



The Friends Quarterly



Welcome to the Friends Newsletter

A keen band of helpers sets up the Plant Sale.

Summer 2026

Issue 58

FRIENDS UPDATE

When I wrote our last Update I expressed a hope for signs of spring, sunnier days and less mud. As I write this, I am reminded of the advice to be careful what one wishes for!

In this edition we pay tribute to two of our members who have died recently, Geoffrey Searle and Betty Farrell. Geoffrey contributed to and served the Friends generously over many years, and Betty was our oldest member. We extend our sympathy to their families and friends.

Since our Spring newsletter, the Friends has been actively involved in representing St Mary's to the wider community as well as in fundraising in support of the heritage, fabric and life of the church. The May Festival 'free muffins' stall was as popular as ever. We were very grateful for the generous donations of time and talents given by cooks, stall erecters, and general helpers. The May Festival 'message' of giving with no payment required or strings attached is a powerful and positive way to demonstrate what Chalgrove church is about. The immediate reaction was disbelief, followed by amazement, and finally gratitude and broad smiles.

On Saturday 9 May we ran the Chalgrove Plant Sale. This year the event was organised on the day by Pat and Mike Hougham as I was visiting family in the USA. I am especially grateful for their willingness and commitment to making it such a success. All Friends events rely on good teamwork, and our thanks go to everyone who helped in any way.

I am delighted to announce that we have cleared the costs of producing the greetings cards, so we are now making a modest profit from sales.

We continue to need and hope for one or two new members on our committee. Our appeal is not just to all our members but to others you know personally or those who may be reading this newsletter and would like to know more about the scheme. We are happy to answer any enquiries and meet with those who express an interest. As you know, membership is open to anyone at any time regardless of faith or belief, so do spread the word. With it come the *Quarterly* newsletters and the Strawberry Cream Tea, which this year is on Sunday 5 July, 3–5pm.

Do come, we look forward to welcoming you!

LYNN (01865 400402/07774 952781), JUDITH AND CANDIDA
The Friends Committee

Please see pages 4 and 5 for our tributes to Geoffrey and Betty.



The Friends muffin stall in full swing.

See page 10 for the report on the Plant Sale.

Full Cream Tea details are given on page 12.

A NOTE FROM THE VICAR

May has gone by in a whirl. At the time of writing, I still can barely believe it that we are in sight of June, and that Trinity Sunday (31 May) is exactly halfway through the Church Year.

Looking back at the year so far, my highlights have been the Christmas and Easter celebrations. It was a particular joy to have the Junior Choir with us for Easter Day and to have a children's altar party, replete with crucifer, acolytes, Gospel bearer and servers.

Looking forward, we have the Vicarage Garden Party on Sunday 14 June from 3pm to 5pm (invitations to follow; please come). There is a prayer in the prayerbook for dry weather. I shall be saying that quite regularly as we get nearer the date! As we get past summer and towards autumn, do look out for our Harvest celebrations (usually the last Sunday in September). We are hoping to have a combined Junior and Senior Choir for a big sing that afternoon.

One recent event bears mention. We had our Annual Meetings on 17 May and, following Patricia Hunt's many years of faithful service, she has laid down her churchwarden's wand. Andrew White has taken it up, following his election as her replacement. We are grateful to Patricia and to Andrew for their service.

At our meetings, we heard how difficult local church finance is proving in the Deanery, and also across the country. St Mary's has a modest, but significant, deficit of about 5% of our total turnover, which is something we seek to rectify. None of this is due to profligacy on our part; the past year has seen us tighten our belts in various ways, including sending back our copier, which was costing us thousands. But the poor financial weather we are experiencing as a nation causes turbulence everywhere, including at St Mary's.

It is for that reason that I am especially grateful this quarter for the work of the Friends of St Mary's. 'Every little helps', as one supermarket motto says, but you do more than a little. So thank you!

God bless you!

FR MICHAEL

WE REMEMBER

Geoffrey Searle May 1939–April 2026

Our friend Geoffrey and his wife Dorothy came to Chalgrove 12 years ago. Geoffrey quickly put his considerable gifts to the service of the community. He was a founder of the Table Tennis Club; this year marks its 10th anniversary. Geoffrey played regularly and was a popular member of this thriving social club, serving on the committee for many years. He was also an active member of Chalgrove History Group, where he took charge of merchandise such as book sales, and later of its public relations. His accomplished accounts of speaker meetings appeared regularly in *Link*.



