

# The Parish of St. Mary's, Tilston and Surrounding Area



Tilston is a village nestled in the heart of The Cheshire Plain, often referred to as The Cheshire Gap by national weather forecasters. It is located close to the North Wales border situated approximately centrally between Chester (12 miles), Nantwich (12 miles), Whitchurch (8 miles) and Wrexham (9 miles). The village has a daily bus service that runs between Chester and Whitchurch.

The rural church parish is formed of one main community – Tilston - and three satellite communities; Stretton, Carden, and Horton Green. In recent years, the population has increased with two developments totalling 45 new houses in Tilston and 34 combined executive and affordable homes in Stretton. This has increased the number of households to between 350 and 400. The church is located away from the modern centre of the village. It is believed to be a “Plague church” where following the black death, the centre of the village was moved  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away from the church. There is still evidence of the original high street in the fields adjacent to the church.



Members of the community are drawn from all walks of life both professional and manual. Farming is strong in the area, mainly dairy. In terms of local employment, the largest business is the four-star Carden Park Hotel and smaller employers include the privately owned Carden Arms pub and a road repair company. Residents commute in many directions from the village to Wrexham, Chester and further afield to Liverpool and Manchester. There is also a shop in the village.

# St Mary's Church

## Construction

St. Mary's Church is constructed from sandstone and can seat around 170 people. Major services often end up being standing room only. The windows are fitted with stained glass windows featuring biblical stories. It has a fifteenth century bell tower with six bells that are regularly complemented for their harmonious sound and is visited by other ringing teams.



## Fabric

The fabric of the church is reasonably sound, with no major issues raised in the last Quinquennial. As with all older buildings, there is always the need for ongoing maintenance. We were delighted when a visiting clergy commented "It's always a pleasure to visit a building that is well cared for".

## The Congregation

The community is a mix of long-established families, some with three generations living in the village, together with newer arrivals that have moved in as the village has developed. Once living in the village, people rarely move away again as there is a strong bond between residents. There is a good support within the community for the church as was illustrated both by the "standing room only" farewell service for the previous incumbent and the generosity of donations for her retirement. As with any community, problems can be experienced by individuals. However, both the church and its parishioners will happily rally round and provide support when needed.



## Service Pattern:

1st Sunday of each month: Family Service at 9.45am  
2nd Sunday of each month: Holy Communion at 9.45am  
3rd Sunday of each month: Family Communion at 9.45am  
4th Sunday of each month: Holy Communion at 9.45am  
5th Sunday of each month: Joint Service with St Edith's, Shocklach

Music for the first service of the month is provided by The Church Band with guitars and light percussion. The remaining services are generally accompanied by the organ.

## Regular Services

Numbers have been reducing in recent times. Average attendance on Sundays is in the region of 28. However, this regular number is drawn from at least 40 to 50 parishioners. Special services such as Christmas and Remembrance Sunday attract larger numbers with between 150 and 200 at these times. There have also been several funerals where it was deemed necessary to relay the service outdoors to people who were unable to fit into the church.

## Life Events

The church continues to develop contacts with parishioners through baptisms, weddings and funerals. In 2018, there were 5 baptisms, 4 weddings and 6 funerals. Sadly, two years ago, the number of funerals was the highest it has been for a long time, reaching 15. Last year's number is more typical of the long-term trend which is between 6 to 8 per year. The death rate has meant that we have lost many good friends and parishioners who were active in the church. There will be 4 confirmations

during the interregnum. One of the challenges facing us is to encourage more of the younger (e.g. < 45) parishioners to be regularly involved and we are keen to find ways to develop their participation.

### Special Services

Special services are always well supported often with standing room only for Christmas, Remembrance Day and others. Over the past four years, the church has played a leading role in the commemoration of 100 years since WWI. In 2018, a whole weekend of events was arranged, including a moving concert on the Friday and projection of names of the fallen on the church tower. Some descendants and relatives came to this to pay their respects. There is a fun Christmas tree service where village organisations decorate small trees which are then put up around the church, the service includes craft activities for young and old and is very popular.



### Children

There is a Holiday Club that runs in the Easter and Summer holidays. This Easter, the theme is "Step into Narnia" based on The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. It is targeted at 5 to 11-year olds. Every other year we have held confirmations which generally include several children and one or two adults.

