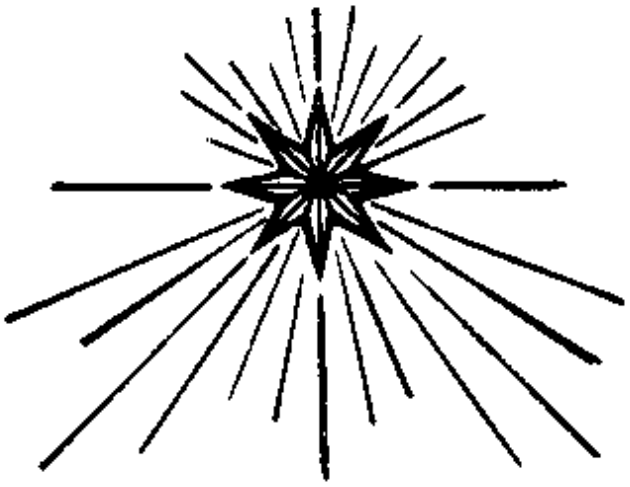
The Quarterly Magazine

St. Mary's, Carden Place

Christmas 2025



WHERE MEEK SOULS WILL

"No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in." It's a line from the carol: "O Little Town of Bethlehem". It's also a concise summary of the Christmas message: Jesus came into our broken world to rescue us from selfishness and to invite us into a living relationship with God.

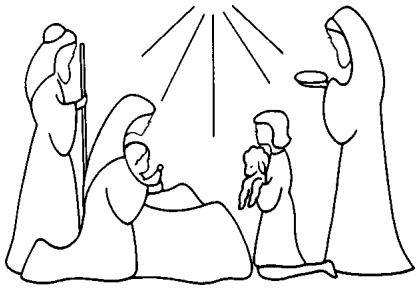
The carol's author was Phillips Brooks (1868). In a letter to a colleague, Brooks described this relationship in his own life: 'I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know him. It is the realest thing in the world'. Brooks' experience reflects one of the bible names for Jesus we frequently used at Christmas: 'Emmanuel'. It means 'God with us'.

You might have noticed that there are two tunes for this carol. At our Carol Services we use the tune first published by Vaughan Williams in 1906. He had adapted it from the folk ballad called The Ploughboy's Dream. But if during your Christmas TV watching you hear Elvis or Sinatra sing 'O Little Town' it will be the original melody penned by the Organist at the Episcopalian church in the States where Brooks was the priest.

Whichever tune you prefer the truths captured in Brooks' lyrics are the glorious heart of Christmas. God drew near to us in Jesus. We unwrap this Christmas gift together through our Christmas services. 'Where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.'

Rev Roger

(Assistant Priest)



St. Mary's AGM will be held after the 10a.m. service on

1st. February, 2026.

ST MARY'S EAST GARDEN PROJECT UPDATE

This year has mostly been a year focused on fundraising for the East Garden Project. Although we haven't managed to raise all the funds that we require to complete the project, we have had a successful year with over £39,000 of new funds raised from sources such as the Provincial Building Grant Fund, Benefact Trust, The Mushroom Trust and our own Gift Day. Total funds earmarked for the project stand at £52,000, meaning we need to raise about £27,000 more to complete the project as planned. We have already spent over £10,000 during the pre-planning permission phase in 2024 and this was mostly funded by earlier Benefact Trust grants.

In the autumn the Vestry decided we should try to get the project started in 2025. The Vestry asked our architect, Dave Chouman, to instruct our building contractor, GW Cheyne, to carry out the repointing of the buttresses on the East Elevation. This work is now completed. Dave Chouman has also provided the Vestry with a new phased project plan which looks something like this:

Phase I: repointing works on the East Elevation

Phase II: ground works; including replacing the damaged drainage, replacing the pathway and introduction of a new landscaped labyrinth and clearance of the border area

Phase III: replanting the border and repairs to the boundary wall

In the new year the Vestry will review our position and make a decision on how much of Phase II is possible to carry out in 2026. Fundraising activities will also carry on! Please look out for more details on the project in the new year.

