made a noticeable difference to the appearance and usability of these spaces. The former bookshop in St Mary's Room has been repurposed effectively as a chair store and cleaner's cupboard, helping us to make better use of available space.

Significant work has begun on the church spire, a major project that will continue into 2026. As is often the case with such undertakings, costs have risen due to unforeseen circumstances, and we will need to remain mindful of this as the project progresses. Looking ahead, we are exploring ideas such as the sale of commemorative shingles and a sponsored climb to help support fundraising efforts. In connection with this work, Stuart has also undertaken Health and Safety training for working at heights.

Routine maintenance and safety compliance have been carefully attended to. The boilers in both the church and hall, fire extinguishers, lightning conductor, and the tower fall-arrest system have all been inspected, tested, and passed as required, ensuring that our buildings remain safe and fit for purpose.

It is also encouraging to note an increase in church attendance over the year, alongside the welcome involvement of some of our younger members serving at joint services. These are positive signs for the future life of the parish.

Following the APCM, Tony Duffy and Stuart Williams were elected as Churchwardens. We extend our sincere thanks to Sylvia for her hard work and dedication over recent years. Our gratitude also goes to all the teams who contribute so much to making our church and churchyard welcoming and well cared for. Finally, we thank David and Mary for their time, leadership, and commitment, which continue to sustain and strengthen the life of this church.

Choir (Susie Duffy)

2025 was another good year for the choir, marked by their commitment, musical growth and strong sense of shared purpose. Through their willingness to attend rehearsals and strive for excellence, the choir has continued to enhance our worship every week and at key services throughout the year.

Special thanks, as always, to Michael as our organist, whose musicianship continues to underpin all that the choir achieves. Once again, he brought versatility and flair to the organ voluntaries, alongside highly accomplished hymn accompaniments.

We were very grateful to Tony Warren for setting the psalm for each Choral Evensong and to Stuart for his thoughtful selection of hymns each Sunday.

At the monthly Choral Evensong service, the choir delivered anthems including 'My Faith Looks Up to Thee' and 'Lead, Kindly Light'. Barbara's daughter, Debbie, continued to join us each month, enriching the sound with her lovely soprano voice. In a moving tribute to our much-missed choir member, Tom Mullen, the choir sang one of his favourite hymns, 'I Cannot Tell', as our anthem in July.

The choir's Summer Outing to Arundel with David and Mary for a shared picnic was a much-enjoyed opportunity for members to strengthen bonds of friendship and fellowship. After a veritable feast of sausage rolls, sandwiches, cakes and homemade scones, some uplifting songs by the lake rounded off a lovely afternoon.

Our December services included an atmospheric Advent Service of Light and a joyful and well-attended Carol Service on Christmas Eve. We were joined by the Lowe family and by Mike Tooley, whose contributions created a wonderfully full and rich choir sound. Once again, Hannah delivered a superb solo on 'Once in Royal David's City' with effortless confidence. Our choir also joined with members of the local Rock Choir to form a special Nativity Choir to lead the carols for the village's Walking Nativity, accompanied by the Petworth Town Band.

Looking ahead, the choir would greatly benefit from more members to strengthen its sound and broaden its repertoire. There is no audition process and the ability to read music is not required. New members would be warmly welcomed, even if they are unable to commit to singing every week.

Worship Band (Jo Eames)

"Praise him with trumpets. Praise him with harps and lyres. Praise him with drums and dancing. Praise him with harps and flutes." Amen! These words from Psalm 150 (v3-4) underpin St Mary's Worship Band's desire to serve God and our church family in shared musical worship.

The Worship Band continues to serve in the weekly 9:30 service and monthly/other joint services, enjoying sharing musical worship with the organ and choir too. We've also supported additional worship times for our church family to celebrate major festivals such as Easter and Pentecost, as well as serving our wider community with playing for the Scouts & Guides carol service, and providing music in the church for the wonderful village nativity.

Following feedback from members of our church family, we've been pleased to include more British Sign Language signing with some of our songs.

The band members enjoy fellowship, prayer, musical development (and sometimes jelly for birthdays!) on Thursday evenings in church, rehearsing songs for Sunday services but also trying new repertoire and playing favourite songs together in a way that leads us into God's presence and keeps us "getting fed". Band membership (all volunteers) has remained consistent for a few years but we welcome enquiries if anyone new wants to join the team. Our approach is to welcome new musicians from the congregation into our Thursday gatherings to help us get to know one-another and the repertoire, before exploring possibly joining the worship team in leading services.

