



**Christmas events
and services p 11**

St Mary Magdalene, Stoke Bishop

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The Messenger

St Mary's Messenger is published quarterly and distributed to 3,000 homes in the parish. Contact us by email: messenger@stmarysb.org.uk or by telephone:

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9th Guides	Lara Kirby	07961 013 097
9th Brownies	Wendy Hughes	962 4580

Sundays at St Mary's

9 am Holy Communion
with hymns and prayers

10.30 am Morning Worship

Communion alternate weeks

Band-led worship for everyone.

SHINEon Sundays groups for children aged 0-14 yrs take place during the service on alternate weeks

Explore@4

An informal service open to all and planned for families with pre/primary school children. It takes place on alternate Sundays at 4pm during term time.

Audio recordings of the Sunday sermons can be accessed at any time via the church website.

For full details of services visit the church website and do check before coming as there are occasional variations to this usual pattern.

Weekdays at St Mary's

Contact the church office for more information

Bright Sparks

Baby and Toddler Group

Mondays during term time 2-3.30 pm

Fuel

Fridays during term time 6-7.30 pm

for young people in school years 6-9

Bulb

Alternate Sundays 5.30-7 pm

for young people in school years 7 and up

Connect on Tuesdays

Conversation, coffee, craft in church

10-11.15 am with Communion service to end

Thursday Lunch Club

A hot lunch in the church hall

Please book in advance

St Mary's Singers

Choir at 9am Sunday services

Rehearsals Tuesday evenings

Bellringing

Contact Simon Tomlinson 962 4020

for more information

Small Groups

Bible study and informal support

Daytime and evening groups

Alpha

An opportunity to explore the Christian faith in a small group or 1 to 1



@stmarymagsb



St Mary Magdalene Church
(@StMarySB)

The Tagart Fountain

By Judith Sheather

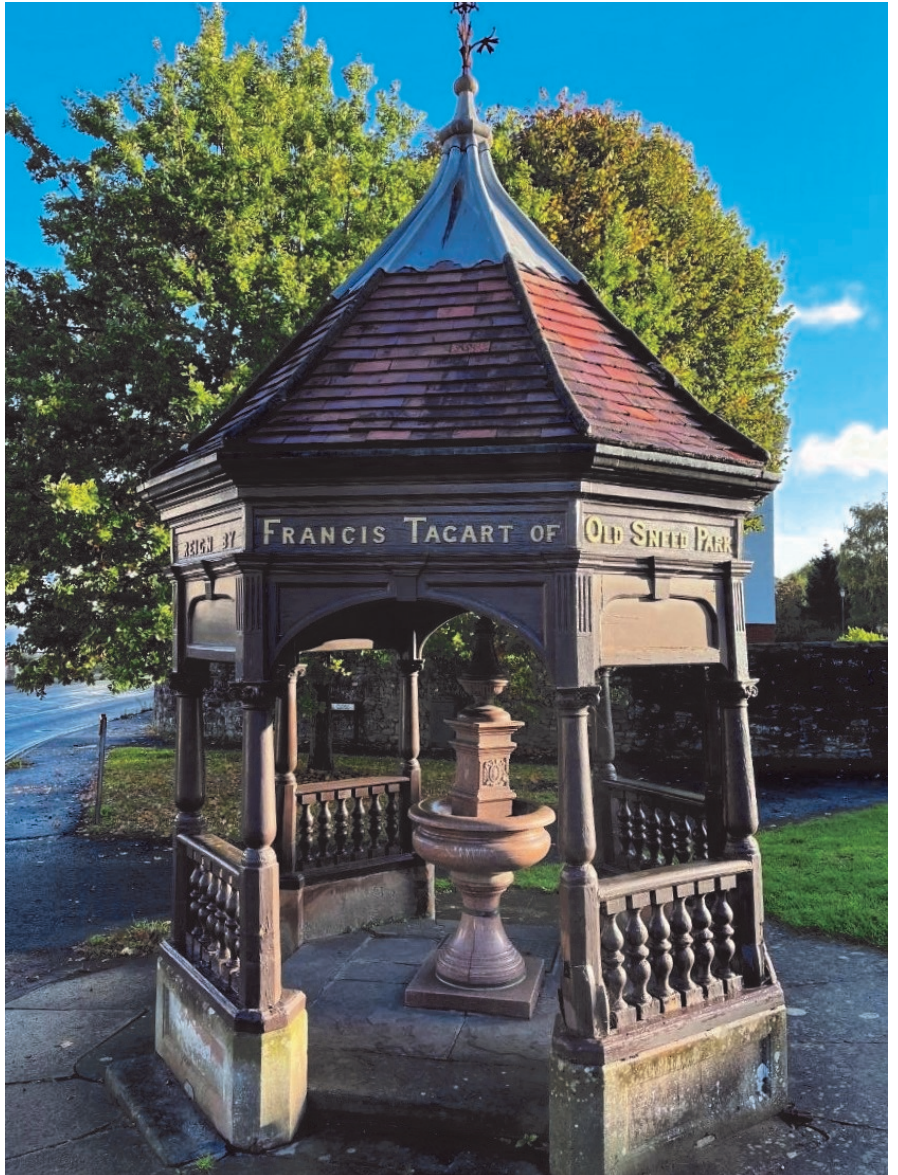
Hidden behind the scaffolding on the patch of green opposite the village shops, keeping us safe from the falling structure, lies the Tagart Fountain. Though built with public subscription to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897, its opening was a year late and the fountain is known by the name, not of the Queen but of a strong character in the community responsible for the delay, Francis Tagart.