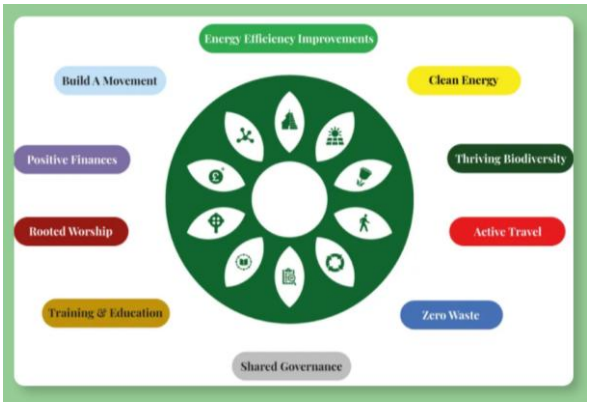
NET ZERO UPDATE

REMEMBER THE THREE CS – COMFORT, COST AND CLIMATE

We've been collecting some very interesting temperature and humidity readings inside and outside the church, and in all parts of the church, over the last month or so. These show us that our humidity levels are usually pretty good, which helps us to maintain the fabric of the building and particularly the organs. They show us that the infra red heating in the church itself works very fast to heat the bits it does heat, and cools down quickly afterwards, so at least we're not wasting energy there. The oil-fired central heating in the ancillary areas is different: it takes longer to heat up but also a long time to cool down, so we may be able to adjust the timings on the boiler to allow us to be more comfortable for less outlay.

In the mean time, as winter approaches rapidly, we have a small supply of hot water bottles that can be filled from the tea urn and heat pads that can be warmed in the microwave, as well as one battery-operated cushion that we've been testing. Remember that just because you're warm enough when you arrive, by halfway through the sermon you could be very chilly indeed, so plan ahead – grab a rug, ask for a hottie bottle, and pop a kneeler under your feet to keep them out of the draughts!

John Cooke
Julia House
Nick Mills
Freddie Stephens



SOCIAL EVENTS

The Curry Evening seems to have been a success! The Social Group will meet in the New Year to discuss plans for 2026 – if you have any new ideas we might like to try at St. Mary's, tell a member of the vestry. Thanks!

PONDERING MEMORIES

Luke 2:19. “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”.

Over the past twenty or so Christmases, I have always taken out the Peace wall hanging I received from a very dear friend. She and her husband were clearing out the loft, including the Christmas decorations, and this was one decoration she didn’t want to part with. The compromise was to gift it to me. I could tell it held special memories for her, so I said yes and thank you. In turn the Peace wall hanging has built up special memories for me too. It has stood the test of time very well, and I enjoy sharing memories of my friend with whoever notices it and comments on it. It is placed in a different spot each year. This year it is at the foot of the stairs, so it is very noticeable as you step on to the stairs.

This led me to reflect on Mary and, of course, we know Luke writes about Mary and her treasuring her memories following the visit of the angels and the shepherds – Mary pondering those moments in her heart.

I like to think that Mary’s pondering was also her praying. Mary and praying isn’t really mentioned in the Bible. However, pondering is, hence my connection. To ponder or to engage in prayer, as we know, can take place whenever and wherever, with or without formal surroundings.
Mary and Joseph waited nine months for Jesus to be born, to look into his eyes and see the eyes of God look back at them.

Many others waited even longer for his birth. In saying this I am thinking of Simeon and Anna in the temple. I would also include the Kings who were travelling the land in search of the special star which they had been tracking in the sky. I suppose I could also add Herod, because he was living in constant fear of being overthrown one day by someone who was to become king.