Geoffrey was also a committed and generous member of the Friends of St Mary's. For several years he served on the committee and played an active role in collating and formatting the *Quarterly* newsletter, even though the task was not fully in his comfort zone. What he enjoyed more was introducing jazz performances into the Friends concert repertoire and then participating in running the bar at each event. Thanks to him audiences enjoyed some wonderful concerts performed by exceptionally skilled jazz musicians.

Geoffrey's Memorial Service was held at St Mary's on 27 May, a packed church testifying to his many relationships within the community. Tributes were given by his brother Gordon (who revealed Geoffrey's lifelong addiction to table tennis), his son Richard and representatives of the Chalgrove organisations that enjoyed the benefits of his many ways of serving them. The fourth speaker, from Probus, reflected Geoffrey's 45 years in business. He had an amazingly energetic and successful career as an exporter of a wide range of British manufactured goods. His memoir, self-deprecatingly called *The Plight of the Long-Distance Exporter* chronicles his tireless adventures in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas and the many developments and changes he navigated on the way.

On a personal note, Patricia and I enjoyed Geoffrey and Dorothy's company on many occasions, including a memorable visit with the History Group to Suffolk and Essex, which included Cambridge, Constable Country and the fascinating reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo longship. With his many interests, commitment to the community, engaging sense of fun and sociability, Geoffrey was a much-appreciated friend, greatly missed by all who knew him.

ANDREW WHITE

Betty Farrell June 1923–May 2026

Betty Farrell was a member of Friends through the Corporate Membership of Age Concern's Tuesday Club, and we were very sad to hear of her death just two weeks short of her 103rd birthday.

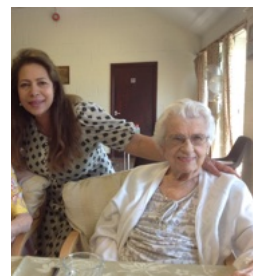
Betty was one of the first members of Chalgrove Age Concern when it was established as an independent charity in 1999. Through the years, she has been one of the most popular, admired and loved members. I first met Betty in 2012, when I became a Trustee and volunteer. She has always been very special to me, and indeed was my idol! She was so neatly dressed, with hair done and light makeup applied, and she walked so well and upright, despite her arthritis. I have often been heard to say that I want to look as good as Betty, and show her vigour, when I reach her age.

One of our special memories was in June 2023 when the Tuesday Club had the pleasure of celebrating the joint 100th birthdays of Betty Farrell and Peggy Waugh. They were the first centenarians in the Club's history.

Betty enjoyed attending the Tuesday Club and our activities. She particularly used to love the mystery coach trips organised years ago, and the monthly shopping trips to local garden centres. She enjoyed looking through the Friends Quarterly when it arrived, and as a Friends member loved attending the Strawberry Tea each year.

She was a very special lady and will be sorely missed.

JUDITH BENNETT



A smiling Betty with manager Naheem Qureshi.

CHURCH NEWS

PROGRESSIVE SUPPER

This year we decided to join the Progressive Supper evening and give it a try. We even volunteered to host a course! Although it pushed us out of our comfort zone to some degree, I'm happy to say that we regretted neither decision.

I enjoyed thinking of a dessert to offer to my unknown guests, and we both found that it was a great way to get to know village folk better as well as many of our congregational friends.

The highlight was when all the participants met together at the end of the evening at The Manor. We were able to catch up on our evening's experiences and have some fun with the raffle. I am so glad we were all able to help raise a significant amount of money in support of St Mary's.

NAOMI JOLLIFFE

EDITORS' NOTE The supper raised £1037, largely thanks to the organisational skills and planning by the three key organisers, Jeanette Barrington, Olga and Andy James, and also the support of everyone who attended.

10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

'The church reopened on 3 April 2016,' starts the Church Yearbook item in March 2017. Is it really a decade since the year-long refurbishment finished and the church emerged from wrapping and scaffolding? Major changes were unveiled: new plaster complementing the wall paintings and stone; new organ, lights, heating installed alongside both new and familiar furnishings.

It is also a decade since the Anglican and Methodist congregations decided to continue the joint worship they had enjoyed during the closure, and both moved from the chapel to the church on Low Sunday.