### Equipment

Sound is augmented by an automated amplification and hearing loop system. It can play CDs if recorded music is required for weddings / funerals and sometimes to reflect upon in sermons. Lighting within the church has been newly refurbished with a digital LED system that can be set to complement different styles of service and concerts. It is heated by a combination of storage heaters to protect the fabric and infra-red heaters to provide comfort heat during services. The majority of the nave is equipped with wooden pews but two rows have been removed and replaced with separate chairs that can be moved to allow wheel chair users comfortable spaces to attend a service. Memory foam pew cushions were fitted in recent years for comfort. The church was enhanced by the local architect John Douglas in the last 200 years.



### Financial

Over the years, the church finances have been in a strong position. The parish share is kept up to date. There is a reasonable amount of regular giving, but it would benefit from a new campaign, early in the new incumbency, to top up the regular amount coming in. At the time of writing, the balances are lower than we would like due to recent expenditure on the digital lighting scheme and the unexpected replacement of the oak fence on the ramp. However, a plant sale is being held in May and there is the Garden Trail in June (this would be an ideal opportunity for applicants to visit the parish and experience the fellowship and teamwork in the community). Held every two years, several

parishioners open their gardens for the trail which has been a major fundraiser, generating in the region of £5,000.00 a time. It is recognised that in the short term more fundraising is urgently required to rebuild our reserves, but we are confident there is support within the community to achieve this. Throughout the year, we support a selection of charities both at home and abroad. At the end of each year, a committee reviews nominations for support and decides upon where to direct donations.

### Music

Music plays a very important role in the life and mission of our church. We are fortunate to have a significant number of accomplished musicians, some of whom have performed at national level.

### Organ

The church organ is approaching 100 years old and is a mix of wooden and metal pipes. Some parts are now understood to be even older having come from other organs. Unfortunately, the organ suffered from the hot summer of 2018 and at the time of writing, we are planning the repair / reinstatement of this wonderful instrument. This is the current focus for fundraising. We have one regular organist and two others who can cover when the regular organist is not available.



### Choir

The parish is also blessed with a broad range of musical activities and has a church choir with 10 members aged 8 – 16 that supports the first and third services of the month. Two years ago, the choristers were taken to The Royal Albert Hall to participate in a production of The Messiah. This proved to be a great experience for them and encouraged some members to explore their faith more deeply.

There is also The Anthem Choir, led by a local soprano. They perform at special services and participate in concerts. Many groups who visit our church love the atmosphere and the experience of performing in the building.

### Concerts



Several musical performances are hosted during the year and we are often visited by The Border Singers, who are a local amateur but highly accomplished choir. Above are members of The Malpas Ladies Choir at a recent performance, featuring many residents of the parish.

### Bell Ringing

Following a recent recruitment drive, there are more bell ringers than bells in the team, so the church can generally provide bells for special services when required. We were able to ring for all the peels suggested for Remembrance Sunday 2018 to commemorate 100 years of the end of the WWI.

## The Vicarage

The Vicarage is located close to the centre of the village and adjacent to the newest development of houses in the village. A modern house built in the '70s. It has a south east facing, fair sized and manageable garden. The rear of the house overlooks open fields. The accommodation consists of:

Ground Floor:

- Kitchen
- Dining Room
- Lounge
- Study
- Toilet

Upstairs:

- 4 bedrooms
- Bathroom and separate toilet.



## Around The Community

### School



The vibrant primary school in the village is a controlled Church of England School and has just been rated to be in the top 1% nationally. It is a feeder school for the Bishop Heber School in nearby Malpas. The current ministry team forges strong links with the school including hosting services in the church for major festivals and a special Joint Service with Shocklach for Education Sunday. The ministry team is continuing to support contact with the school, by participating in assemblies every fortnight. End of term and leavers services are held for the school to build the bond.

## Memorial Hall



There is a War Memorial Hall in the centre of the village which is not affiliated to the church and equipped with very modern facilities for all manner of events. The hall is used regularly by all in the parish and hosts regular fitness and yoga sessions. A millennium tapestry was produced as a snapshot of the village organisations at the time and this is housed permanently in the hall. The hall holds various fund raisers during the year and has started a "Flicks in the Sticks" where films are shown. The church makes regular use of the hall for its own social and fundraising events which include a plant sale in May and a pudding club. On occasions, it relocates a special service there in an attempt to draw in other parishioners. The church also supports our monthly youth club which meets in the hall.

