



# KNIGHTON



## *Benefice Magazine*

### **Christmas Tree Festival and Advent Windows add to Christmas joy**

The Christmas Tree Festival at St Mary's, the illuminated Advent windows in Knighton Church Road and nearby streets, and the St Guthlac's Fayre have established themselves as highlights of the season for the whole Knighton community. (Reports and more pictures on inside pages).



## Vicar's letter

Friends,

I hope there was much in the Christmas season to give you good cheer and lift your spirits! This new year, 2025, seems to be bringing many challenges already, so I hope that the recent festivities refreshed and encouraged you for all that's ahead!

At Christmas – the celebration of the Incarnation – we remember that God himself has entered Creation, taking on the limits and pains, the joys and the adventure of being human. Therefore, we know that God in Jesus is alongside us come what may, and a deep peace can be ours as we trust him for all our futures.



The incarnation tells us that God is committed to the *small details* of human life. As Jesus he lived the life that we are all familiar with – daily routines, small tasks, unimportant but necessary choices, unexpected but short-lived pleasures, snatches of bird song, sad stories about the neighbours, ongoing frustrations with others and with ourselves, today's ache, wounding comments, and momentary, uplifting smiles ... all of this, Jesus has experienced with us.

Small details make up most of life - those who promote New Year Resolutions in our glossy magazines and social media ("*New Year! New You!*") may believe that big things are possible if we only try harder (or buy the right product) but our experience tells us that real change is harder to achieve, and that it's the small details that actually make a difference.

One of my favourite Christmas presents this year was a clip-on, close-up lens for my phone's camera... meaning that I can take close-up pictures of the details of the bugs and plants that I'm so fond of spotting around me. By going closer, into the detail, I'm discovering another layer of beauty in the natural world and fascinating new things about what is so familiar.

I wonder what Jesus made of the small details in human life, as he experienced them just as we do?

Perhaps he found them wonder-full, as I do when getting close to the details of my bugs – but the difference is that I am still an observer, whereas Jesus entered fully *into* those small details. To *live* these details, he had to be human and therefore be restricted, limited, given boundaries, in a way that as God, he never was.

Paul the Apostle expresses this self-emptying of Jesus so poetically in the Letter to the Philippians:

*“Christ Jesus -*

*who, being in very nature God,*

*did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing*

*by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man,*

*he humbled himself*

*by becoming obedient to death –  
even death on a cross!”*

The incarnation, Jesus coming into the detail, is amazing, but it leads to something even more astounding: Jesus giving himself to the death that we all experience too, so that he might defeat it for us. And then...

*“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place*

*and gave him the name that is above every name,*

*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,*

*in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,*

*to the glory of God the Father.”*

(Philippians 2:5-10)

I do hope your experience of Christmas was heartening and happy, but I also hope deeply that it leads you on to that more astounding discovery - that Jesus, having shared the detail of human life alongside us, has now won for us the glory and joy of life into eternity, alongside him.

Yours in friendship and Christ's service,

*Adrian*

## **The Knighton Christmas Tree Festival, 2024**

**A**t 10.00am on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November we opened our doors for the fifth in-person Knighton Christmas Tree Festival. The church was decorated with 70 trees, the splendid craft and gift stall looked like Fortnum and Masons, and there was an amazing range of cakes ready to sell. Volunteers were at their stations.

At 10am promptly people began to arrive, and this continued until the Carols on Sunday at 5pm.

The visitors were very complimentary.

“We always get such a warm welcome.”

“The trees are so beautiful and creative. It was nice to interact with so many this year.”

Finally:

“This is the start of Christmas!”

The range of Christmas Trees was again spectacular. It would be inappropriate to highlight specific trees as ‘the best’, but I know ‘Lady White’ in memory of Doreen White was a firm favourite with many; and the Laura Centre's Tree gave all those who wished to remember a chance to hang a message on their tree.

Each tree was different and provided a unique insight into our rich community. The ‘St Mary's Tree-O’ also put a smile on people’s faces. If you didn’t notice this tree, it was the one which had three of everything and if you opened any of the three Christmas cards it played a carol!

The music was a particular highlight of 2024. Thanks go to the Titanic Boys, the Semper Singers, the Knighton String Quartet and the St Mary’s Trio, who had us dancing in the aisles!