This Low Sunday, 12 April, more than fifty of us celebrated that anniversary. The circuit Superintendent, Rev. Miriam Moul, presided at the Methodist service and Fr Michael preached. Fizz, delicious cake and chat were enjoyed after the service. The Ecumenical Welcome extended by the Anglican congregation to the Methodists was renewed. This is a less formal arrangement than a full ecumenical partnership, so suits us better. There is a copy on the church noticeboard.

The two photos show the combined congregation in the Methodist Chapel for the final service in March 2016, before the reopening of St Mary's, including most of the people actively involved in the Restoration and Refurbishment Project. Notable in the front row on the left are Rachel and Paul Jacques, prime movers in the success of the applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funds. Sadly, Paul died in 2018, but Rachel and the family were at the celebration as it was also the date of Paul's birthday. In the photo on the left of the chapel, in the second row is Charles Baker, Project Leader of the refurbishment project, who with Lynn was at the celebration too.

*Please see page 7
for the photos
described here.*



Two views of the last service in the Methodist Chapel, which was held in March 2016.



It was in fact a week of anniversaries, as Bob Heath-Whyte was admitted and licensed as a Church of England Reader and Lay Minister on 16 April 1988 and celebrated his 38 years of service by leading Messy Church on the 19th. Chalgrove Methodists are a (unruly?) 'class' of Watlington Methodists, so we maintain links there as well as continuing to be made very welcome at St Mary's.

Here's to the next decade together.

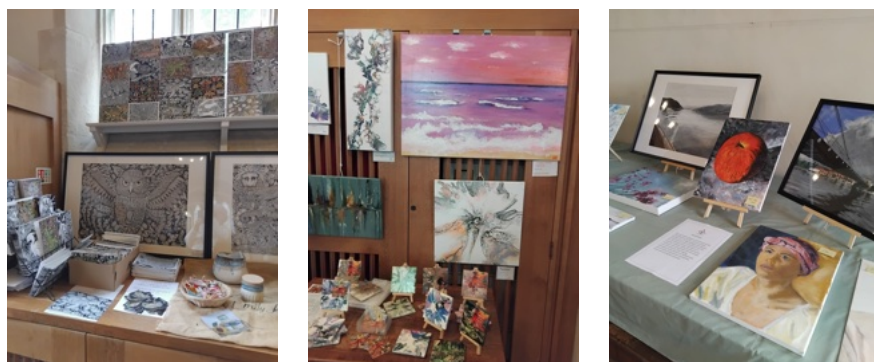
BOB HEATH-WHYTE AND JENNIFER THOMPSON

ART EXHIBITION IN ST MARY'S CHURCH

St Mary's has traditionally been a venue for Oxfordshire Artweeks, but this year we were treated to something much more locally based. Over the Bank Holiday weekend at the beginning of May, there was a display of works by artists from Chalgrove or nearby.

Although I had had the opportunity to look briefly at the displays on Sunday after the service, on Monday I had several hours to spend in appreciation of the skill on show. I was at St Mary's as a volunteer guide during the Chalgrove May Festival so that visitors could learn something of the history of the church as well as admire the art on display.

The works ranged from ceramics to large canvases. There were intricate pen-and-ink drawings, photography, some abstract pieces, a lot of colourful flora and fauna, mythological beasts, seascapes and one or two beautiful portraits. The exhibitors included Jon Knapp and Roland Whiting, son of our much-missed Bas Whiting. Several of the artists were on hand, and it was so interesting to learn more about them, including someone whose works were sold in aid of a charity in memory of her child.



Samples of the work on show at the exhibition.

Most visitors came to view the exhibition, but a small number had come to enjoy the medieval wall paintings. It occurred to me that what St Mary's offered all our visitors that weekend was art across the centuries, from the 1300s to 2026! It was a delight to share both eras of artistry with them.

JUDITH BENNETT

BELLRINGERS REPORT

Chalgrove and Henley bellringers spring outing

The teams at Chalgrove and Henley have formed a close bond over the years, assisting with weddings and joining together for our now annual spring outing. We were again blessed with glorious sunshine as 24 of us, plus a dog, met at Warborough church on the morning of 9 May. We began our day with prayer, after which many of the novice ringers tried different bells for the first time.

