

# Parish profile of St. Michael's, Tilehurst

*A guide to the church community*



[www.stmichaeltilehurst.org.uk](http://www.stmichaeltilehurst.org.uk)

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Statue of the Virgin Mary in the Lady Chapel

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## Introduction

**O**ur purpose in the Oxford Diocese is to create a caring, sustainable and growing presence in every community. This will require creativity and flexibility, and is a vision that needs to be implemented at the local level. We will need to encourage innovative forms of outreach and this will include developing fresh expressions of church. In all our parishes we are therefore looking for priests who are servant leaders, who have a heart for mission, and who can work collaboratively enabling the whole church to fulfil its vocation of service and outreach to the world.

The parish of St. Michael's Tilehurst is of strategic importance for the mission of God's church in the west of Reading. We are looking for a priest to help develop its life of prayer, worship and outreach. This is a wonderful opportunity for a more experienced priest to work alongside a committed congregation who want to see the church flourish, who are committed to serving the local community and who will welcome someone who can offer servant leadership.

The Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell  
*Bishop of Reading*

# About Tilehurst

Originally a village in its own right, by the 1950s Tilehurst had become a suburb of Reading. Located on the high ground between the Thames and the Kennet, to the west of Reading town centre, Tilehurst has expanded rapidly over the past half a century. Most housing is private, but, like everywhere today, there are some pockets of deprivation. Overall, the area is an affluent one.

Tilehurst benefits from excellent communications with other parts of the country. From Tilehurst railway station, one can get direct trains to Reading, Oxford and London. Reading railway station, some four miles away, provides the opportunity to connect to trains across the country. The M4 Junction 12 is about three miles away, while Reading Buses run a number of frequent services within the Greater Reading area from, and through, Tilehurst.

Tilehurst sits in the heart of what has been called Silicon Valley, with a number of multinational businesses located close by. In particular, high technology companies have been attracted to the area by the relative ease of access to Heathrow Airport and London, as well as the quality of life enjoyed here. The area has one of the lowest unemployment figures in England, and job opportunities for young people are consequently good.

Tilehurst has a thriving village centre, providing an excellent choice of local shops, as well as the presence of each of the four large banks. Nearby, Reading boasts the extensive Oracle Shopping Centre.

Educationally, there is a good selection of schools in Tilehurst – three secondary schools within a mile and a half of the Church, and an even greater number of primary schools. West Berkshire is one of the best performing education authorities in the country. Tilehurst also possesses its own library.

The Royal Berkshire Hospital (four miles distant) is the main hospital for the area. Part of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, it provides the full range of services to the population of West Berkshire, including maternity and accident & emergency.

There are numerous parks within, and on the outskirts of, the village. Barely a mile from the centre of Tilehurst, one can find oneself in open country. To the west of Tilehurst is an area of outstanding natural beauty.

For entertainment, sports fans are particularly well catered for. Reading FC play football in the Premiership at the Madejski Stadium (five miles away), while, at the same venue, London Irish play top level Rugby Union. Reading also hosts top level Speedway. For the theatre and concerts, the Hexagon in Reading provides a wide variety of well attended events throughout the year, while, at the end of August each year, the town hosts the extremely popular Reading Festival on the banks of the River Thames.

# Overview

As a church, we aim to provide a welcome by:

- Sharing the Risen Life of Christ
- Witnessing to God's love and serving the wider community
- Providing nurture in the faith through worship and friendship

St. Michael's is a church with some 170 regular worshippers. Lay members exercise a variety of gifts and ministries, including help with intercessions, readings, music, children, stewardship, fabric and parish visiting. The church is well maintained, loved and cared for, with a congregation committed to serving Christ and caring for one another and the wider community.

The Parish, one of the largest in Reading, has enormous potential. It has a solid basis in good quality facilities, finance and many enthusiastic Church members. It needs someone who can see the potential, identify the way forward, and motivate people to work cooperatively to achieve our agreed goals.



## WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Our new Rector will need to:

- Be able to reach out to the community
- Help and nurture the existing congregation to grow spiritually
- Have the ability to teach, guide and motivate
- Support the organised groups within the Church

The new incumbent at St Michael's should have the ability and determination to reach out to potential new worshippers, particularly young people. The current profile of the congregation is predominantly middle aged to elderly and we are conscious that renewal is essential if the Church is to prosper. There is a strong desire within the congregation for the Church to develop, and we have undertaken a number of reviews in the past few years, including studies based on "Mission-shaped church" and "Growing Healthy Churches".

Our new leader should also help the existing congregation to gain spiritually from their involvement in St Michael's, as most people feel a need to deepen their understanding and faith.