Nevertheless, saying 'YES' to God isn't always an automatic 'yes' to immediate receiving, or to automatic change. However, I think it is a 'yes' to focussing one's gratitude on being asked, and to preparation towards what is to be in the present and/or future. In other words, preparing one's heart in order to hold the treasures of life's journey with and through God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I am sure that Mary, Joseph and their family treasured Jesus' childhood as he experienced 'ordinary' life, learning Biblical and practical skills that would engage him in meeting people from his community and perhaps beyond. I'm glad that as a family these treasured memories have remained theirs and not for human discussion or analysis or anything else.

So as we await the birth of Jesus, may we ponder the treasures of our hearts and open our hearts to more treasures that are to come.

Blessings and Happy Christmas
From
Margaret McKinnon

FROM FACEBOOK

This was posted by someone calling themselves 'Farmer Girl' on Facebook. You may have seen it, and in many ways it applies just as much to men as to women – we're all victims of the high expectations of ourselves and others, perhaps particularly around Christmas:

'Somewhere along the way, being a "biblical woman" got quietly tangled up with this Pinterest-perfect idea of a woman who is always gentle, always tidy, always calm, always smiling, always speaking softly, and somehow managing a full schedule, a full home, and a full plate without ever breaking a sweat. She's the kind of woman who looks like she wakes up naturally at 5 a.m. with Proverbs playing in the background while she kneads sourdough and waters her thriving houseplants.

'Meanwhile, many of us wake up looking like we wrestled a raccoon in our sleep, drink cold coffee because we forgot about it again, and start the morning already negotiating with God about the day ahead. And honestly, that version feels a lot closer to reality.

‘The thing is the Bible never described women the way modern church culture sometimes does. When God said He would make Adam a “helper,” the word used wasn’t “assistant” or “the quiet one who never rocks the boat.” The Hebrew word was ezer, which is the same word used to describe God as Israel’s rescuer. It means strong help. It means life-saver. It means the one who steps in when the battle is too much. That’s the original blueprint. Not delicate accessory. Strong ally.

‘And then there’s the Proverbs 31 woman. She has become the unofficial mascot of Christian womanhood, often presented as a mythical creature who never gets tired, never forgets anything, and never once has a meltdown in a grocery store parking lot. But the Hebrew phrase used to describe her is eshet chayil, which means “woman of valor.” Valor isn’t quiet perfection. Valor is courage. Valor is strength. Valor is keeping faith on days when everything feels heavy. Valor is doing your best and trusting God with the gaps.

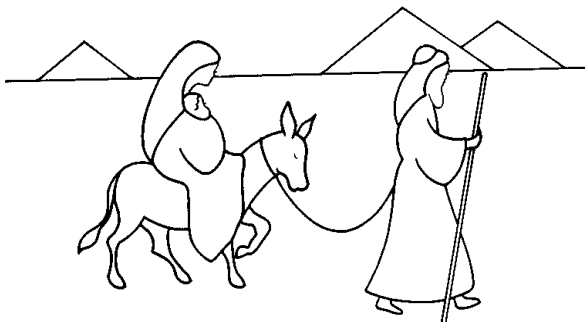
‘The Proverbs 31 passage wasn’t a checklist for women to exhaust themselves trying to complete. It was a poem praising the strength and dignity of a woman who walks with God in the middle of real life. A woman who is resourceful, wise, resilient, trustworthy, compassionate, hardworking, and deeply rooted in her faith. A woman who shows up. Not one who never struggles, but one who keeps going.

‘Scripture is full of women like that. Deborah led with authority. Jael handled danger head-on. Esther walked into rooms that terrified her. Ruth survived unimaginable loss and kept moving forward. Hannah prayed until her whole heart emptied out. Mary carried the weight of God’s plan without a roadmap. These are not quiet decorative lives. These are strong, brave, deeply human women who trusted God in some very messy situations.

‘So maybe a biblical woman is not the Pinterest version so many people imagine. Maybe she’s the woman who loves fiercely, works hard, prays honestly, laughs loudly, protects what God gave her, gets overwhelmed sometimes, stands up for truth, collapses into God’s grace when needed, and keeps moving anyway.