'Francis Tagart was reported to have said that 'from Shirehampton to Redland there was not one spot where a carter could refresh himself or water his horse'. To rectify this omission, he offered to present a public fountain in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. But its opening missed the due date. Tagart showed his forthright character by withholding his gift until he was certain that an initiative by Bristol Corporation to absorb Stoke Bishop within its boundaries had gone away. (His certainty was to prove false.)

A year later, on 15 August 1898, the fountain was officially opened by the Duchess of Beaufort. In attendance were her husband, the Duke of Beaufort, the High Sherriff of Bristol, the vicar of St Mary's, Canon Alford, and most of the Tagart family. A reporter from the *Bristol Mercury* described how the Duchess 'turned on the water and drank some of it from a silver cup. She expressed a hope that the fountain would be a comfort for man and beast'.

As ever the school children lined up waving flags and a military band played throughout. The reporter wrote a pen portrait of the new fountain that now sat beside the large oak tree in the centre of the village. *'The design is of rustic character, harmonising well with the surroundings. The fountain is of Aberdeen granite The roof of the shelter is covered with Boseley tiles surrounded by a lead apex and finial At the foot of the structure are four dog troughs of pennant stone.'* The water came from an underground spring. The fountain still stands, although no longer connected to a water supply and the dog troughs have gone.

One curious question is exactly how much Francis Tagart contributed to the cost of the memorial. Money for the fountain was raised by public



subscription but Tagart was always described as having 'presented' the fountain. Perhaps as the oldest man of importance in the village it was felt an honour that his name should be associated with the fountain. Although officially called the Jubilee Fountain, it will be forever known affectionately as the Tagart Fountain.

Tagart died on 25 November 1911 aged 92. In his will he gave £300 each to his butler, William Attwell, his coachman, Charles Garrett and his gardener, Edwin Binfield.

Our Councillors John and Henry report that, thanks to many residents' support, listed building consent has already been granted and tender documentation is being prepared.

***With thanks to the new book,
Stoke Bishop – Bristol's leafy suburb,
see page 5.***

Jump(ers) for Joy

By Hazel Trapnell

If their lives are a little drab at times, the children (aged 3-12) in a village in Romania, including quite a few gypsies, find their lives more colourful as they don these jumpers. They simply love colour and the sometimes snazzy patterns.



It was some 25 years ago, that Pip and Judy's cousin, Jean, attended a Christian conference where she was asked if she knew anyone who might knit some jumpers. She offered Judy Bishop, but it was not long before sister Pip Willoughby joined her.

A long association with a poor parish in Essex began. This parish had taken an even poorer parish under its wing - a village in Romania where there were no mod cons at all, not even running water. Pip and Judy's husbands and families were in full support - it would keep the retired sisters employed and out of mischief! Both sisters had been teachers, but Pip started off as an economist in industry after graduating from Bristol University in 1950 - there she had been Lady President of the Students' Union and it was there that she met her geographer husband - who also went into industry. What an industrious

pair! From big business, a family of three boys, teaching, to home industries. 500 jumpers later and still knitting, both sisters are now widowed, but at the ages of 94 and 88 have no intention of laying down their needles.

The jumpers must be knitted in acrylic, so they are easier to wash and dry with limited facilities. Each jumper costs about £5 to knit and the output is roughly one a month each. Each August they send a large parcel of over 20 jumpers to travel with a lorry-load of all sorts of practical items.

Pip, at the front of the picture and Judy at the back, both belong to Connect at St Mary's which meets on Tuesday mornings. As soon as they arrive (with wonderful carer Mia), out come the knitting needles and the jumpers under construction - not a moment to waste. If it's not jumpers, they are knitting squares to make blankets for the homeless. Each blanket takes 96 or more 6" squares.



Interested in swelling the production? Do contact us at Connect and we will point you in the right direction. I am sure that Pip and Judy are qualified to teach you.

Stoke Lodge - paths, pledges and public meetings

It's been a busy time for Stoke Lodge Matters. Four applications for long-used footpaths across the field will be considered at a special meeting of the Public Rights of Way and Greens Committee on 27 November. These paths, from top to bottom of the field, from West Dene to the Adult Learning Centre and from Cheyne Road to each of those points, show the role that Stoke Lodge plays in the everyday connectedness of our community.

After that, the next big date in the calendar is the court hearing to defend our Village Green. This is scheduled for 27 January 2025 and we have been busy raising donations and pledges to cover our legal costs. A particular highlight was our launch meeting at St Mary's, attended by over 300 people, at which we also reflected on around 150 years' worth of ties between St Mary's and Stoke Lodge, from past residents of the house to more recent significant community meetings.



For details of ways to support, please visit www.stokelodgevg.co.uk/donations to help protect this parkland for everyone, for ever.

Photo by Bruce Quilter taken in low autumn sun.

Helen Powell

New Book on Stoke Bishop's History

Reviewed by Jeffrey Davies

Keith Sheather's new history book, 'Stoke Bishop - Bristol's leafy suburb' was published on 8 November.

'Stoke Bishop, Bristol's leafy suburb', fascinating, informed and highly readable, is a comprehensive, fully illustrated history of a unique part of Bristol. It tells its story from pre-history to the pandemic. Drawing on local and national archives, newspaper cuttings and personal memories, author Keith Sheather weaves the area's history with what was going on in the nation at large.

