



St Mary
Magdalen
OXFORD

PARISH PROFILE

FROM THE BISHOP OF OXFORD

Thank you for your interest in the Parish of St Mary Magdalen in the heart of the city of Oxford. We are seeking a priest for the parish in the inclusive Catholic tradition who will be able to focus on the ministry of word and sacrament and who will be well supported by ordained and lay colleagues and a lively culture of volunteers. Mary Mags is a parish with a long and distinguished history and a vibrant ministry. Many of all ages have come to faith or a new understanding of faith there and many have discovered a vocation to ordained ministry. The parish has played a significant role in the confident renewal of theology for ministry and has been a centre of life and renewal for the wider inclusive Catholic movement. The challenge of mission and ministry will, in the coming decade, lie in sustaining the annual renewal and building of the congregation at the heart of this unique University city as the city itself continues to change and evolve, which will include maintaining good relationships with the neighbouring chaplaincies and parishes. The parish enjoys a very positive relationship with the wider Deanery and Diocese and the previous incumbent has served (and continues to serve) as Associate Archdeacon for the Oxford Archdeaconry.



FROM THE AREA DEAN

Although the city-centre Deanery of Oxford is small in geographical scale, the benefices and chaplaincies of the deanery represent the full breadth, depth, and height of the Anglican Communion. The diversity of tradition is both a cause of celebration while also being a subject for debate. The deanery has been careful to listen to the different needs and desires of all the churches within its wide spectrum, especially with regard to missional activities and parish share.

St Mary Magdalen's, located as it is in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, has been a strong defender of parish ministry evidenced by its strong sacramental heart and pastoral concerns, keenly supporting vocations across the deanery. Attention to its work with students and nurturing an inclusive community has been a brand which has brought about a strong ecclesial identity for Mary Mags and one which the deanery would be keen to continue to support.

It is to this theological prominence in liturgical, pastoral, and vocational praxis that St Mary Magdalen's offers a particular gift to the Church in Oxford. The deanery will offer fellowship and nurture through its Chapter and sound governance through its Synod. I would be delighted to support the new incumbent and offer myself to them as a colleague and friend.

The Revd Gavin Knight

PRELUDE

The parish of St Mary Magdalen ('Mary Mags') lies at the heart of the city of Oxford. There has been a church on this site for nearly a millennium, and the character of the parish and its community is an intrinsic part of the history of this university city. The church is known for its long-standing commitment to an inclusive Anglo-Catholic tradition and its support for the ordination of women. In recent years it has maintained a theologically informed and musically enhanced liturgy that characterises the church's worship and continues to enrich and to form its clergy and congregation. This tradition is highly valued and is an integral part of what the church aspires to be in its service to the worshipping community and beyond.





HISTORY AND LOCALITY

Physically, the church lies on Magdalen Street, at the end of St Giles' and the intersection of the Banbury and Woodstock Roads, the two major routes leading northwards from the city centre. It stands at the west end of Broad Street, bordering a cluster of colleges and some of the key and most visible institutional buildings of the University of Oxford.

Its Grade I listed building reflects key points in the history of the Church in this country. The first stone church on the site is thought to have been built in 1074, perhaps replacing an earlier wooden structure, but the parish assumed a permanent profile from the time of St Hugh of Lincoln, who supervised the rebuilding of the church in 1194. An altar to the Virgin Mary existed by the time the chancel was rebuilt in the thirteenth century, and in 1320 the Carmelites founded what is now the Lady Chapel. The west tower boasts a ring of ten bells which are regularly rung by the Oxford University Society of Change Ringers; the tower and the south porch were constructed in the early sixteenth century. The church interior as we see it today is largely the result of significant restoration and alteration during the nineteenth century. The PCC undertook a major restoration of the roof, and renewal of interior lighting, wiring, and decoration in 2017.

In 2024, we celebrated 950 years of parish life with a reaffirmation of our place within the city, as well as the opportunity to re-examine our mission within and beyond the church building. A project to restore the south churchyard was begun in the anniversary year and is ongoing.