This year, we've continued to encourage the young people in our church family to play some songs in services. On occasions you may have spotted different younger drummers and we've also had some ukulele in our worship. Some of the youngsters are starting to suggest and request songs.

We've enjoyed bringing in some new repertoire this year, including some very new modern worship songs as well as some older classics that are new to the band. We aim to find a mix of songs to meet the needs of our congregation, and always welcome suggestions/ideas/feedback.

The 'new' software for projection has been working well (helping us remove the need to print lots of sheets of weekly lyrics for the congregation) and we have a small team running this on a Sunday. It's quite easy to use during the service, so if you could help out with this on occasion, please get in contact so we can grow the team.

Sacristan (Kathy FitzPatrick)

The duties of a Sacristan are varied - the main one is to get everything ready for all the communion services. This entails getting the silver vessels ready with the appropriate white linen cloths, counting out the wafers, filling up the flagon with wine and trimming the candles.

The coloured altar frontals and vestments have to be changed according to the appropriate season eg: for Easter they are white and for Pentecost they are red.

Washing, ironing and starching the linen is another job to be done each week.

The Sacristan is also responsible for ordering the wine, wafers, palm crosses and candles so that they never run out.

I don't think I would change anything- it is a privilege to be trusted to be the Sacristan.

At some point I will be giving up the role, however Christina Arnold and Sylvia Tilley will be taking over. May the joys of starching linen be ever with them!

Brass Cleaning (Marion Brown)

This is one of those tasks that often not fully appreciated until it is done! Fortunately at St Mary's we are blessed with a faithful team of brass cleaners who keep our brass shiny and bright. We have 22 volunteers who cover our fortnightly rota for cleaning. We work in pairs so that means roughly two commitments a year.

Thank you so much to all who willingly volunteer. More volunteers are always welcome.

Bell Ringers (Vicky Chase)

St. Mary's bellringers have managed to ensure that the bells have rung for every Sunday service this year, taking turns between the early and later services. We were also able to ring for every Christmas Service, including Midnight Mass and rang out the bells for the New Year.

However, our band of bellringers is slowly dwindling and we are struggling to attract new bellringers to our practices. We are only occasionally able to ring all eight bells on Sundays, when bellringers from other towers join us, but mostly we have to be content with only five or six bells being rung. We would warmly invite both new and returning bell ringers to join us.

Our band is ably managed by Tower Captain Vicky Chase and the bells maintained by Steeplekeeper Kevin Quigley.

Despite our limited numbers, the St. Mary's band of bellringers look forward to another year of enriching the community by providing the timeless sound of church bells ringing out over Billingshurst.

Prayer Chain (Angela Burroughs)

The team marked the end of Linda's long tenure of St Mary's Prayer Chain in the Autumn of 2025 thankfully managing to keep her on as a much-valued adviser and team member.

The general consensus amongst the team has been to keep to the format and system that has worked well for so long, including meeting together periodically for a cup of tea and very nice cakes.

At our recent get together we talked about the slight drop in numbers of people being prayed for, mostly because of prayers being answered and sometimes when someone has

come to the end of their life here on Earth. We felt that we should remind everyone more often about the postcards that can be found in the tower and on the noticeboard in St Mary's Room, which invite anyone who either needs or knows someone who needs prayer, to contact us via email or letter. All the details are on the card.

Anyone referring somebody, or themselves, is asked to send regular updates so that our team is able to offer up prayers that are timely and relevant to the situation.

Our team comprises 15 people who are always ready to hear of any new or urgent needs to pray for, in addition to the three other names that they have been delegated to pray for on that month's prayer lists. We all agreed that it would be really great to welcome more people on board who would join our prayer team. It requires only a commitment to add some names to their own prayers and it would enable us to reach out to more and more people.

prayerchain@stmarysbillingshurst.org

Prayers (Andrew Colwell)

We are at our most humble when we come before God and pray. Our very posture of asking our Father to provide for us what we cannot provide for ourselves and that all that He does provide shall be for His glory should remind us of our smallness and His awesomeness.

The only way to improve in prayer is to practice: practice alone, practice in public. This practice may not be comfortable but it will lead to a more intimate relationship with God. He will reward those who eagerly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Come and practice your prayer every morning at 09:00 every week from Monday to Saturday. Come and practice your prayer as an intercessor at our regular services. Come and practice your prayer at our silent services on the first Friday of each month. Come and practice your prayer with the Healing prayer ministry at both the 09:30 Service and the 11:00 service. Ask the person sitting next to you in the pew "Will you pray for me" or "Can I pray for you".