Good people management and teamworking skills are essential. Many members of the congregation demonstrate talent and enthusiasm in Church activities other than Sunday worship. We would expect the new incumbent to support the organised groups within St. Michael's, make people feel that their contributions are worthwhile and appreciated, and actively encourage more people to become involved.

The activities that we at St. Michael's are good at can mainly be described as inward looking – maintaining the Church fabric, organising social events for Church members, etc. We have not been as good when it comes to looking outward. Whilst there are some links on an individual basis with local outreach organisations, there is no organised contact with schools, hospitals and community groups in the area. If the Church is to grow, and indeed if we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, we need a leader who can help us to increase our involvement with the local community.

# The church buildings

There has been a Christian church, dedicated to St Michael on the present site in Tilehurst since 1189. The oldest part of the present church is the south aisle, or Lady Chapel, built around about 1300. In the South Aisle there is a spectacular renaissance monument, to the Dutch merchant and Lord of the Manor, Sir Peter Vanlore, as well as one of the oldest brasses in Berkshire.

In 1855 G E Street restored the church to his own design. This work included building the north aisle and adding a spire to the tower. The tower dates from the 1730s and currently houses eight bells.

There are two windows of particular note. The first is the East window of the Lady Chapel which is an early design by William Morris. The second is the East window of the Chancel, which is by Wailes of Newcastle.



The East Window  
designed by  
William Morris

The organ was replaced in the late 1990s by a new electronic one. The original pipes remain in place.

Recently a new painting 'The Adoration of the Shepherds' has been installed in the Sedilia. This work has been painted by a local artist who is an active member of St Michael's, and features some one hundred or so of the congregation.



The Adoration of the Shepherds

St Michael's is a consecrated church, and, together with the Rectory and other church buildings, is located in a conservation area.

A major **extension** to the church building was completed in 1993. The cost of the work was met by donations and fund raising. It comprises a cloister with enclosed garden, small meeting room, office, large meeting room with kitchen, sacristy, choir room, toilets, which are suitable for disabled people, and a utility room. It is used almost exclusively for Church activities but there is potential for greater use. The office is used by the Parish secretary, who works weekday mornings.

The **Rectory**, some one hundred yards from the Church, was built in the 1960s. It has 4 good sized bedrooms, recently redecorated kitchen and bathroom, generous living and storage accommodation, and a large walled garden with established fruit trees and borders.

The **Church Hall**, adjacent to the Rectory, was built in the 1960s and is used widely by the local community as well as by the church when a large venue is required. It consists of a large hall, and several smaller rooms, with kitchen and storage facilities, a storage shed and other storage space for groups using the Hall. Some 1000 people use the Hall on a weekly basis.

Opposite the Church are the **Church Cottages** built in 1779 to be inhabited by such people as the gardener or the parish clerk. They are now owned by The Church Lands Charity – a charitable trust chaired by the incumbent.

**Tilston Lodge**, across the road from the church, was built to provide accommodation for a curate but currently it is rented out to provide additional church income.

# The church services

Currently, St Michael's has three regular Church services on a Sunday, as well as a very well attended mid-week Eucharist service.

## 8.00 A.M. SUNDAY HOLY EUCHARIST

About twenty regular worshippers attend this service. A verger, a churchwarden and an altar server support the Priest. The service is a said Eucharist, and lay people read the first and second readings.

## 9.30 A.M. SUNDAY FAMILY EUCHARIST

Approximately 110 worshippers attend this service each week. The Priest is supported by one of the two Lay Ministers, a verger, both churchwardens, sides persons, servers, organist and, on the first Sunday of the month, a robed choir. The service could be described as "middle of the road" Anglican. As well as reading the lessons and intercessions, lay people also provide chalice support. The hymnal used is 'Hymns Old & New'.

In term time, the Sunday school, Sparks, meets in the Morlais Room during the first part of this service, and, at an appropriate juncture, they come into church to receive either a blessing or communion at the High Altar. At the end of the service, the teachers and children present the work of the day to the congregation.



The Sunday school, Sparks

A group of older children, Dynamos, also meet separately during this service, and join the rest of the congregation before the Eucharistic prayer. They provide occasional reports of what they have undertaken to the whole congregation at the end of the service.



The 9.30 a.m. service is followed by a get together over coffee which is always well attended.

## 6.30 P.M. SUNDAY EVENSONG

This is a traditional service, attended by about a dozen worshippers plus a churchwarden, verger and organist. Lay people read the first and second readings.

## 10.00 A.M. WEDNESDAY HOLY EUCHARIST

This service, very similar in content to the 8.00 a.m. Sunday service, is regularly attended by about 40 worshippers. It is followed by a popular get together over coffee.

## ADDITIONAL REGULAR SERVICES

On the first Saturday of each month, a Requiem Mass is held at 9.30 a.m.

A special baptism service is normally held on the first Sunday of each month at 11.15 a.m.