COMMUNITY

The clergy and congregation of Mary Mags form a diverse gathered community, with an electoral roll of 112 in 2025. Regular congregants can travel some distance (in some cases more than an hour) to worship with us. Closely connected to the university, it is also near the commercial and cultural heart of Oxford. The church is open daily to worshippers and passers-by and is on the route of the many tourists who are now a constant presence in the city. As such, it has very few residents within the parish itself, but aims to be at the service of all who come as curious visitors, to attend daily services, or to look for sanctuary. In recent years, we have worked with the Oxford Winter Night Shelter and the Gatehouse, initiatives supporting the homeless in the city of Oxford, as well as those whose accommodation is precarious.

The incumbent is part of a close network of city clergy, with neighbouring parishes representing the full spectrum of Anglican churchmanship. Mary Mags is also within close proximity to many college chapels whose members often gravitate to us on Sundays, as well as for student groups.

Our community must therefore balance the needs of the transitory with the permanent. We highly value each year's influx of new students, some of whom discover and deepen their Christian calling in this church, and who contribute their youthful energy and devotion to service in the liturgy and in wider fellowship. Integral to all that we do is the pastoral care of parishioners, undertaken by clergy and by members of the laity alike.





WELCOME

We also characterise ourselves as a place where everyone is welcome. While much of the congregation shares some form of university affiliation – inevitably an intrinsic part of our profile in a university city – newcomers and visitors will find themselves among an eclectic mix of professionals, musicians, young families and retired people, and any number of individuals drawn to Mary Mags by its inclusive catholic tradition, its lively and welcoming atmosphere, and its liturgy. We are a community that embraces all regardless of gender and sexuality.

Binding together this diverse membership into a worshipping community is one of the most important parts of the vocation shared by priest and people at Mary Mags. Our team of sidespeople greet everyone before the Sunday High Mass, and all are offered the opportunity to be involved in the activities of the parish – such as joining one of the house groups or the weekly bible study. We regularly extend an invitation to Sunday lunch in one of the nearby pubs. Our starting point for establishing fellowship is the regular post-service gathering after the High Mass when clergy and congregation mingle over tea and coffee (or occasional celebratory drinks) to meet newcomers and consolidate existing friendships and contact.

Our guiding principle is to respect and to value each and every person, what they seek in parish life, and all the gifts they bring: there is no definable 'Mary Mags person'.