"Stoke Bishop has been blessed with a special landscape. On one side is the River Avon as it enters the Gorge, on another the sweep of the Downs, and on a third, the course of the River Trym. Only on the fourth does it merge with other parishes," Keith says.

"This has given it a special appeal, and over the decades it has attracted the mercantile gentry of Bristol to build their great mansions and live the life of country gentlemen. Even when the professional middle class arrived, the estate agents' brochures could still describe 'the country air and channel breezes' that would be enjoyed by the newcomer."

Iron Age peoples, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Tudor lords and business magnates have all left their mark and the book delves into their political machinations and eyebrow-raising scandals. It addresses the local myths and legends, among them the stories of Pitch and Pay and Cook's Folly. Great events too, such as the dissolution of monasteries, the suffragette protest and the planning for D-Day jostle with tales of everyday life.

So, what prompted Keith, a former BBC producer who came to Bristol in 1973, to write this most interesting history of Stoke Bishop?

"Penny Jetzer published a book on Stoke Bishop in 1998. (She was the pioneer who undertook the original research which formed the basis for the Stoke Bishop archive.) It's an

interesting book but it's now a bit out of date. I have been associated with the local history group for many years and I had made a video about Stoke Bishop in about 2001, so the local history group suggested I update that book and write a new history of Stoke Bishop.



"Many local history books are pictorial walk-throughs showing pictures of the area with a bit of history. This was a much more ambitious project. I aimed to take Stoke Bishop's history from the beginning of time through to the present day and wrapping it around a national narrative."

As well as consulting Penny Jetzer's earlier book, Keith also drew on the Bristol Archives, national archives, online books and researches, and other people's memories.

How would Keith, a long-standing member of St Mary Magdalene Church, describe and define Stoke Bishop as it is today?

"The place today is obviously very different from how it was 200 or 300 years ago. But the yearning of people living here is much the same. They settle in this area because it's a quiet retreat from the rest of Bristol; that's why we call it the leafy suburb. Its trees and vistas are magnificent and the hillscapes give it huge depth and dimension, though it's been a struggle to keep that leafy, rural feel with all the recent house-building," he conceded.

While researching and writing the book did Keith discover any surprising or little-known facts about the most pleasant locality?

"Well, I hope the book is littered with them! Over the years Stoke Bishop has been the home of powerful figures within the city. Pretty well everyone who made any mark on the city in the Victorian age at some point lived in Stoke Bishop."



Early 30's view of snowy village from Druid Hill. Glen House in the foreground soon to be demolished for 2nd parade of shops.

Stoke Bishop, Bristol's leafy suburb, is published by Stoke Bishop Local History Group and can be obtained priced £15, from them*, or from Salvatore's Barber Shop on Druid Hill.

***sblocalhistory@gmail.com**

Care Options

By Andrew Wood

It used to be the case that as we aged and needed help beyond immediate family, or indeed have other health conditions at a younger age, such as an acquired brain injury or muscular dystrophy, a residential or nursing care home would be the next, and final, move from our own home.

However, for the last 35 years or so we have been able to receive care at home, ranging from as little as an hour a week (often called domiciliary care) right through to a little understood category called Live In care. Live In care involves having someone living with you, in your home, up to 22 hours a day (so throughout the night), supporting you in and out of the home in an almost unlimited way, for a few weeks in each stretch before the second dedicated carer replaces the first carer, in rotation.

It is well-reported that the UK has a funding crisis in adult social care and for indiscriminate conditions like dementia, affecting over a million people in the UK, the financial burden can be very substantial, and lasting many years, regardless of the ability to pay for care.

In-home care provision divides into two financial camps, whilst the primary responsibility for adult social care sits with the Local Authority. Every adult is entitled to an assessment of needs. However, if you have over £23,250 of your own savings (a limit which has been unchanged since 2010) you have to fund your own care (unless health needs are so great that you qualify for NHS funding under Continuing Healthcare funding). This threshold excludes the value of your home if you choose to have care in your own home. However, if you live alone, you are expected to sell your home if you move to a care home, to help pay for care until your funds are down to the threshold. Alternatively, equity release schemes can free up money for care.

If your savings are below £23,250, the Local Authority will make a partial contribution, or the full cost if savings are less than £14,250. It is not widely known that if you do qualify for Local Authority help, you can choose to 'top up' and use a provider of your choice.

Costs of care by the hour range from £25-35/hour (with no VAT) and can be scaled up or down as needs increase or decrease, and can also be used for short-term help, for example for respite support or after discharge home following a hospital procedure.

Live In care typically costs upwards of £1,600 a week, which is a substantial cost but is comparable with, or may be less than, the costs of a private care home. However, Live In care offers one-to-one support all day and night, including trips out of the home.

A great source of homecare information and providers is at www.homecare.co.uk, the TripAdvisor of homecare.

Andrew Wood is the owner and director of Home Instead, Bristol North. He lives in our parish and is a member of Woodlands Church.

Church rooms update



In the Bible Christians are encouraged to grow in patience (Colossians 3:12) and the Church Rooms Development Project is certainly giving us opportunity for this! After several 'false starts' we are hopeful that a property owned by the church will soon be sold, which will enable us to begin work on the Church Rooms.

During this delay, the plans have been adjusted to bring the cost down (given the impact of inflation on labour and materials) but we have retained all the key elements of the project. We have also adapted one of the smaller rooms ready to relocate the church office into it during the building works. If you are inclined to pray, please ask God to make sure the house sale will go through, the revised plans be quickly approved and our contractors be able to make a prompt start once we give them the green light. There's a lot still to navigate, but we are inching closer!