‘Maybe biblical womanhood isn’t about perfect presentation. Maybe it’s about holy perseverance. Maybe it’s about courage disguised as everyday life.

‘And honestly, that feels a lot more like something we can actually live. And a whole lot more like the way God designed His daughters from the beginning.’



TREE OF LIFE

Not the Baobab —
Nor the tall Iroko in the deep forest of Africa;
Not even the Hyperion of California,
That ancient sentinel of the western sun.

Some say trees are shelter,
A quiet refuge when the silver lining of the sky
Pours down unannounced —
Like the monsoon's sudden hymn over India.

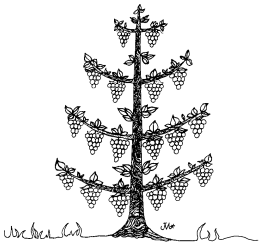
Yet You, O Lord, are the true Tree of Life —
Roots sunk deep in mercy,
Branches stretched wide in grace,
Leaves whispering songs of everlasting peace.

You stand tall and never envy the flowers,
Their momentary bloom or fleeting praise.
Your strength is a calm eternity,
Like a mother cradling her child,
Rocking creation in arms of tender power.

When hearts grow weary,
Your shade becomes our rest;
When spirits thirst,
Your fruit becomes our breath.

O Tree of Life —
In You we find the greenness that never fades,
The pulse beneath all seasons,
The quiet, holy sap that keeps us alive.

Naheemah ©2025



FUNDRAISING FUN!

Our two Christmas campaigns have been running this year, our collection of Selection Boxes to go to Barnardo's (now closed – the boxes are off to their recipients) and our tin Christmas Tree. Donations for this will be welcome probably up to the start of February – standard size tins only, please, or we'll have an engineering challenge!

Bags full to bursting with Selection Boxes

Starting the tree

FAMILY AND FANDOM FROM DOWN UNDER!

A few weeks back Iain and I boarded the LNER to London, simply to go to one concert at the Troxy in London. The whole weekend was planned to see and hear an Australian band who were finishing their UK tour. We were so excited, no one we knew in Aberdeen had even heard of them, but in Australia they are famous. As some of you may know, we have a daughter, who lives in the Northern Territories (NT) in Australia. This is Crocodile Dundee territory and very remote from everywhere. The local shop is likely to be a 3-hour drive away, but the outback has a beauty all of its own.

When we visited, Jenny took us to Katherine Gorge and Litchfield Park. We drove for hours and learnt the words of every Cat Empire song in their extensive back catalogue. We Glamped and went fresh water swimming in water holes that we were assured were VERY UNLIKELY to have salt water crocodiles in them. The logic is that by the end of the season, a Saltie would have already nibbled a passing tourist by this time as hundreds of visitors come every week even though it feels so quiet. The story on Freshies (Fresh water crocodiles) is that they like to swallow their prey whole so don't eat humans as we are too big, so no need to worry about

them – ‘Comforting chat’ NT style! As we drove the gum trees with their green-grey peeling park flashed by and the red earth stretched away to the horizon, all so different to the verdant green of Aberdeenshire.
Even these ‘local’ beauty spots are several hours drive so there is lots of listening time. This was how we discovered ‘the Cat Empire,’ an Aussie band with great lyrics and a Latin fusion mix.

During Covid, although the boundaries of the NT were closed, within NT, life went on as normal. As a consequence, if musicians would come in and do quarantine, they could then play a normal concert with crowds of people, live. The Cat Empire came to Darwin and played at the Botanic Gardens, endearing themselves to an audience of people who felt very isolated from the world. Jenny remembers the lead singer, Felix, becoming emotional at being able to sing live in front of a flesh and blood audience. I think we all remember how wonderful it felt when we returned to some of our normal group experiences.

So, as we travelled from LNER, to the Tube, to DLR it felt as if we were once more trekking across the outback. We hummed the songs we knew would be sung to us and started to feel excited. It’s a long time since we queued for a gig in London, but we were delighted to see that there were all ages of people with us, it wasn’t going to be just us and Felix!