Practice your prayer as you read your Bibles, let God speak into your soul and let your soul reply in hymns of thanks. Abba, Father! (Romans 8:14-17) The more God's word resides in you the more willing you will be to pray. Let Prayer be the adventure of your life.

Baby Zone (Emma Eade)

Baby Zone provides a regular, safe and loving place for new Mums (& Dads) to come with their babies, and be offered drinks and snacks that they don't have to make themselves! They can relax, chat, make new friends, swap advice and share concerns. This reduces isolation and helps overcome postnatal depression (PND).

We also held regular swap shops where families could swap outgrown clothes and toys for the next stage up.

Baby Zone is appreciated by the local community and of course our families. We have a wonderful and committed team who we simply could not run without. It has been a joy to work together with other churches to better support our community at the Billingshurst Show, Billingshurst Primary School summer fun day, Weald Fest and Family fun day. It has also been good to work with other organisations such as Sing and sign, to provide a variety of activities to our families.

As ever, our challenge going forward will be to maintain our good work in the community, and to strengthen our wonderful and supportive team of volunteers. We have an excellent, but small team of volunteers, but would greatly benefit from another who could help during school holidays.

Another ongoing challenge is reaching new parents to let them know we are there for them. We have found our best method for reaching families is word of mouth. We have thousands of flyers which we regularly hand out (especially at events such as the Billingshurst Show). There is usually a supply of these in the entrance to SMR, so please feel free to pass them to families with new babies.

We have refreshed our webpages and are looking for ways to improve our digital presence.

Thank you to St Mary's for their ongoing prayers and support with this important outreach.

Children and Family Ministry (Beth Little)

First I need to say thank you to the many people who have supported children's ministry in so many ways this past year: volunteers who give so many hours to Sunday School and Messy Church, everyone who has been praying for our events and for individual children, people who have worked behind the scenes to make events happen, kitchen helpers, and everyone who has lent a hand cleaning up after the messes we make! Your prayerful and practical support means children in our church family and community have so many opportunities to hear the good news, experience God's welcome and love, and chances to respond in faith.

Our relationship with the primary school feels fragile this school year; please hold that in your prayers. Whereas once they invited church leaders to come in and do assemblies every week, they've reallocated us to every third week, and there have been many scheduling difficulties, cancellations, and double bookings which feel ominous.

Our regular groups have flourished. Sunday school had 21 children attend over the year and we explored the parables during the first part of the year and "meals with Jesus" in the autumn: stories from the Gospels about how Jesus sought out all kinds of people – and seeks out each one of us - to invite to his eternal banquet. Messy Church also focused on the parables in 2025 and had 86 children with 61 parents/carers attend over the year. We have a lot of "regulars" at Messy Church for whom this is their main place of worship. I'm keen to keep inviting them to other events at St. Mary's and our neighbouring churches, because meeting once a month is not enough for discipleship! For many families who can't make Sunday mornings, having a variety of times, dates, and welcoming groups in which to worship and learn is crucial. Toddler church is another of these groups; a mum of 2-year-old twins expressed to me how difficult it can be to bring the children to a formal Sunday service (don't I remember!), but she values the weekly time to bring her children to learn more about God and find Christian fellowship for herself on Wednesdays.

Hospitality team (Sharon Ashborn)

The hospitality team have been kept busy over the last 12 months with various functions including a concert and the Easter breakfast as our most recent events.

I have a dedicated team of helpers who are very much appreciated and without them the hospitality would be almost impossible.

I would like to express my thanks to each and every individual who has helped out in anyway over the last 12 months with the hospitality we offer at St Mary's. It's a vital role and really does show love to others through provision of high-quality food which is served with love! I have had one or two of my regular bakers having to step down due to aging and health concerns so the team is a little smaller than I would like so if there are any others out in the community who would like to be involved in this wonderful ministry I would sincerely love to hear from you! You don't have to be a star baker but if you have something that you're particularly fond of making, I would really love to hear from you! You don't have to help at every event and it's perfectly okay to say no if your diary is too busy at the time of the function I'm asking for help with.

Hope that makes sense!

Thank you again to everyone who has helped both in preparing setting up and clearing away-it's all part and parcel of what the team do!