Jema Ball

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Encounter Christianity

By Peter Weeks

More goes on behind the scenes at St Mary's than I had realised before I started writing for The Messenger. One low-profile but important aspect of the church's work is supporting a wide range of local and international Christian organisations that work in different ways to help the disadvantaged and to spread the Gospel. These are known as St Mary's Mission Partners.

A Partner group I went to meet recently is Encounter Christianity, a charity based just over the Downs in Redland, staffed by four Christian teachers (pictured right) and supported by volunteers from local churches.



L to R: Sharon Price, Chloe Sargent, Jess Ottaway and Sian Campbell-Colquhoun

Encounter Christianity's work takes them into 70 primary, secondary and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) schools in and around Bristol to help with the delivery of the Religious Education (RE) syllabus. They do this by presenting the Christian elements of the curriculum from a Christian perspective.

The following are examples of topics covered in primary school lessons:

- Wonderful World***
- Moral Choices***
- Art and Symbolism in Christianity***
- Creation vs. Science***
- Baptism***
- Why is the Bible important?***



All lessons are highly visual, engaging and interactive, with the aim of providing children with the opportunity to find out for themselves who Jesus is and what He came to do. For some children this is the first time they have encountered Jesus.

In secondary schools the lessons encourage children to ask questions, to think about and debate important topics and give them the opportunity to hear genuine answers and contributions from Christians. Teachers in these schools say that hearing personal stories of faith is highly beneficial for their students. Enriching the religious education of children from Reception to Year 13 is important to helping develop their understanding of the world.

The Encounter Christianity staff are committed Christians and qualified teachers who can all share personal reflections on what it means to live the Christian faith in today's world. Volunteers from local churches also go into the schools with Encounter Christianity's teachers. The idea is to give children a personal experience of Christianity as an active faith.

Meeting the leader of Encounter Christianity, Sharon Price, I found a person who is energetic and enthusiastic about the work her organisation does to take high quality, engaging lessons into schools across and beyond our city.

Left: Lighthouses from a lesson on Jesus, the Light of the World

Meet Tristan Hagger

Welcome to Tristan Hagger, our Avonside Mission Area ministry experience scheme worker, interviewed here by Julie Summers



I was born in Cornwall and grew up on a farm near the sea. I have a great affinity with animals, as I was kicking mud with cows and pigs since I was a toddler. Growing up, I developed interests in music and reading. I learnt to play the guitar from my older brother's enthusiasm for playing rock guitar, and my favourite band were The Red Hot Chilli Peppers. I still love watching how John Fruscante (the lead guitarist) navigates the fretboard.



I am half Moldovan on my mother's side, and I had great Russian books from writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky thrown at me as a teenager, which refined me philosophically. And philosophically speaking, I became fascinated with God: I became fascinated with how He brings unity to multiplicity, how He gives coherence and intelligibility to the world, how He gives objectivity to things such as beauty, truth, goodness and morality. And how without that unity found in God, we separate, confound and fragment. That study has blossomed into a relationship with Christ, who has given me new eyes with which to see the world, and who is at the centre of all I do.

I am excited to see what this year will bring and where it will lead me, as I work with the Avonside mission area churches and their communities.

Revd Julie Summers, Avonside Mission Area Curate

Safeguarding at St Mary's

Why safeguarding ?

Periodically there are distressing news stories in the media about safeguarding failures in a wide range of institutions. When things go wrong it can be catastrophic for victims and also for the organizations who failed them. Failures in safeguarding have led to some shameful episodes and negative publicity for the Church which is why I willingly accepted the role as Parish Safeguarding Officer for St Mary Magdalene church, and take my role seriously.

As a mother of two young children, I was always relaxed about my children spending time at church without me. I was relaxed because I knew the church had robust procedures in place to ensure that the adults who interacted with my children were safe, and also that my children knew who to approach if they felt at all uncomfortable.

I realized, as my mother-in-law became old and at times slightly confused, that protection needs to be provided to any vulnerable person who is served by the church. This protection is extended to those who are vulnerable due to mental incapacity (the legal definition of vulnerable) and also to those who have become temporarily vulnerable due to circumstances such as bereavement or illness.

So how does safeguarding work?

Firstly, it is not just up to me. Checking up on employees and volunteers is now expected and largely accepted so I carry out background checks and take up references for anyone who volunteers or works at the church. I also co-ordinate training and act as a conduit between the church and the Diocese. However the real work of

safeguarding is carried out by the whole church family. We are all the eyes and ears to protect our children and vulnerable members. Visitors to our church maybe unaware that this is happening, but as an increasing number of the congregation undertake safeguarding training there are more eyes and ears on duty. This does not mean that we are unfriendly or suspicious but it does mean that we are aware and alert to behaviours typical of offenders as they attempt to infiltrate organizations.

Training

The Church of England and the Diocese of Bristol offers safeguarding training. All members of the PCC, all church employees and most volunteers are expected to carry out at least the basic training, but I would like everyone who is a member of the family of St Mary's to take the two basic training courses. They are free and are available on-line. We are lucky at St Mary's that Caroline Jowett-Ive, a church warden, has been trained as a safeguarding trainer and will be running in-person courses for us this winter. Please sign up for them!

To sum up

Safeguarding at St Mary's is our collective responsibility. We must not be complacent and believe abuse won't happen at our church.