## Playing Fields

General facilities in the village include the village owned and equipped playing fields that feature a green gym, two children's play areas for different ages and a recently installed pump track for more adventurous cyclists. There is a clubhouse with changing rooms. The playing fields also host the annual wakes festival which coincides with the church rushbearing festival.





## Wakes

In August, the wakes festival commences with a village procession and barbecue on the first day. Various giants are paraded which have been made in the village. On the second day, the main event commences with a short service led by the church and Praise Group on the playing fields, followed by various country pursuit demonstrations, enactments etc. That evening, there is a well-attended rushbearing service in the church. During the service, the names of those that have died in the past year are read out and remembered.

## Smaller Groups

There are many smaller groups within the community, including a Landscape and Wildlife Group, The Evergreens for older members of the population and a wine club to name but a few. Whilst not directly sponsored by the church, many church members are involved in these groups. This helps newer parishioners find a friendly face when they visit the church.

## What We Value About Our Church

We believe that St Mary's is always a welcoming place to visit. There are many friendships within the congregation as evidenced by the fact that people remain in the church for some time after a service. Parishioners have a broad range of skills in the community and are always willing to share those skills to the benefit of the church and other groups within the village. Another advantage of the broad skill base is that when a group is needed for a specific project or event, a strong team can be built. This also means that it is not the same people doing everything all the time.

As a parish, we are always prepared to try new things, and as important, prepared to move away from things that no longer work. At the same time, we recognise and respect the history of those that have gone before. Our style of praise is varied with the objective of attracting people from different backgrounds and traditions. Music forms a major part of our ethos and we are fortunate to have so many talented individuals amongst us.



Some comments from parishioners in compiling this information:

"I personally have greatly valued the different services which we have had over the last years. We are a diverse community, different people/ages with differing needs, and I think that the emphasis has been on meeting as many people's needs as possible."

## Church Leadership

Ministry Team:

Minister with PTO:

Rev David Black  
Rev Canon Dick Gilpin

Reader:

Chris Gilbert

Pastoral Worker:

Trisha Swift

## Lay Leadership:

### Church Wardens

Robin Travis  
Penny Hearn

### Parish Administrator (Voluntary)

Penny Hearn

### Secretary

Viv Black



The PCC meets regularly, holding between 8 and 10 meetings per year depending upon need. Services are supported by 6 chalice assistants; 3 sacristans and many parishioners read and intercede at services. Sides persons are located at the church entrance to welcome regular and new visitors to the church at each service.

## The Challenge

- Encourage more of the newer residents to get involved with the church.
- Continue the ongoing growth of the congregation in a living faith and knowledge of The Bible.
- Build upon and strengthen the links with school and development of children and teenagers.

## Our Next Incumbent

“Flexible to appeal to as wide an expression of faith as possible.”

Able to respond to the change in demographic that we are travelling through. Will need the ability to encourage younger residents to continue the church traditions whilst continuing to work with older parishioners who have attended for decades.

- A person who has a strong knowledge of scripture and is an excellent communicator
- A person of faith who can engage with people of all generations and backgrounds both within and outside the church
- A person who would actively foster the sense of community that we have in our village
- A good listener who empathises with all ages.
- Desire to strengthen the links with the local school and work closely with The Head
- Appreciative of the value of music in enhancing worship and drawing people into church.
- Someone who will work closely with the ministry team providing pastoral care.
- Maintain and build on our community links
- Who would actively foster the sense of community that we have in our village and encourage new arrivals to increase their involvement.
- A person to look beyond the church community to help and serve non-believers
- A can-do positive attitude e.g. glass half full.
- Someone who can challenge intellectually at times and in a child friendly way at others.

The incumbency will be part time with a total of 55% full time equivalent, shared as 40% Tilston and 15% Shocklach.

## Conclusion

A warm and welcoming community, St Mary's, Tilston is forward looking and wants to build on the strength of its past and continue to be a beacon within the local community. As ever there are new challenges to be faced, but these are taken on with joy and a determination to respond in a thoughtful and prayerful way. We look forward to welcoming our new incumbent and travelling with them as we commence the next phase of church life at St. Mary's, Tilston in the heart of rural Cheshire.