Here's to the blessings of the coming year and the hospitality it will bring.

St Mary's Guild (Beryl Peacock)

2025 was an enjoyable year. Our membership remains much the same. We have the benefit of having known each other for a long time. We have shared the precious moments in life, both happy and sad, but we have the support and friendship of long term friends, for which we are truly thankful. We are living in a caring community with our members feeling the guidance and support of our beliefs.

We had various meetings. One of our members helped us make cards. We had afternoon tea. We also had a quiz and a very enjoyable Christmas meeting. We also have speakers occasionally.

Several of our members knitted teddies for charity – for children in need through war, family breakdown and illness. The teddies travel abroad, or stay in this country. To date we have sent 800.

Life is often challenging but we are sustained by our belief in the Lord.

We may be a small group, but we make the best of the life we have been given and are proud to be called St Mary's Guild.

Church Sitters (Val Weobley)

This year has again been one where we have been able to open the church during the week. We have continued to welcome individuals, families, small groups and on occasions large groups. The variety of reasons for visitors is extensive. Tourists come to look around the church and are interested in the history and architectural features. Local people frequently come in and explain they were passing and the church is open and so they came in to look around. On these occasions we try to offer the chance to get involved in church activities: Babyzone, Toddlers Church, Prayer Chain Sunday Services. There are also those people who need to come and have a few moments peace and bring their problems and worries to God.

Friendly Lunches (Dawn O'Dowd)

The first Friendly Lunch was held on 29th November 1996 and, apart from Covid years, the lunches have continued to run on the first Sunday of the month during the winter ever since. A BIG thank you goes to Hazel Barnes for all the hard work and time she has given to the lunches over so many years, from the original set up to coordinating the team for almost 30 years. She has recently relinquished the reins.

We held five Sunday lunches last winter from October to March, omitting January. We are a team of five who take our turn to organise one of the meals. The meals have been well attended and enjoyed by many, with a high of 36 guests in February. The Christmas meal is extra special with roast turkey and all the trimmings and a glass (or two) of wine. It is a lovely way for St. Mary's to reach out to the wider community, giving anyone who would otherwise be eating on their own the opportunity to share a meal and the company of others.

My thanks go to all the organisers, helpers and transport providers. We would really appreciate more people to volunteer to organise one of the meals or just to help on the day.

The Sanctuary (Sharon Ashborn)

Running the sanctuary has been one of the biggest privileges of my life so far! Starting with a vision from God this has evolved into a wonderful small community of ladies who meet regularly to focus on well-being and scripture while being nurtured loved and supported through friendships and conversations.

Together with Lucia we provide a safe space for ladies to come and be heard to be included and to be welcomed. It is a space to explore scripture together as well as focus our intentions on various different topics of well-being. We always begin and end every session in prayer.

Each session is unique-some are full of laughter and fun others take a more gentle approach if the subject is sensitive or difficult in any way. Each week brings different ladies who come and go according to schedules and needs which means every session is different with different characters and personalities which we embrace!

There is no obligation or commitment and we run standalone sessions so there is no feeling left out if you missed the session before!

We provide refreshments which the ladies take turns to bring and is a wonderful way to show love and hospitality as well as to enjoy different treats. We have some super talented bakers in our midst!

God has been answering some BIG prayers for us and I am very thankful to everyone who supports this ministry with encouragement as well as prayers.

It would be wonderful to see this community grow and we have an open door policy for any lady regardless of faith age or dress size to be welcomed in.

For further details, please just come and chat to me whenever you see me at church or around the village (those who know me know I always love to chat!)

Looking forward to seeing what God has in store for us this year.

Love and blessings,

Sharon and Lucia xx

Healing Prayer Ministry (Tina Woodhead)

Regular prayer for healing was introduced to both our Sunday morning services this year and was undertaken two Sundays in November and one Sunday in December. It is provided by a trained team of sixteen people who have completed Acorn Christian Foundation's Growing a Healing Ministry Course and is done in pairs. It is hoped this will settle into a pattern of 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month.

To launch there was a Healing Service on October 19th when the Healing Prayer Ministry Team was also commissioned. It is hoped to have another dedicated Healing Service in the autumn of 2026.

The offer of prayer has not always been taken up every service but hopefully it will become a valued part of Sunday morning worship. Consideration is also being given to accessibility for everyone.