We must all

- Be aware of the possibility of abuse
- Respect boundaries when we are asked to
- Express any concerns we may have to me either face to face or by using my dedicated e-mail address safeguarding@stmarysb.org.uk

Caroline Owen

Making Decisions

Making decisions is part of life. Some sources suggest that we might make as many as 35,000 decisions every single day. This hurts my head just thinking about it!

Most of our daily decisions are made on autopilot (do we really 'decide' to clean our teeth or do we just do it out of habit?) but there will also be bigger decisions to tackle daily, and points in our lives when we will have to weigh up some *really* big decisions.

Sometimes it's easy to reach conclusions because there is an obvious right or wrong way forwards. But other times we will be faced with a scenario which is far less clear cut. I'm sure you can think of times when you've had to choose between two or more equally good options. Most decisions have both pros and cons, so how do you come to a wise conclusion?

For me, I rarely make big decisions in isolation. I seek out friends, colleagues or family members to chat things through with. Often if more than one person makes the same suggestion it can feel like confirmation of the right path to take. As a Christian, prayer is also part of the picture. I talk to God about the decision I need to make, and I try to notice the ways He might be responding.

I very rarely 'hear' God in any audible sense, but sometimes I feel an inner conviction or I see something that could be a sign from God giving me guidance. In the Bible there are some often-quoted words:

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.***
Proverbs 3:5-6

For me, these verses remind me that God's plans for me are far better than anything I could conceive for myself. I might well have ideas about how I would like things to pan out, but I believe that God is the only one who can see the full picture of my life, and so it is natural for me to rely on Him in the big decisions, as well as the day to day.

At St Mary's we often find that people seek out the church when they are going through a time of change. If that's where you are at the moment, why not connect with us at a Sunday service, or make an appointment to meet with me or one of the other ministers for prayer and listening. We would love to meet you and support you.



Revd Jema Ball
Vicar of St Mary's



From the CHURCH REGISTERS

August–October 2024

Baptism

15 September Ariella Allen

Weddings

10 August Alice Rivers and Benjamin Slade
28 September Hope Shooter and Oscar Cole
5 October Philippa Johnson and Henry Tarr

Funeral

20 September Affra Baird

Thanksgiving Service

27 August Barbara Hollyhead

Favourite Carols

By Richard Powell

I expect we all have our favourite carols. I have spent a lifetime playing most of them! Here are my top three; what would you choose?

Top of my list is 'Hark the herald angels sing', which brings together lyrics written by Charles Wesley in 1739 with a tune written by Felix Mendelssohn in 1855. Not a bad pedigree! Its finely crafted lyrics deliver a weighty theological punch:

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all he brings,

Risen with healing in his wings.

Mild, he lays his glory by,

Born that man no more may die,

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth:

Hark, the herald angels sing,

Glory to the new-born King.

My second choice is 'It came upon the midnight clear' sung to the tune 'Noel', an English traditional melody adapted by Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan) that perfectly matches the ebb and flow of the lyrics. Those lyrics were written by a US pastor Edmund Sears in 1849. The US invasion of Mexico had ended only in 1848, and there was revolution in Europe. Sears paints the world as dark, full of "sin and strife", not hearing the Christmas message.

Nearly 200 years later and two world wars later, with events in the Ukraine and Middle East in our minds, how much the world needs to hear words like this:

With sorrow brought by sin and strife

The world has suffered long;

And, since the angels sang, have passed

Two thousand years of wrong;

The nations, still at war, hear not

The love-song which they bring;

O hush the noise and cease the strife,

To hear the angels sing!

My third choice honours the death in August this year (aged 97) of one of the finest hymn-writers of my lifetime, the clergyman Timothy Dudley-Smith (see box right). Many will know his hymns 'Tell out my soul' and 'Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided'. He wrote over 450 hymns including many carols. 'The hush of midnight here below' goes to the

much-loved tune 'Repton' (Dear Lord and Father of mankind), written in 1888 by Hubert Parry:

The hush of midnight here below

The shining stars above,

A night of wonder long ago

When in the stable lantern's glow

Is born God's gift of love,

Is born God's gift of love.

There is a timelessness to carols. Generations before us have sung them, and generations to come will sing them long after we have gone. The list of lyricists and composers of carols is extensive and distinguished. They have left us a great legacy. Join us this Christmas to sing these carols and more!

Richard Powell is one of our organists at the 9 am service

The Right Reverend Timothy Dudley-Smith 1926-2024



For a man who claimed to be unable to sing or write music, Timothy Dudley-Smith, the former suffragan bishop of Thetford, who died in September aged 97, has left a considerable legacy to Anglican churches in over 450 hymns, composed over more than 60 years.

Decorating the Church for Christmas

A small band of us plan to decorate the church with greenery for Christmas on Friday 20th December at 10 am.

If you can offer greenery from your garden or would like to help, please contact Sue Wood.

Pictured here is one of many arrangements prepared for our Harvest thanksgiving on September 30th.



Happy Christmas

Why not join us at St Mary's,
Stoke Bishop this Christmas?



Sunday 1 December at 4pm

Explore@4 Christingle

An interactive Christingle Service for all ages.

Friday 6 December at 7.30pm

Beer and Carols

Join us and get into the Christmas spirit with some well known carols, a meat or veggie pie and mash while tasting beer or BYO wine! Cost £20 or BYO £15.

Thursday 12 December at 12.15pm

Christmas Lunch

If you would like to come please call the church office on 0117 9687449, the cost is £8



Sunday 22 December at 6pm

Traditional Carol Service

Favourite carols and Bible readings by candlelight

Christmas Eve, Sunday 24 December

Crib Service at 4pm

A short family-friendly service telling the story of Jesus' birth.