A brilliant warm-up band the Chicago Horns, with many trombones, got the evening going, but we really only had ears for the Cat Empire. At last, they came on, the lights were fancier, the sound was brighter and we were off. The joy of the rhythm and the skill of the band with horn section, drums, keyboard, a variety of guitars and percussion, the mix of English and Spanish lyrics had us all up on our feet. All the songs we had sung along the Stuart Highway came one after another, the joy was infectious, the emotion was intense It filled us with hope for the future as we jumped and swayed, roaring out the words of the songs we loved. It connected us to our daughter in Darwin and brought back memories of our wonderful trip. Shared music, singing and rhythm are such wonderful experiences. Who would have thought there were so many Cat Empire fans in the UK!

Julia House

If you have seen an interesting play or film or read a thought-provoking book and would like to tell us about it, please contact the editor.

HELPING OUT AT ST. MARY’S

Whether you’re new to St. Mary’s or have been coming along for a while, you might be wondering if there are ways you can get involved in the life of the church – it can be lots of fun! We’re always looking for people to join the rota for intercessions or reading, or helping out with the flowers or cleaning or the coffee after our 10am service on a Sunday, or perhaps you’d like to help with the sound and make sure we can hear what’s going on?

So for readings and intercessions talk to Iain, usually to be found at the door.

For coffee, sign up in the choir vestry for dates to suit you.
For sound, talk to Malcolm or Graham – you'll find one or other of them with an I pad at the 10am service.
For flowers or cleaning, talk to Nick, usually near the back, too.
Anything else you're interested in, talk to a vestry member – ask anyone to point them out.

At our AGM in February we'll also be looking for new vestry members, so if you're interested in that, watch out for a call for nominations over the next couple of weeks.

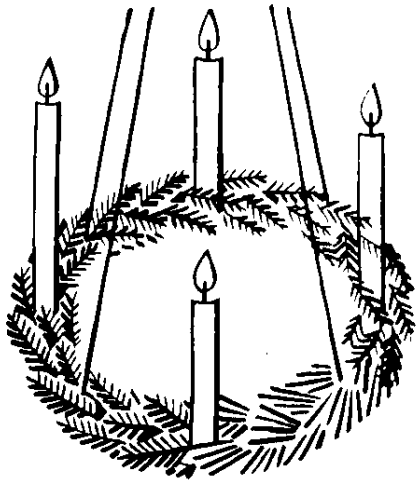
ACCOUNTS

September 2025

Income:	4,400
Expenditure:	2,897
Net result for month:	1,503

Balance unrestricted funds:	68,867
Balance restricted funds:	17,707
Balance at month end:	£91,074

The full update will be available at the AGM in February, as the treasurer has been away.



We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

CHURCH DIRECTORY

Rector: vacancy

Assistant Priests: Rev. Jason Hobbs, Rev. Roger Dyer (for pastoral matters please contact on 07719 458571 or revrogdyer@btinternet.com)

Rector's Warden: John Cooke

People's Warden: Iain Stewart

Vestry Secretary: David Rose

Vestry Treasurer: Lydia Ross

Lay Representative: Nicola Mills

Sacristan: Anne Farquhar

Organist: vacancy

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Co-ordinator: Graham Thomson

Flower Convener: (please contact Nicola Mills for now)

Church Office (01224 561383) stmaryscardenplace@gmail.com

Online: www.stmaryscardenplace.org.uk / facebook.com/stmaryscardenplace

The deadline for the next magazine, our Easter 2026 issue, will be 30th March. Copy when required to Nicola Mills, or telephone 01224 488700, or e-mail to palaeography@aol.com. Thank you!

Your Magazine

You can order your St. Mary's News to be sent to you each quarter by e-mail, or ask for a Large Print version, or ask for any back copies of editions you may have missed. Just contact the Editor!

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Carden Place, is a charity (Scottish Charity No. SCO 14062).