The aim is to reach the congregation with not just prayers for physical healing but also for emotional and spiritual needs as well.

Friendly Voice (Dawn O'Dowd)

Billingshurst Friendly Voice was set up during COVID in 2020 to make calls and have a friendly chat with anyone who felt lonely and isolated. We have continued making the calls, though the number of people receiving the calls is now much reduced. We now only make calls to a couple of people - one weekly and the other twice weekly. We have a team of 14 active volunteers who happily make the calls when asked, which is typically once a month. Over the past 6 years we have made more than 2000 calls in total.

Tony Warren played a large part in the team and we will all miss him very much.

If anyone would welcome a Friendly Voice call, or knows of someone else who would, we can be contacted at friendlyvoicebilli@gmail.com.

Street Pastors (Emma Fogg)

CELEBRATE! During this month of May 2026 we will celebrate thirteen years of continuous service to the people we meet in our village: caring, listening and helping in practical ways anyone we encounter day or night.

We are delighted to report that we have received some very generous funding over the past few months which will enable us to train up and uniform two new recruits whilst covering our insurance fees and expenses for the next two years. This is a wonderful answer to prayer and we are most grateful to Billingshurst Parish Council, Sussex Police "Safer in Sussex" Fund, Churches Together in Billingshurst, Legal & General "Social Value" Fund and a private donation from within our congregation in St. Mary's. Thank you all for supporting our work.

We have been operating with six fully trained Street Pastors for some while but will soon be joined by a seventh for which we give thanks. We would still love to have more recruits join us. Send a message to our email address if you'd like to find out more information. All training is fully funded and you can come out with us as an Observer on a patrol so please do get in touch with us by email at billingshurst@streetpastors.org.uk if you are interested. There is no upper age limit but you need to be over 18 years of age to begin your training.

CHALLENGES! Our initiative is underpinned by the work of our amazing Prayer Pastors. Most have been with us for the past thirteen years and all provide faithful, essential service behind the scenes. All of them would be very happy to welcome new members to the group. If you have a couple of hours to spare every month we would love to hear from you. Our patrols typically run between 10am to midday or 2:30 - 4:30pm during the day and 9pm to midnight during the evening. Often Prayer Pastors will come to the URC Hall (our base) during the day and evening, but you can pray from your home if you are contactable by phone. Contact us at billingshurst@streetpastors.org.uk if you are interested.

Our AGM takes place on *Tuesday 9th June @ 7pm in St Mary's Room*. Come and hear what is happening and share light refreshments after a short meeting.

We will have a stand at the *Weald Fest on Saturday 18th July 2026* (11:30am to 9:45pm ending with a Firework Display). This will be a great community event for all the family so do have a look online and put the date in your diary.

Flowers (Yvonne Tooley and Kate Botting)

The Flower Team has had a busy year and we hope you have enjoyed the flowers in the church. We are very pleased to have been able to provide at least one arrangement in the church throughout the year as well as working together to decorate St Mary's at every festival. Our fundraising coffee and flowers morning was very well supported and enjoyed by both the team and our guests! The money raised covers the cost of the flowers we use for Easter, Pentecost, Harvest and Christmas.

It is recommended that all churches should make their flower arrangements more sustainable and use locally grown flowers whenever possible. We no longer use floral foam and much of the foliage we use is from our own gardens. It is more difficult to use home grown flowers in the winter months but we are using garden flowers and locally sourced flowers whenever we can.

A major challenge this year was finding a new flower supplier: for many years Pat Cannons had ordered flowers for us and was very generous with both advice and a good price. In October Pat retired and closed the nursery. We thanked her for her long association with St Mary's.

Jill Price has arranged flowers at St Mary's for many years and we are very grateful for everything she has done. Although she is now not on our rota, we are delighted that she is still happy to help when the team works together. Sadly, Mary Slaney is no longer able to be involved and we thank her for all her hard work and for encouraging us to look at alternative ideas for arrangements.

A huge thank you to our hardworking and enthusiastic team for all you have done this year. We are, of course, keen to welcome new members!

Maintenance Team (Les Botting)

Sadly Alan Gosling, our former leader for some forty years, died on Palm Sunday at the age of 94.

Reg Styles has returned to the team for his week-day mowing activities. On Saturday mornings four team members carry out routine maintenance.

The tasks include mowing, mower maintenance, strimming, hedge trimming, drain and gutter cleaning, weeding, pruning, emptying memorial garden waste bins, roof tile replacement, plumbing repairs, etc.

