

St Mary's Parish Church Whitegate



NEWS FOR FEBRUARY 2026



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Our cover photo

We owe thanks to Steve Leech for this one. Sitting as we do inside the famous Cheshire Gap, our area often escapes the snow that falls on the higher ground in North Wales and the Peak District. More often than not, snow either side of us falls as rain here; not as magical to look at but less treacherous underfoot!

Thank you, Steve, for capturing this, and other, super images for us. Now that the leaning conifer by the lychgate has gone, we have a wider view over towards Lodge Cottage too. It's another great record of how the churchyard evolves over time.

A verse for FEBRUARY

1 Corinthians Ch 13: v 12

“Now I know only a part, but then I will know fully, as God has known me.”

Corrie ten Boom and her family helped around 800 Jews escape the Holocaust in Holland. She and her family were eventually sent to Ravensbrück where her father and sister both died. Corrie survived and started a worldwide ministry, speaking all over the world.

Corrie would often speak with her head down. She appeared to be reading notes, but she was actually stitching a needlepoint design. When she finished telling her story of the atrocities she suffered from the Nazis and how she was able, with God's help, to forgive them, she would reveal the needlepoint she had been working on.

She would show the back side first, which was just a tangle of coloured threads with no discernible pattern. Then she would say, 'That's how we see our lives. Sometimes it makes no sense.' Then she would turn the needlepoint over to show the finished side. She would then say, 'This is how God views your life, and someday we will have the privilege of seeing it from His point of view.'

She would end her talks with this poem by Grant Colfax Tullar:

My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colours, He works steadily.
Oft times he weaveth sorrow and I, in foolish pride,
forget he sees the upper, and I the underside.
Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly,
will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skilful hands,
as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned.

TMF

February Diary

1st	9.30 am 2.00 for 2.30 pm	Candlemas Family Service Movies in The Mews: Downton Abbey – The Grand Finale – see page 12.	St Mary's The Mews
3rd	2.00 pm	Bible Study at Commonside	L.B. Methodist Chapel
4th	10.00 am 12.00 noon	Crafty Coffee Holy Communion (BCP)	The Mews St Mary's
5th	10.30 am	First Thursday Café – see page 12.	The Mews
7th	7.00 pm	Bishop Mark's Motorbike Quiz	The Mews
8th	9.30 am	Second Sunday before Lent Holy Communion This morning the Vicar is leading services at Holy Trinity, Castle	St Mary's
9th	7.30 pm	The Vicar is on duty today at the Cathedral Safeguarding Officers' meeting	
10th	10.00 am 2.00 pm	College of Canons' meeting Bible Study at Commonside	Chester Cathedral L.B. Methodist Chapel
11th	9.00 am 10.00 am 12.00 noon	Men's Breakfast – see page 12. Crafty Coffee Holy Communion (BCP)	Tarporley G'dn Centre The Mews St Mary's
15th	9.30 am 9.30 am 11.00 am	Sunday before Lent Morning Prayer Storytelling Service Memorial Service, remembering 100 th anniversary of the fire at Oulton Hall, with dedication of new memorial – see page 8	St Mary's The Mews Oulton Park
17th	2.00 pm 4.00 – 7.00 pm	Bible Study at Commonside Shrove Tuesday Pancake Party – see page 12.	L.B. Methodist Chapel The Mews
18th	10.00 am 12.00 noon 7.30 pm	Ash Wednesday Crafty Coffee Holy Communion (BCP) Holy Communion with Imposition of Ashes	The Mews St Mary's St Mary's
21st	10.00 am	Coffee morning	The Mews
22nd	9.30 am	First Sunday in Lent Holy Communion	St Mary's
24th	12.00 pm 2.00 pm	Deanery Chapter Meeting Bible Study at Commonside	L.B. Methodist Chapel
25th	10.00 am 12.00 noon 7.00 pm	Crafty Coffee Holy Communion (BCP) Lent Group	The Mews St Mary's The Mews
MAR 1st	9.30 am	Lent 2 Family Service	St Mary's
3rd	2.00 pm	Bible Study at Commonside	L.B. Methodist Chapel
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5th	10.30 am	First Thursday Café	The Mews

February letter from the Vicar

Observant readers of these monthly ramblings will remember that February is my least favourite month. After a long gloomy winter the days begin to lengthen and I go looking for signs of spring but nothing ever happens. As I have often quoted, living in Britain in February is like living inside a Tupperware box. The sky is always dull, grey and opaque.

(Other brands of storage containers are available.)

This winter things have been out of kilter. I saw the first snowdrops in mid-December. The week before Christmas the rhododendrons by the river were coming into flower. The seasons seem out of sorts. So, who knows what February will bring this year?



Yet this least favourite month begins with one of my most loved festivals, Candlemas. I love the humanity of the story. Two parents bringing their firstborn child into God's presence. Their offering was modest, Joseph's skills were valued but he wasn't rich. Mary was no more than a young teenager. They were out of place in the city and had probably never entered the temple before. Yet they came, carrying their child, doing what needed to be done.