After the main festival, on Monday 2nd December we welcomed St Mary's pre-school and a group of residents from MHA Aigburth Care Home. The residents were delighted to have a trip out, studied the

trees in detail and enjoyed a cup of tea and mince pie to round off their morning.



The Laura Centre was delighted to be chosen as this year's charity. The Laura Centre contributes vital work in providing therapeutic support to families who have experienced the death of a child, parent or sibling. During the weekend the charity exhibited a tree and provided 6 volunteers to help run the event. The Laura Centre will receive 50% of the money raised during the festival. The other 50% going towards completing the St. Mary's Church community garden project, A Place of Peace.

The final figures show that 1,700 people visited the Festival, 120 attended 'Carols round the Trees' and we were able to make £6,600 for charity, a magnificent increase of £1,240 on last year, and a new record.

The most important purpose of this article is to thank all those who helped make the festival a success. Firstly, the Christmas Tree Festival Team who have been working since April to ensure the event was a success. You know who you are and thank you. I have said it before, but you are the dream team!

Thank you to Leicester City Council who agreed to give us a Knighton Ward Grant which covered all the costs associated with running such a big event.

Thank you to David Ardley, Andrew Oldershaw and Luke Fogg who did all the technical things behind the scenes that we didn't understand! Thank you to all those who did the heavy lifting. Thank you to Adrian, Cecilia and Janet and to the Church Wardens, Sian and Beryl, who supported and adapted throughout the week.

Also thank you to all those who volunteered to help during the festival - members of the congregation, friends, neighbours and others.



Finally, thank you to St. Mary's congregation who gave so generously to the raffle and cake stall, volunteered at the festival and provided trees too!

I hope you will agree that the festival was a wonderful community team effort.

If you would like to be more involved in future, please contact me. It's great fun! Watch this space for festival dates for 2025!

*Sue Siesage (sue.siesage@gmail.com)*



## Advent Windows



## A Place for Peace in St Mary's churchyard

The next phase for the community garden in the churchyard will be starting soon. The landscapers marked out some areas on the ground before Christmas, with the majority of the project taking place in the New Year. The area south of the church, between gravestones and the wild area near the brook, will be developed into a place for peaceful reflection, prayer or meditation.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been to recognise the importance of green spaces for health and well-being, for everyone to be in touch with nature and

wildlife, to take moments of stillness. The new garden will help to encourage members of the wider community to use the space without feeling it's just for 'church people'.



Pathways through a range of soft planting will help people to connect to nature through borders of seasonal interest, a variety of flower shapes and forms for pollinators and new habitats for birds and small mammals. The planting will enhance the existing vegetation and provide wildlife corridors across the churchyard.

One of the key criteria in the design brief was to be as sustainable and eco-friendly as possible, to further contribute to the Eco-Church award. Therefore, the designs will use local and reclaimed materials and incorporate sustainable practices for the ongoing care and maintenance through composting, directed flow of rainwater and the range of plants sequestering carbon dioxide.

Thank you to everyone on the Christmas Tree Festival team who have helped to fundraise for the garden and friends and family of anyone who has donated or left a legacy gift for this project.

*Tanya Willis, Garden Design*

## Here lieth ...

*The first in a short series exploring some of the more noteworthy burials in St Mary's churchyard*

### Did you know...?

**W**hile we were setting up this year's Christmas Tree Festival, we were approached by a member of the public who said, "Did you know that you have a significant grave in the churchyard?"

I immediately thought of the 'Titanic Grave' of Denzil Jarvis, but no, this was another grave, that of Francis Smith, who died on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1888 at the age of 73.

I began to do some research. It seems that Francis Smith is known locally as Tanky Smith. He grew up in Victorian Leicester, which according to Police historian Clifford Stanley, was a lawless, crime-ridden place, and "burglars, robberies and street brawls



were frequent". The narrow streets and dark alleyways were frequented by gangs of robbers and pickpockets, with riots and drunken brawls being commonplace.