Other items of work this year include:

1. Repair of a leak in SMR roof by Stuart Wallace.
2. Removal of cracked mortar at threshold of SMR French windows and replacement with aluminium plate.
3. Valley gutter repointing at SMR.
4. Root removal from SMR foul manhole.
5. Trimming of vegetation around log cabin and storage of pallets.
6. Storage of tower scaffold in shed behind SMR kitchen.
7. Replacement of broken lid to water can box at east end of church.

We failed to repair and paint the cast iron gutters on the north and south sides of the church and we were unable to clean the valley gutters over the east end of the church.

St Mary's Room (Edna Bengner)

'From the cradle to the grave'; St Mary's Room has something for everyone and we are keen to meet the needs of the community, to offer to all who use it a warm, light, welcoming

space, accessible to young and old, which also meets Health and Safety and Safeguarding standards.

We continue to serve refreshments between the 9.30 and the 11am services, with two teams; one to set up and serve and another to clear away in order that those setting up and serving coffee may get away in time for the 11am services. Coffee and Chat meet on the second Saturday in the month and we host the Seniors' Coffee Club on Monday mornings. Table tennis follows on Monday afternoons. St Mary's Guild meet every first and third Tuesday morning of the month whilst Babyzone meet on Tuesday afternoons, offering support to new babies and their mums. Wednesday Group meets during the autumn and winter. The Sanctuary, run by Sharon and Lucia is held twice a month on Thursday evenings. We are the popular choice of venue for all of the Lent Lunches, which our friends at Churches Together in Billingshurst take it in turn to organize. Friendly Lunches are as popular as ever during the winter, although sadly with the demise of some. The NHS hire the hall for vaccination days during school holidays.

SMR continues to be a work in progress as we recognize that investment in the room is essential for the comfort and accessibility of current and potential users. During the Summer, Stuart painted all the walls and the carpet was deep cleaned. We are aware that some of the chairs are looking somewhat the worse for wear and that we need to either clean, refurbish or replace so that will be the next project. Our coffee machine, after many years' faithful service, had to be replaced and was generously funded by the Wednesday Group. Thanks again go to Colin for keeping the room (and my office) clean and tidy.

Safeguarding (Durell Barnes)

Safeguarding remains a central focus of the vicar and the parish safeguarding officer. It features on every parochial church council meeting agenda and awareness is strong. This is essential in a parish where there is extensive work with children, young people and potentially vulnerable adults. No serious incidents have occurred but this awareness will be important if any significant concerns were to arise. The requirements of the Church of England in this area are rightly stringent and we are well under way with ensuring that the right policies are in place, appropriate checks have been undertaken and risks assessed. Progress with these has been slower than would be ideal owing to volunteers' time commitments, but the existence of the required action plan and dashboard monitors means that we are going in the right direction. We have developed good relations with the staff at the diocesan safeguarding office and they are extremely helpful.

Health and Safety (Tim Foulsham)

The church's Health and Safety Policy is still being upgraded to make it more manageable.

All certificates and inspections are currently up to date.

H&S assessments are made for all church activities including events like the Nativity Procession. There have been no incidents left unmanaged.

Health and Safety continues to be a permanent item of the PCC agenda. It covers a wide range of matters.

Many thanks once again to those who look after the church and keep it safe and clean. The same also to those who similarly look after SMR. Also, a big thank you to our wonderful church's maintenance team who do a fantastic job keeping the church, SMR and especially the churchyard neat, clean and safe, and saving the church a huge amount of money. Volunteers to help on the maintenance team are always welcome and whatever time you can give would be much welcome.

Transformation (Tim Foulsham)

Transformation Project Annual Review May 2026 Much of the past year has been spent in looking at floor options combined with heating options. The two are very much integrated. All sorts of combinations have been explored. Various experts have visited and offered views. Plans have altered and are still being developed accordingly. Plans have also developed further with the works in the tower, with the possibility of having a second but smaller toilet installed on the south side of the lobby opposite the disabled toilet. This will also avoid disturbing the large York flagstones, In mid March 2026 a new order of costs was received, but this too is likely to be revised. A summary of the costs is on a separate sheet. 2025's report ended by summarising a meeting April 2025 attended by Emma Arbuthnot, chair of the Chichester DAC, Alma Howell of Historic England and Simon Dyson, Church Architect. One consideration was infilling the side aisles instead of dropping the aisle platforms, saving potentially £50,000. Infilling the whole floor of the church was discussed but met with little enthusiasm either from Dr Arbuthnot or Alma Howell. A plan of possible infill was requested and has since been produced. The questions of how to adapt or replace our present heating system, how to avoid endangering ourselves of massive costs, and what in the long run is going to help our church reach zero carbon by the CofE's target of 2030 are under continual consideration. Options were clarified following a visit by an M&E consultant Andrew Dougherty 10.09.2025 who with his experience of old cast iron piping suggested that modifying such pipe runs was a risky venture. This was particularly addressed to the pipes in the aisles. He thought a better approach was to remove these altogether and install underfloor heating. This could be done in stages. A potentially significant moment to us was