Children might like to come dressed as a character from the Christmas story.



Midnight Communion Service at 11pm

A traditional Midnight Communion service to celebrate the birth of Jesus, 'God with us'.

Christmas Day Celebrations at 9am and 10.30am

Come to either service for a family-friendly Christmas Communion, including well-known carols.

Sunday 29 December at 10am

Holy Communion (Said Service) with carols for all the churches in the Avonside Mission Area to be held at St Edyth's, Sea Mills.

There will be **no service** at St Mary's Stoke Bishop on this date.

Feasting at Christmas Time

By Eileen Stonebridge

Among the traditions at Christmas, feasting features strongly. When did the tradition start? Have we always eaten turkey and plum pudding?

The origins of winter feasts go back well before Christian times, to the Neolithic, as has been discovered in excavations near Stonehenge where thousands of bones of pigs and cattle have been excavated. Using modern archaeological techniques, it has been shown that the pigs were about nine months old, that is, young pigs which could not be kept through the winter.

Until ways were found of producing animal fodder through the winter, stock always had to be killed, apart from a few selected for breeding for the next year. In addition to using salt as a preservative it was an excuse to have a feast. The winter solstice was a good time for celebration because after the shortest day light and hope would return.

The Romans celebrated the darkest time of the year with a feast to their god Saturn, the god of agriculture. From 17 December for seven days there was feasting and celebration. Other traditions included the giving of small gifts, singing and lighting candles. These traditions diffused through the Roman Empire. After the emperor Constantine, Christianity was accepted as a religion until 380 A.D. when the emperor Theodosius issued an edict that Christianity as stated in the Nicene creed was the official religion of the Roman empire. The church leaders decided that the birth of Jesus could fittingly be celebrated at the time that the Roman cult was celebrating the return of the sun as Jesus was the Light of the world. The first documented mention of the birth of Jesus being celebrated on 25 December was in AD354 on the Philocalian calendar.

The Celtic peoples also celebrated the winter solstice by burning the Yule Log all night to welcome the new sun. Evergreens, especially holly, symbolised eternal life so it was logical to incorporate them into Christian celebrations. We know from Egbert of York, who died in 766, that by his time the Anglo-Saxon people were celebrating Christmas by fasting, holding vigils, prayers and the giving of alms as well as a holiday. These traditions have been incorporated into later celebration of Christmas. The



Medieval period saw the extension of feasting with goose or venison being eaten by the rich with the poor occasionally being given some of the poorer cuts of venison by the lord of the manor.

In the monasteries until the mid 14th century Christmas fare was much simpler. The monks fasted in Advent but on Christmas Day they would feast on eggs, cheeses, fish and pies using minced meat and offal. By the mid 14th century joints of beef, pork and venison were served in a special room called the misericord. Abbey accounts show a great deal of money was spent on Christmas feasts and it has been calculated that a monk might consume up to 7000 calories during the feast.

By Tudor time Christmas feasts for the rich were enormous, with a boar's head as the centrepiece among badger, peacock and woodcock. Turkeys were introduced to England by Tudor mariners who found the birds in north America. They proved popular and breeding took place in Norfolk and Suffolk. The birds were walked to London to be sold.

By Victorian times we begin to recognise a menu which is more akin to the food of today. The wealthy families ate beef, venison and turkey while goose was the fare of the less well off. Vegetables accompanied the meal and ham was also served. At this time, pudding and mince pies also featured.

As well as all the feasting and jollity, Christmas was also seen as a time for caring about those less fortunate, a scene well portrayed by Dickens with Bob Cratchit's Christmas dinner.

Sources: Historic England

An Alternative and Beautiful Christmas

By Hazel Trapnell

I wonder how you celebrate Christmas. By no means everyone enjoys Christmas. It can highlight aloneness, and family tensions, but somewhere buried underneath consumerism-gone-mad is a true Christmas message.

Last year, I stayed at an Anglican convent, Ty Mawr in Wales, from Boxing Day to 2nd January. I was made so warmly welcome and there was a real sense of joy in the air. The chapel is not decorated until Christmas Eve. Nothing is premature. A tall Christmas tree is lit with real candles. A large crib scene is central.

The Sisters there know how to celebrate and I was a beneficiary of generous feasting, a lot of Christmas cake and pudding, mouth-watering meals, three games of scrabble, a glass or two of wine, and a carol sung each evening around the beautiful nativity scene.



This is Ty Mawr's supersize nativity scene (9 ft by 7 ft at a guess) with beautifully modelled expressive figures, all set in greenery, lichen logs and pine cones with candles strategically placed. It is ideal for reflection on one of the great mysteries.

It was not all celebration at Ty Mawr Convent, I am glad to say. How could we celebrate without being naggingly aware of those who currently cannot?

On New Year's Eve, we were invited to convene in the dark chapel at 11.30 pm for an hour's vigil during which we would pray for the world. Bed seemed so warm and inviting, but temptation withstood, five of us gathered and stayed awake as we listened to well-chosen prayers for the world and then sat together in candle-lit silence for the remainder of the hour. There was something strangely beautiful and moving about it. Prayer too deep for words.

Let us not give up either celebrating what we can, or praying for what we can't. Both are necessary, but without the prayer there will be no celebrating.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray for peace in that part of the world especially Gaza and Lebanon, pray for Russia and Ukraine, pray for the smaller conflicts which erupt in family or national life from time to time. Let us pray and not give up. I suggest that prayers make all the difference in the world and to the world.