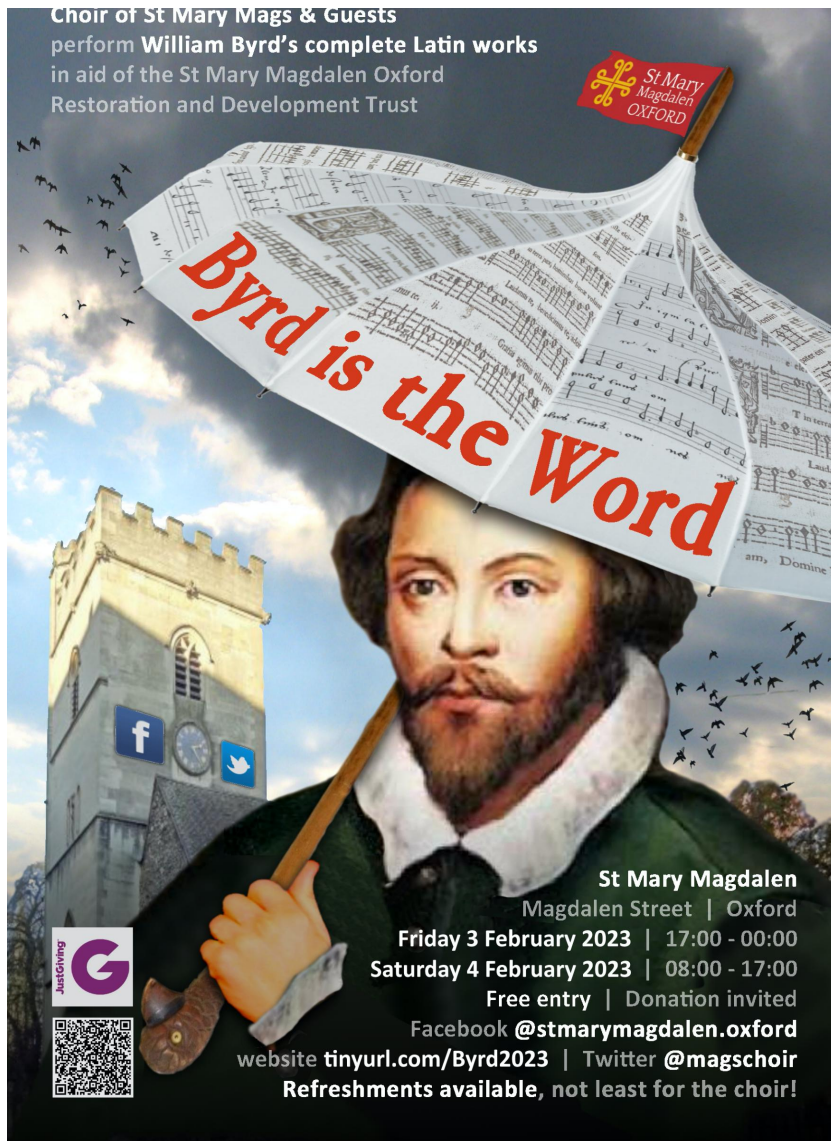
THE PATTERN OF LITURGY

Our community's life is grounded in prayer and in the sacraments: a said Mass is celebrated twice daily, at 1215 and 1800, with High Mass on Sundays at 1030 and on feast days. Morning and evening offices said publicly frame the start and end of the day, though the church is open daily for private prayer. The great festivals of the Church's year are celebrated with a full array of services. As a church with a largely non-residential congregation, relatively few occasional offices take place each year. The clergy hear confessions before major festivals, and by appointment, and are always available for spiritual advice. Communion is taken to our housebound community and reaching people at home has become more important since the pandemic; expanding our online presence is an area of potential growth for the parish.

The work of our regular clergy (the incumbent plus two non-stipendiary Associate Priests) is supported by a number of priests working within the university or who are retired and resident in Oxford. This enables the parish to maintain the daily pattern of Masses and a considerable pastoral ministry. We greatly value their wisdom, garnered through years of faithful service, and their contribution to the life of the community. We are fortunate to have a large team of altar servers, and this is often supplemented by ordinands on placement from local theological colleges.



Choir of St Mary Mags & Guests
perform William Byrd's complete Latin works
in aid of the St Mary Magdalen Oxford
Restoration and Development Trust



St Mary Magdalen
Magdalen Street | Oxford

Friday 3 February 2023 | 17:00 - 00:00
Saturday 4 February 2023 | 08:00 - 17:00

Free entry | Donation invited
Facebook [@stmarymagdalen.oxford](https://www.facebook.com/stmarymagdalen.oxford)
website tinyurl.com/Byrd2023 | Twitter [@magschoir](https://twitter.com/magschoir)
Refreshments available, not least for the choir!

MUSIC

Music is fundamental to the church's vision of liturgy and worship. We value a close relationship with our musicians, who are far more than professionals paid to enhance our worship. They are also part of our community, and their Director plays a key role in planning and characterising our liturgy. A choir of eight professionals sings for the High Mass on Sundays and at festivals and other significant services such as weddings and funerals. A fruitful working relationship between the incumbent, the Director of Music and the Organist has always been highly prized, and leads to a creative symbiosis of music and the liturgy. So important is this relationship that the PCC is committed to allocating the resources necessary to ensure that this tradition of music can be maintained.

The annual Carol Service is a particular musical highlight of the liturgical year when the church is usually packed. The choir sings full Holy Week services, as well as Midnight Mass and Christmas Day. Its work is generally focused on the liturgical calendar but it notably engaged in a project in 2017 (repeated in 2023) to perform the entire corpus of the sacred Latin music of William Byrd over three days which reached international notice. The church also has a record of commissioning new choral music, including a setting of the Mass by Cecilia McDowall to celebrate our 950th anniversary.