# Church activities

## CHURCH GROUPS

The **Mothers' Union** has Branch Membership of about 80, and organises a varied programme for an Afternoon Group that meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, and an Evening Group that meets on the 4th Monday.

The **St Michael's Wives Group** meets alternate Tuesday evenings, with a programme of speakers, discussions and outings. It organises tea/coffee after Services, and helps with the Plant Sale, Christmas Bazaar and other activities. The **New Lane Hill Group** has a programme of speakers, visits and other social activities. The **Bethany Group** meet in each other's houses to explore their faith and its application to daily life.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Sunday School, **Sparks**, meets every Sunday in term time. The group of 10-15 children learn through Bible stories and various activities. Children over seven are allowed to receive communion after a period of instruction. The teens group, **Dynamos**, has a discussion group during the first part of the Service. They are encouraged to take part in Christian activities outside the Church, such as the Regenerate campaign.

There are two **Beavers Colonies** two **Cub Scout Packs** and a **Scout Troop** associated with St Michael's. The total membership is 88, plus 14 Adult Leaders and Helpers. The Scout Hut is adjacent to the Church Hall. There are two **Guides** units, four **Brownie** units, one **Rainbow** unit, and a **Senior Section**, with total membership well over 150. These meet in the Church Hall.

## THE FUNCTIONING CHURCH

Lay involvement in services is extensive. In addition to Sidespersons and Readers, there are teams of Vergers, Servers and Chalice Assistants. The **St Michael's Choir** continues to robe on the first Sunday in the month and to sing at all the major festival services. The **Flower Guild** has a well organised rota, and there is an enthusiastic team of **Bell Ringers**.

Major activities organised by the **Events Committee** include the annual Plant Sale and Spring Fayre, which in the past year raised £1500 for church repairs; a summer Barbeque; and the Christmas Bazaar which raised £1600. Christian Stewardship of time and money in support of the Church is encouraged by an active **Stewardship Committee**.



An arrangement by the Flower Guild

## MAINTAINING THE CHURCH

The cleanliness of the Church and its surrounding rooms is maintained every Friday by the **Church Cleaning Group**. Four teams of **Grass Cutters** look after the Old Churchyard, surrounding the church. The **Fabric Committee** takes responsibility for upkeep, repairs and improvements, and also organises two or three working parties each year at the Church, and a similar number at the Church Hall. There is a **Churchyard Committee** responsible for the New Churchyard, across the road from the church. Maintenance there is undertaken by contractors.

After the 2007 quinquennial report on the Church fabric the first phase of Church redecoration will begin, following some work on the west wall of the Lady Chapel. A significant project recently completed treated the timbers under the north aisle. In the **Church Hall**, the gents' and ladies' toilets were upgraded this year, and new fencing has been installed around the site. Kitchen improvements are also planned.

### THE CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY

Members of the **Baptism Group** visit each family at home to explain the practicalities and commitments associated with the service. They also ensure there are familiar faces at the church door to greet the families. Members of the **Marriage Preparation Group** organise evening group sessions for couples planning to be married at the church.

The **Church News** magazine goes monthly to over 200 subscribers, and provides a form of outreach, as well as keeping church members informed and amused. A team of ten Pastoral Visitors has commitment to specific individuals. An **Outreach group** oversees charitable giving by the Church. St Michael's current supported charities are: the Reading based Christian Community Action, the Mityana Charity in Uganda, and the Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf.

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## Financial statement

### Overview of the financial position for 2006.

Total income for the year amounted to £149,049 (an increase of just under 10% on the previous year).

#### MAIN POINTS

- Regular giving (stewardship and collections) amounted to £54,766 (against £59,777 for 2005 – a decrease of some 8%).
- Donations/bequests rose to £14,373 (up from £5004 in 2005). However, of this amount £8000 was received from just 3 donations.
- Funds received from activities for generating funds fell to £4885.
- Income from fees received (e.g. weddings/funerals) increased in the year helped by an increase in tariff.

Total expenditure for the Church amounted to £138,347 for the year (this was a slight reduction on the total for 2005 (£142,212)).

#### MAIN POINTS

- Parish Share payments totalling £69,892
- Reduction in Church Hall income due to large spend on improvements
- North Aisle works cost amounting to some £7600.

Although from a financial point of view the position is a healthy one it should be noted that the reduction in expenditure was largely due to over payment on Utility services which is not likely to be repeated to the same effect in 2007. Similarly, on the income side, the increase was primarily due to an increase in donations which are largely 'one off' occurrences and should not be regarded as achievable again in 2007. The reduction in regular giving has been a point of concern, particularly with the church refurbishment/redecoration that is being planned. However a campaign of stewardship renewal is underway, to address regular giving, and a targeted appeal to raise funds for church refurbishment is planned.