Wishing you a joy-filled wholesome Christmas.

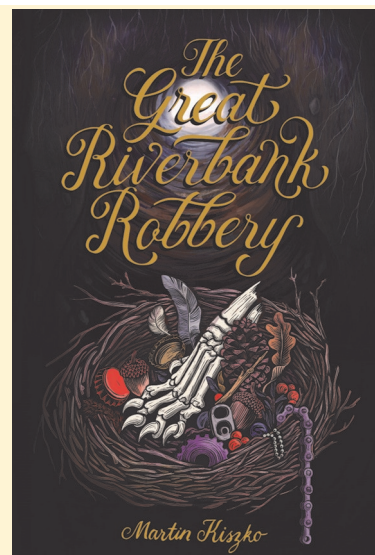
A New Novel from Martin Kiszko

Martin Kiszko's new novel launched in Bristol in October. *The Great Riverbank Robbery* is set amongst a community of animals in an imaginary woodland in the UK. It is aimed at a universal readership and is filled with adventure, foreboding, and humour. It is also a reminder of the importance of our rivers and nudges us to value our connection to nature - and to each other.

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Martin lives in the parish and is a member of St Mary's congregation.



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www.stmarysb.org.uk



Saturday 14 December

St Mary's Church

Join us in celebrating a Swedish Santa Lucia procession with a community choir, mulled wine, ginger thins, and a small Christmas bazaar.

Doors at 5.30pm, procession starting at 6pm

Tickets available at <https://hdfst.uk/e115395>



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We are grateful for all donations.

Community Diary Winter 2024–5

Friends of Old Sneed Park Nature Reserve

Saturdays 7 Dec, 18 Jan, 15 Feb, 15 Mar, 12 Apr

10 am–noon: **Working parties.** Thanks to all who support these sessions. New volunteers welcome - no experience needed. Please bring gloves and tools, and email if you are coming for the first time. Hot drinks and biscuits/cake provided.

www.oldsneedparknaturereserve.org

To join the Friends, or contact a committee member: fospnr@gmail.com

Stoke Bishop and Sneyd Park Local History Group

Fri 10 Jan: Richard Smith (1772-1843). The kleptomaniac Bristol surgeon with an interest in murders by Michael Whitfield.

Fri 21 March: Brunel in a changing world—how his inventions affected society and the economy by Iain McGregor.

All talks in Village Hall at 7.30 pm.

Visitors welcome £3. Membership £6 pa.

Please email sblocalhistory@gmail.com, or phone 0117 9686010 for news and membership.

University Botanic Garden

Nov–Mar, weekdays only, 10 am to dusk.

Adults £9 'Friends', children, students, staff, alumni free. Wed is DAISY day (donate as it suits you).

See website for up-to-date information

www.bristol.ac.uk/botanic-garden

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email avongorgewildlife@bzsociety.org.uk

Stoke Bishop and Sea Mills Ward Forum

Fri 17 January 2025, 7 – 9 pm

in Sea Mills Methodist church.

Public meeting with Local Councillors.

Everyone welcome.

To receive notices, reports and contacts, join the mailing list:

email stokebishopforum@aol.com

Cubbaccinos

1st Saturday of month 10 am – 12.30 pm

Coffee, cakes, books etc in aid of the Scout Hut.

Kewstoke Road

Stoke Bishop Townswomen's Guild

1st Thursday of each month 2.15 pm

Hulbert Room, St Mary's Church Rooms

Friendly tea, chat and social outings

For details, contact Sheila 914 7159

or Angela 968 6473

Make Christmas Decorations

With Sarah Harris and Lucia, aged 6

After last year's challenging star - a great stellated dodecahedron, you may remember, here are some ideas for very young children. If you would like to have another go at last year's star, we still have the nets to cut out. Just email messenger@stmarysb.org and we'll get them to you.

Simple Paper Bauble

1. We used colourful and bright Christmas wrapping paper. Try to find some which is glossy or glittery.



Stiffer paper works best, or use a mix of papers, perhaps aluminium foil or gold paper. Lucia drew circles with the help of a tumbler and cut out 8 circles.

2. She folded each circle carefully in half thinking about how the bauble will look. (The coloured sides will show and the white sides will be glued.)



3. Then, using PVA glue on the white sides, she stuck the circles together, lining up the folds and edges.

4. Last of all she stuck one end of some thin silver cord into the fold of one of the circles and stuck the other end into the fold of the circle directly opposite to make a hanging loop.



Have fun!

A Barley Star for the Top of Your Tree



This star is very simple to make. We still have barley left from harvest just inside the church. Do help yourself! Unlike wheat, barley has long hairs called the awn.

We made each of the 4 'arms' of the star from two stalks of barley placed head to tail, see photo below. We tied them together with thread just beneath the head of each stalk creating a natural centre for the star. Once the star arms were made, we painted them with silver acrylic paint.

To make up the star, we placed our two longest 'arms' in a cross, with the longest as the vertical one and tied the cross tightly in the centre.

We placed our smaller 'arms' across these, at 45° (see left) and tied them in place with thread.

Next, we added a silver hanging cord by tying it tightly around all four arms in the centre, crossing it over in the front middle of the star, then turning to the back to cross over near the top of the star. (This helps to prevent the star from tipping forward.)

Finally, we pasted clear PVA onto the star and immediately covered it with glitter.