And then Anna and Simeon, elderly servants of God who had watched and waited for years. They recognised who this child is. They saw Mary's joy but also foretold her agony. Candlemas is our last look at the Crib, our first glimpse of the Cross. It is a pivotal moment. But we need to stick within this moment. It is where we are. It is where God needs us to be. Life is messy.

I have to recognise the many, many days when Anna and Simeon came to the temple and nothing happened. They came faithfully, patiently, hopefully, watching and waiting, and day after day nothing happened. It is only because they kept on just being there that they were there when Mary and Joseph walked through the door.

Maybe the point of February is just enduring. Looking and looking, keeping the faith that spring will come – eventually.

Candlemas is moment of connection. G K Chesterton said that, "our religion is not the church we belong to, but the cosmos we live inside of." In Candlemas we are allowed to enter into the lives of parents carrying their newborn child. Stay within that moment. And we are allowed to enter into the lives of patient, faithful, elderly servants who wait day after day in holy space. Stay also within that moment. We are allowed to glimpse both Crib and Cross and are invited to be part of this story.

I read somewhere that the Latin root of the word 'disaster' means 'losing connection with the stars.' The Romans had a sense that we have a place in the cosmos and if we lose sight of that place then things go wrong. They didn't know

then that all matter, everything we are made of, each atom of our bodies, was forged in the heart of a star. (In the book of Genesis when it says God shaped Adam out of dust the word is 'stardust'.) We are part of creation. We have a connection with the stars that is deep within the very stuff we are made of.

Christians speak of 'the Incarnation' by which we usually mean the message of Christmas, when God became human in Jesus Christ. But St John, whose Gospel we read at Midnight on the Eve of Christmas, suggests something more than this. That which becomes incarnate in Jesus is the action and being of God that is present in all creation. God calls all things into being, that is also Incarnation. The Word of God was in the beginning. All things came into being through that which is born. We are part of this.

In the dull days of February when nothing much happens and the world seems to like a bad internet connection (you know that time when you just see a circle going round and round and you wait and nothing happens) stay in that moment. Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, the Crib and the Cross, Incarnation, you are made of stuff forged in a star, remember in this moment that 'religion' means 're-alignment'. We need to rediscover that which God has made us to be. And it is truly wonderful.

God invites us to be part of his world, to shape ourselves to be citizens of heaven, to make his kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.

But for a time we need to wait.

Paul.

Evelyn Pritchard

See alongside this message a photograph taken during Evelyn's funeral service with her coffin in St Mary's flanked by the Mothers' Union banners. On the day of her funeral there was heavy snow and a number of those planning to attend wisely decided it was unsafe to travel. We know there were many people united with us in prayer who could not be present, so during the service we asked for this photograph to be taken to share with you. Please keep Evelyn's family in your prayers in the coming weeks. Paul.



NEWS FROM ST MARY'S

□ Lent Preparations

Ash Wednesday is on 18th February when we shall hold a service of Holy Communion with the Imposition of Ashes at St Mary's at 7.30pm. To make the ash for this year's service please bring last year's palm crosses back to church. Traditionally they are returned on Candlemas.

We will offer a Lent series based on hymns, some well-known, others less familiar, in the Mews 7.00pm on Wednesdays from 25th February.



□ Pancakes in The Mews

As advertised elsewhere in this edition you'll see that the Mission & Giving group is again offering pancakes on Shrove Tuesday (17th February) in The Mews. All are welcome. Come down and join in anytime from 4.00 to 7.00 pm. No specific charge, but donations please, for Christian Aid.

□ Mews Management

There is a small group that meets just 3 times a year to oversee the management and upkeep of The Mews. One member has recently felt it necessary to stand down and with Margaret Byrne's appointment to Kingsley and Paul Dawson's retirement later this year, the Mews management committee is looking for a couple of new members. It's not an onerous job but it is essential, for The Mews plays a central role in so many village events & activities. Could you help? If so, please talk to Andrew Millinchip, a churchwarden or a member of the clergy.

□ Weekly Reading Sheets: www.stmaryswhitegate.org/

Readings and prayers for services in February are on the website. If you don't see the sheets straight away on the home page, click on the Blog button, top right.

www.easyfundraising.org.uk

Don't forget that St Mary's Church Whitegate is registered with easyfundraising. If you sign up, then each time you buy online, from many different shops and businesses, St Mary's will receive a small donation AT NO COST TO YOU! Sign up to support us at <https://tinyurl.com/mubythrp> or scan this QR code.



WHITEGATE WI

The group meets on the first Wednesday of each month, at 7.15 pm for a 7.30 start, in the Recreation Room. Visitors and new members are always welcome. There is a small fee for visitors, which covers refreshments. On Wednesday 4th March, Kevin Reynolds will bring us, Dispelling Myths; An Introduction to Bats.