The choir sings from a loft in the west end of the church, where the organ is also situated, and is both visible to the congregation and able to observe the liturgy.



PREACHING

The character of the church's congregation and the considerable presence of students and young people within it puts education at the heart of its work. We appreciate the high quality of our preaching, which, though always focused on the Gospel, brings a wide range of disciplinary perspectives into the pulpit – theological, academic, literary, as well as a wider political and social gospel. Our own clergy provide a rich and varied repertoire, but we also benefit from visiting preachers, particularly at festivals and significant occasions, who are often bishops and priests with long-standing connections to the parish.

VOCATIONS

The church is privileged to have a tradition of nurturing vocations and we all benefit from the insights and enthusiasm of those exploring a call to ordained ministry: this keeps the parish's own sense of vocation alive. We have also maintained close links with the local theological colleges (Ripon College Cuddesdon, St Stephen's House, and Wycliffe Hall) often having two or three ordinands a year on placement. In recent years, Mary Mags has been a training incumbency and has brought four curates through to priestly ministry in the past decade or so. Keeping in touch with our former ordinands and curates through our Guild of Clergy is an important part of our work which connects us to the broader life of the Church.



EDUCATION

Not all those who come to St Mary Magdalen's are initially familiar with the complexities of our liturgy or with an inclusive catholic theology, so both clergy and laity are committed to a wider educational remit. Some of this takes place in a regular Saturday morning bible study and in student groups, where discussions range widely beyond the specifically theological.

The School of Theology

A significant initiative for delving more deeply into our tradition of the Christian faith was set up in 2019: the St Mary Magdalen School of Theology (<https://www.theschooloftheology.org/>). Currently a separate website, this online school brings together a range of theological work by a number of former and current clergy and parishioners, with the aim of providing theological resources for Christian ministry and mission. We would like to expand the work of the School and develop this unique resource for our own parish and for a wider global readership via the website.

Training

The preparation and practice of the liturgy is taken very seriously at St Mary Magdalen's. The clergy and laity collaborate to provide rotas of sacristans, altar servers, readers, intercessors, sidespeople and flower arrangers; all volunteers and members of the liturgical team receive thorough training so that our services are conducted with unobtrusive devotion and care. We see this not as an end in itself, but as part of our mission to offer a rich, contemplative, and edifying liturgy for all; that being said, we all enjoy the drama of a major festival with the complete panoply of Anglo-Catholic ritual delivered with panache.



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The character of our fluid community and physical locality inevitably means that the numbers of our youngest congregation members vary. Our Children's Church meets at the nearby St Michael's at the Northgate, where there are more suitable facilities for this ministry. Children return to church in time for the Eucharistic Prayer, and are fully incorporated into the sacramental life of the parish with all encouraged to prepare for first communion. The children gather around the statue of Our Lady of Joy after the Sunday High Mass to sing the Angelus.





GOVERNANCE

The church is governed by the Parochial Church Council (charity no. 1145027); its representatives are drawn from a wide cross-section of the parish, and bring a wealth of different experience to the council's work. The PCC currently sends three representatives to serve on the Deanery Synod.

A close relationship is maintained with our patron, Christ Church, Oxford, which takes a keen interest in the benefices in which it has an involvement as patron. This extends well beyond the appointment process and can take the form of certain grants for the incumbent, a biennial incumbents' conference at Christ Church, and a biennial invitation to parishioners to a service and dinner at Christ Church.

The incumbent is a trustee of several separate charities besides the PCC:

The St Mary Magdalen Oxford Restoration and Development Trust (277127) supports the preservation, repair, maintenance, improvement, upkeep, beautification, and restoration of the church. It had a gross income of £15,132 and a total expenditure of £24,629 in the financial year ending 31 Dec. 2024.