We travelled on to Benson church, where the more experienced ringers rang Plain Bob Triples with great confidence. Plain Hunting was rung at Brightwell Baldwin and we then enjoyed lunch in the garden of the Lord Nelson. Onwards to Watlington, where the weight of their eight bells is not a problem for our ringers as it is similar to the total weight of St Mary's six bells. The last tower was Chalgrove, where there was enough time to arrange a group photograph in the afternoon sun.



*Ringling completed,
the teams pose
together to record
the annual outing.*

We completed this special day with Norman leading us in saying grace together, and then we all sat down to enjoy the traditional ringers' tea, laid on by Teresa "Afternoon T" Davis. Father Michael joined us, Chris Devonport demonstrated the organ, and we all chatted and shared in the fellowship that is part of being a bellringer.

ANDREW DAVIS
Tower captain

FRIENDS EVENTS

PLANT SALE

I had been excited about helping at the Plant Sale since the dates were announced. When I arrived, I was very happy to see a number of people busily putting up tables and removing plants from various car boots. Already it was a hive of activity, and still with an hour or more to go until the sale opened to the public!

Much discussion was had about the value of some of the plants so generously gifted by donors who had either grown them from seed or split plants in their gardens and potted them up. All had clearly been lovingly cared for.

An excited and expectant bunch of village gardeners kept us very busy from the moment that we opened for sales. While some plants were already on their list ('Two tomato plants, please') they also had lots of questions to ask the very knowledgeable team, for example: 'What can I put in a shady part of my garden?', 'What can I use as ground cover?'

Questions were answered quickly and suggestions offered of plants on the stall that would fulfil their requests. Once payment was made many boxes were needed to take home their collection of plants. Hopefully, all will thrive and do well, given a good watering to counteract the current heat!



Another view of the Plant Sale, this year held on a sunny morning.

I was very busy selling the plants that I knew about, and also knew who to ask when questioned by an eager inexperienced gardener whom I couldn't advise. Andrew White is the official Plant Advisor and is a huge asset at the sale; he also sharpens secateurs on site – another invaluable service.

When I left at the end of the sale my brain was in overload trying to remember the answers to the questions I had known nothing about. I was also loaded down with more plants to add to my garden, including a very large Monstera (Swiss cheese plant) for my home. On my journey back I was frantically trying to think of a reason why this particular plant needed to come home with me, and also where on earth I was going to put it!

This is a very well-organised Friends event that I look forward to supporting each year.

SUE EWERS

EDITORS' NOTE The combined profit made from the main sale and the back-up sale the following Saturday morning (thank you Kuypers!) was £883. 60. This is a great result, and a credit to everyone who helped. Thank you.

FUTURE EVENTS

*(Friends events marked with *.)*

***Sunday 5 July: Strawberry Cream Tea**

3pm to 5pm. Members are warmly invited to join us at The Red House, 16 Mill Lane, Chalgrove.

Saturday and Sunday 12/13 September: Heritage Open Days

In church Saturday 10.00am to 4.00pm, Sunday 11.00am to 4.00pm. *Hospitality provided by Friends. Helpers are needed to set up each day, to bake or provide cakes or tray bakes, and/or to be there to welcome visitors. It's a great way to showcase St Mary's beautiful building and its internationally recognised medieval wall paintings, as well as to demonstrate our welcome to all. We will show the film on the wall paintings, and have the touch tour resource available for use by any visually impaired visitors. Please contact Lynn either now or a few weeks beforehand if you can support this event. It makes the planning so much easier!

***Sunday 20 September: Concert performed by The Shepherd's Trio**

In church 3pm to 5pm. An afternoon of classical music provided by Helen (clarinet), Jack (keyboard) and Ann(voice). Many of you will know that on several past occasions Helen has delighted our audiences with her clarinet playing. It's a real pleasure to welcome her again, this time with two of her fellow musicians. Refreshments will be provided after the concert. Suggested donation £10 for entry, tea donations welcome! Book the date as all are welcome irrespective of membership.

EDITORIAL POLICY

We welcome your contributions (up to a maximum of 400 words) to the newsletter but we reserve the right to edit them. We should also point out that the views expressed in *The Friends Quarterly* are not necessarily those of the editorial team, the incumbent, or the PCC of St Mary's Church.

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