at the end of January 2026 Simon Dyson came across a heating system on display by a company called Ultra-Fin at a Listed Property Show in Olympia. This system places heating pipes and fins within existing floor joists. Simon learnt that this new system had been installed at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden and at the end of March Simon and Tim visited the church to find out more. The observations were promising. At the end of April directors from Ultra-Fin, Sussex Floor Restoration, and Surrey Energy Centre, as well as DAC architects met in St Mary's to discuss with Simon Dyson and a team from St Mary's possibilities for heating St Mary's and reaching zero carbon. This meeting again clarified the best heating possibilities for the church and what we should avoid. Of significant note was the strong recommendation from Ultra-Fin not to disturb the earth under the floorboards. From various access points they could see in their experience the strong likelihood of tombs. Simon Dyson has long suggested this could well be the case. We are now again looking at infilling the church flooring totally to the level of the pew plinths. This is not without its own problems. There is a potential trip hazard resulting from a small difference in floor level between the nave and chancel. Ramps will be needed at the entrance into the nave from the tower. The infill will need to be made sensitively as the York stone inside the church will be covered. The DAC and amenity bodies such as Historic England have already expressed reservations about such a plan. However, as Simon Dyson commented, anything is possible, but the question is how much money does it cost? The Surrey Energy Centre are eager to engage with us, helping through their experience to plot a route map of how a heating system can be integrated with the actual generating of heat using heat pumps and battery storage. They are already working with Guildford Diocese in helping churches in this way. A meeting with them has been arranged. Meanwhile Ultra-Fin are putting together a cost feasibility study using different options. Their own heating system can be used within the existing floor platforms and a different Jupiter heating system in the floor infills. They believe that persuading the DAC and amenity bodies that raising the floor levels in the church to the best option will be its cost effectiveness compared to other options. As far as fundraising goes, the prospect of receiving money from Horsham District Council from their capital funds as well as S106 developer contributions has not materialised, with other community projects winning out. However, HDC do award grants for carbon related projects so Tim is eager to get a carbon-reducing plan for St Mary's in place for reducing carbon emissions and thereby gaining grants this way. Main fundraising will really only be possible when the plans are finalised and the DAC has approved them. This will be another chapter in the project.

Order of Cost 15.02.2026

PHASE 1	1	Take down the Morris screen and doors at the entrance in the tower and adapt for re-use as the screens to the Vestry at the east end of the north aisle	33,000.00
	2	Up-grade the existing glass doors into the nave doors so they are powered, new glass doors and refurbish existing external doors	112,000.00
	3	2 Nr WC's, one Accessible	86,000.00
	4	Drainage runs	41,500.00
			272,500.00
PHASE 2 / 3	5	Remove the pews to the south and north aisles and raise the aisle floor level to match the pew platforms.	67,000.00
	6	Form timber enclosures to the heating pipes that run along the outside walls	17,000.00
	7	Re-order the west end of the north aisle currently enclosed by a screen to form a new servery and enclose the electrical cupboards. Includes CCTV, Smoke and Fire alarm, new Emergency Lighting.	124,000.00
	8	Save cost by recycling flooring	
	9	Remove the pews to choir stall area at the front of the nave, and lower the pew plinths to create a large level area at the front of the church. Using new wood.	32,000.00
	10	Chancel. Adapt altar to include runners	5,000.00
			245,000.00
Variation B			
Remove all of the pews a lay new limestone flooring to the Nave. Keeping pews in side aisles. Including underfloor heating ans supplementary heaters.			300,000.00
Variation C			
Remove all of the pews a lay new oak flooring to the Nave. Keeping pews in side aisles. Including underfloor heating and supplementary heaters.			273,000.00