The trust known as the **St Mary Magdalen Oxford Ecclesiastical Charities** (205873) makes grants to the parish in support of the fabric of the church. It had a gross income of £1,029 and a total expenditure of £1,019 in the financial year ending 31 Dec. 2024.

The **St Mary Magdalen Apprenticing and Educational Charity** (810205) supports the education of those aged under 25 years and resident in the City of Oxford. It had a gross income of £4,080 and a total expenditure of £1,246 in the financial year ending 31 Dec. 2023.

The **St Mary Magdalen Relief in Need Charity** (203247) provides relief for those resident in the City of Oxford who are in need. It had a gross income of £5,218 and a total expenditure of £5,762 in the financial year ending 31 Dec. 2023.



FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Finance

The church is supported by regular donors, some of whom use the Parish Giving Scheme. In recent years, we have raised funds for our 950th anniversary with a particular focus on the renovation of the churchyard.

Administration

Administration is largely undertaken by the clergy and officers, as well as PCC members on a voluntary basis. This is supported by a part-time (twenty hours a week) paid administrator. There is a small office in view of the main entrance, and the administrator thus also often serves as the first port of call for anyone enquiring about the church or spiritual support. The administrator's responsibilities currently include preparation of the weekly service sheet, the parish newsletter, and liaising between the officers of the PCC and those engaged to work on the church fabric. One of the aims of the church is to remain open during the day, to enable regular and occasional tourist visits, and to ensure access for prayer and sanctuary.

The Bishop of Oxford and Christ Church, Oxford as patron seek to appoint a person ordained priest to be Vicar of the Church of St Mary Magdalen, Oxford who:

- i. will lead the worship of our community in a prayerful manner to the greater glory of God;
 - ii. will ensure the availability of all of the Church's sacraments, including the celebration of the Mass on a daily basis, Anointing of the Sick, and Reconciliation;
 - iii. is committed to the style of Anglo-Catholic worship for which this church is known;
 - iv. will maintain the high quality of preaching;
 - v. is committed to fostering the theological education of the congregation, e.g. through Bible study;
 - vi. will nurture and support those exploring and pursuing vocations to ordained ministry;
 - vii. will support and promote the ordained and priestly ministry of women;
 - viii. will build on the work of the St Mary Magdalen School of Theology to provide theological resources to the wider community, and on that of the Guild of Clergy to maintain links with the wider Church;
 - ix. will encourage and nurture lay ministry within the community;
 - x. has an affinity with, and is cognizant of, the Anglican choral tradition;
 - xi. will work closely with the Director of Music and the Organist;
 - xii. is able to intone with precision and clarity;
 - xiii. will be committed to the pastoral care of our congregation and wider community;
 - xiv. will support the fellowship of our gathered congregation and all that builds up our common life;
 - xv. will maintain and strengthen our links with the student communities in Oxford;
 - xvi. will explore links with the wider community and work to develop the parish's role in the outworking of a social Gospel;
 - xvii. will be enthusiastic and imaginative about expanding our outreach and witness, including to the housebound and those unable to attend services;
 - xviii. acknowledges the importance of safeguarding, comports themselves accordingly, and will promote it in the life of the parish;
 - xix. will engage in, have oversight of, and appropriately delegate the administrative needs of the parish that are integral to the responsibilities of stewardship shared with the Church Wardens and the Parochial Church Council.
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THE VICARAGE

The parish is fortunate to have the use of a large vicarage within five minutes' walk of the church. The four-storey nineteenth-century terrace house lies half-way down Beaumont Street, one of the access roads into central Oxford, leading from Worcester College past the Ashmolean Museum to the Martyrs' Memorial. It is within the catchment area of St Barnabas Primary School and the Cherwell School, the secondary school which serves north Oxford. There is no Church of England primary school attached to the parish. Mary Mags has no separate church hall or parish room, and so the vicarage has traditionally been a centre for social activities in the parish.

From September 2025 the vicarage will be undergoing a complete refurbishment, so the new incumbent will have the benefit of a renovated home. There is private parking at the end of the walled vicarage garden.





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OXFORD

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