As a result of this lawlessness, the Leicester Corporation created the city's first organised police force in 1836, and when Tanky Smith was of age he joined. He worked with his partner 'Black Tommy' Haynes to clean up the streets of Leicester. It is believed his nickname, 'Tanky' comes from Francis 'tanking' or tapping disorderly people on the head with his cane. The partnership of Tanky and Tommy quickly became successful, and they become Leicester Police Force's first ever detectives.

As a detective, Tanky got a reputation for infiltrating criminal gangs using a range of disguises including a jockey, a quaker and a bishop! His success led him into private investigating.

As a private investigator, his most famous case came when the Winstanley family of Braunstone Hall hired him to search for James Beaumont Winstanley, who was High Sheriff of Leicestershire and had gone missing after a family argument.

Tanky tracked James first to Paris, and then Germany, where he discovered that an Englishman had fallen from a ferry and drowned. He arranged to have the body exhumed, and identified Winstanley thanks to the distinctive gold shirt studs and cufflinks that belonged to the High Sherriff. Was Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes inspired by Tanky? Some believe he was ...

On his return, Tanky used the £1,000 he received in fees and the skills of his architect son to build Victoria Terrace on London Road. This is now generally known as 'Top Hat Terrace.' It still stands today and is decorated with sixteen prominently carved heads of Tanky's many disguises including a bishop, jockey, plus his distinctive top hat!



So this is indeed a significant grave in our churchyard!

*Sue Siesage*

*In our next issue we will investigate the memorial to members of the prominent local Gee family. If you have any information on the background to other graves which would make an interesting article, please let the Editor know.*

## St Guthlac's Christmas Fayre

**T**he St Guthlac's Christmas Fayre was, as always, a great success, and a very happy occasion, attracting visitors from all over the community and Benefice.

Over £2,300 was raised for church funds and in addition, £279 for the mobile health clinic in Malawi - a wonderful result.



## Warm Room / Drop-in Christmas Get-together

**A** small party was held in the Cottage Room at the Parish Centre on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, for the last "Warm Room" of 2024.

Despite many (understandably) having other commitments so close to Christmas, six people attended and we all enjoyed a lot of chat, laughter and tea-

drinking with Christmas cake, mince pies and chocolates (an odd cheese straw made it to the table to counteract the sugar)!

Friendly games of backgammon, shove ha'penny and bagatelle (early pinball) were played, plus a Christmas Quiz which caused quite a bit of hilarity.

Our guests were very appreciative and asked us to pass on their thanks to all the people who have hosted the meetings during the last twelve months. When asked if they would like to see any changes in 2025, they all agreed that more people coming along would be a good thing ...

Known as the "Warm Room" in the winter and the "Drop-In" for the rest of the year, the Parish Centre doors are open (come rain or shine) to everyone in the community ... church members, neighbours, friends and passers-by ... anyone who would like some company and a cup of tea or coffee. We are open every Monday afternoon, except Bank holidays. Join us for a quick tea/coffee or stay for the whole session. You will receive a very warm welcome.

If anyone has a spare couple of hours, once a month, to co-host a session, please come along to the Cottage Room on a Monday afternoon (2pm-4pm) and see what it is all about. Thank you.

*Annette Metcalfe*

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## PLANNED GIVING

Regular giving is an integral part of our church life, supporting our day-to-day costs, ministry and mission. A good way to achieve this is through a monthly direct debit as part of St Mary's participation in the Parish Giving Scheme or by standing order to St Guthlac's. Details of the two schemes can be obtained from Planned Giving Scheme contacts for each church, listed in the Contacts section. If you are a taxpayer and gift aid your giving, the church can claim an additional 25%.

## From the Editor

The March/April issue of this magazine will be issued in *mid March*. The closing date for copy will therefore be **Monday 3 March 2025, but you can send your contributions at any time** to the usual address, [stmaryknighton.magazine@gmail.com](mailto:stmaryknighton.magazine@gmail.com).

Articles do not represent the opinions of the Parochial Church Council of either church. Typographical and other errors (and the occasional omission) are the Editor's responsibility.



## All Things Bright and Beautiful 2025 Calendar



The remaining stock of these lovely calendars is now available for half price!  
**That's 11 months for only £3!!**

For sale at services at St Mary's or by contacting Amanda Beck, Beryl Bonfield or Sian Howarth

(See contacts section of this Magazine).

*Cash or contactless payment (no cheques please)*

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