Leadership Transition at Stoke Bishop C of E Primary school

This Autumn has seen some changes in the leadership of Stoke Bishop Primary, helping the school transition from one season in its life, to the next.

After several years of dedicated service, the Headteacher, Mr. David Forrester, has begun the process of preparing for his well-deserved retirement. Over this academic year, David (on the left) will be gradually stepping back from his full-time duties and working part-time until July 2025 when he will fully retire.



To ensure a smooth transition, our Deputy Head, Mr. Darren Hunt (centre) has stepped out of his classroom role, and has ably taken on the responsibilities of Co-Headteacher alongside David. This arrangement will allow Darren to gain valuable experience while maintaining continuity and stability for the school.

Mrs Vickie Melton (right), a Reception Teacher and Early Years Lead, who has been with the school for many years, has also stepped out of her classroom role to take on a full-time role within the leadership team as Assistant Head Teacher. Vickie's experience and passion for early years education is already proving to be a great asset to the leadership team, and she brings wealth of wisdom, enthusiasm and knowledge of the school.

We are committed to ensuring that this transition is as seamless as possible, and as a school we fully intend to remain a key part of the wider Stoke Bishop community, welcoming the input from those who live locally who would like to help the school to continue to flourish.

Ann Smith, School Business Manager

'It seems as though everyone was happy helping and the people being helped really appreciated it'

'I really enjoyed making bird feeders with Colin and getting out and doing something useful'

'I enjoyed the guide dog presentation because we got to teach younger children about it as well as learning about it ourselves'

'I really enjoyed seeing the smiles on the toddlers' faces when we built them something or played a game with them'

'I found it nice we actually got to do something outside of our school – it was good to get into the community'

'I really enjoyed that we were often helping green spaces and the environment'

'I liked going to the care home for a tea and chat- all of the residents were smiling because we had visited them'

'I really enjoyed going to St Monica's and we got to meet new people and discover what they did for jobs- for example someone worked at Stoke Bishop! I really enjoyed singing with them too.'

At the end of last term we held our first Advocacy Week at Stoke Bishop. The aim of this was to help deepen the children's understanding of advocacy through 'lived experiences'. Whilst all children took part in activities across the week, the focus was on Year 6 children, all of whom had the opportunity to get involved with a local group, this ranged from helping out at the local Food Bank and supporting the Avon Wildlife Project through an environmental audit, to taking part in 'Singing for the Brain' at St Monica's and working with Guide Dogs for the Blind to deliver key messages to our younger children. Through these opportunities children were able to directly impact on their local community in a positive way, build connections with local groups and truly experience the personal development that comes from supporting others and 'giving back'. The week was a huge success and we hope to continue this again next year.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."
Mahatma Gandhi



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Our Changing Woodlands

By Eileen Stonebridge

As we walk through the woods, the seasonal changes are apparent but how many of us are aware of how woodland changes through time? There is a sense of permanence about a wood.

Those we knew as children generally look the same now as they did then, but in fact woods are dynamic and change is the norm but the questions - what has changed and by how much - are difficult to answer, unless it is by a dramatic event such as clear felling.



Recently, the Woodland Trust commissioned a report from the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology on the change in broadleaf woodland over the last fifty years. The baseline was a survey carried out in 1971 of specific plots in 103 woods selected from a sample of 2453 woods surveyed during the 1960s. Records were made of the soils, tree and shrub composition, ground flora, dead wood and signs of management. The same plots were re-surveyed in 2001 and again in 2021. Some plots of the original 2453 were lost to urban development and agricultural activities between the years of survey, 38 before 2001 and another 21 in the later period.

The 103 selected plots were deemed to be representative of British broadleaved woodland. The soils had become slightly more alkaline during the period, which correlated with a decline in sulphur deposition, which I assume to relate to a decline in smoke emission generally. The change in tree species was a further reduction in elm, ash die back and a big increase in holly. There were fewer young trees than in 1971 and fewer open habitats such as small clearings, glades, ditches, streams and rock exposures. Generally grazing was reduced apart from deer, where the impact had increased by 33%.

Changes in non-tree flora was evident, with more shade-loving species such as ferns, pendulous sedges, bluebell and wild garlic. An increase in bramble is inhibiting the growth of other species. There are now fewer good plants for pollinators such as bird's-foot trefoil and wood sorrel.

Such surveys enable the identification of causal factors which include lack of management, climate

change and an increase in deer populations. The lack of management has caused woods to become more shady, as good management entails coppicing shrubs such as hazel, and the occasional removal of standards (tall trees), to enable light to reach the woodland floor and so encourage the growth of seedlings which increases species diversity. It was noted that species diversity has reduced by 22%.

Management has been reduced because of costs and a shortage of trained foresters. Added to this there has been an overall decline in the need for many woodland products, such as hurdles, brushwood and the variety of stakes and poles which were needed in older style countryside management.

Climate change in the form of milder winters has encouraged the growth of holly, which itself is invasive at the expense of other species. Deer are very destructive in woodland as they strip the bark of young trees and eat seedlings and saplings, but they avoid holly.

The observations in this report have implications for future management. The culling of deer would help in natural regeneration and the gaps left by ash dieback may help increase ground flora. Action is needed now to help recovery of woods in the important role they play in carbon capture, prevention of flooding and a defence against the effects of climate change.

**Reference : Woodland Trust:
State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021**

Photo: Bluebell woods at Portbury, May 2024

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Cover picture:

Christmas decorations in Cranleigh
Gardens. Photo by Keith Sheather