For more information, email whitegatewi@outlook.com

□ Burns' Night Supper

Everyone enjoyed the occasion, celebrated in The Mews recently. There was lots of food, including Haggis and Cranachan, all cooked by those attending. Copious wine and whisky flowed. We were entertained with Rabbie Burns' poems with very interesting accents, and a challenging quiz about Burn's life from Eileen. Martin Allen played his guitar and sang "The Rose" and "Green Grow the Rushes" and we all enjoyed it and joined in. The Mews was beautifully lit with candles and the tables decorated with heathers. All felt we must do it again. We had fun and raised money for the church. Thank you to all who participated.

John Blayney



□ Fire at Oulton Hall – 100 years ago

Readers will have seen in the Diary on page 2 that a special Memorial Service is planned at Oulton Park at 11.00 am on Sunday 15th February, marking the 100th anniversary of the devastating fire, which gutted Oulton Hall on 14th February 1926, leaving nothing but a charred shell.

The Oulton Estate was the ancestral home of the Egerton family, made Lords of the manor by Henry VII. For nearly five centuries, the Egertons were significant local landowners, overseeing vast stretches of Cheshire farmland. The original, Tudor hall met a tragic fate when it was consumed by fire in 1715.

John Egerton then commissioned the construction of the opulent baroque-style Oulton Hall, which became a symbol of the family's enduring legacy. Alongside the grandeur of the manor, beautifully designed formal gardens and expansive parkland were established.

It was this house that would be destroyed by fire on Valentine's Day 1926. Six people died: 5 employees of the Grey-Egerton family and Joseph Hunt, the leader of the Tarporley volunteer fire brigade which was attending the blaze.

A new memorial, which has been ten years in the making, will be unveiled at the service on Sunday 15th February. Made from sandstone from the ruined Oulton Hall, it will be sited within the footprint of the house and will incorporate a seat and a commemorative plaque.

Peter Robinson, chairman of Little Budworth Parish Council and great grandson of perished firefighter, Joseph Hunt, said, "We thought it would be most fitting to make the memorial on the site of Oulton Hall and to have a service and dedication on the 100th anniversary of the tragedy."

The Memorial Service at Oulton Park will be taken by Revd Canon Paul Dawson, Vicar of St Peter's Little Budworth.

In his book, *The Great Fire of Oulton*, Cheshire writer, Mark Bevan, examines the truth behind the tragic blaze. It is available from <http://www.cc-publishing.co.uk/>

With thanks to Northwich Guardian, Wikipedia.org, Duke's Auctioneers & Mark Bevan for the information in this piece.



Photo showing parishioners attending the memorial service held a few days after the fire. © Mark Bevan

□ Chester Cathedral hosts the Museum of the Moon

From Thursday 12 February to Sunday 15 March 2026, marvel at its beauty or go along to one of the many events and activities that will be taking place in the moonlight, including family events, talks, concerts, and more.

Measuring six metres in diameter, the moon features 120dpi detailed NASA imagery of the lunar surface. At an approximate scale of 1:500,000, each centimetre of the internally lit spherical sculpture represents 5km of the moon's surface.

The installation is a fusion of lunar imagery, moonlight and surround sound composition created by BAFTA and Ivor Novello award winning composer Dan Jones.

Throughout the exhibition there is no charge for daytime entry to the Cathedral, although a suggested donation of £5 per person is encouraged, contributing to the hosting of the exhibition, the ongoing maintenance and development of Chester Cathedral, and keeping the doors open for all.



Events under the Moon

Monday 16 February: A Grand Day Out at Chester Cathedral. Showings at 11.30am, 1.30pm, 2.45pm. SEND relaxed performance at 4.30pm

Monday 16 February: Moon Model-Making Workshops at 10.30am, 12.30pm, 1.45pm, 3pm

Tuesday 17 & Wednesday 18 February: Family Activities under the Museum of the Moon: 11am - 1pm & 2pm - 4pm. No booking required

Thursday 19 February: From the Earth to the Moon and beyond: Human beings in cosmic perspective: Lecture with Revd Professor David Wilkinson at 11am

Mondays 23 February, 2 March, 9 March: Midday Mindfulness under the Museum of the Moon, 12pm no booking required

Thursday 26 February, Friday 27 February, Thursday 5 March, Friday 6 March: Museum of the Moon evening openings, from 6.30pm

Saturday 7 March: Sing Loud - Family Silent Disco under the Moon, 1pm and 5.30pm

To find out more and book for any of these events, go to:

<https://chestercathedral.com/events/event/museum-of-the-moon>



Also at the cathedral in the moonlight, on Saturday 28th February at 7.30 pm, Chester Philharmonic Orchestra will welcome Mariatu Kanneh-Mason, soloist, playing the Elgar Cello Concerto. Other works on the programme will be Weber's Overture, Der Freischütz and Beethoven's Symphony No 3, "Eroica", all under the baton of Conductor, Robert Guy. To book a ticket, go to <https://chestercathedral.com/events>

Movies in The Mews Programme for 2026



Sunday 1st February: 2.00 pm for 2.30 pm start

Downton Abbey: the Grand Finale (2025), directed by Simon Curtis, written by Julian Fellowes & starring Hugh Bonneville, Elizabeth McGovern, Penelope Wilton, Jim Carter and many more

Sunday 22nd March: 2.00pm for 2.30 pm start

The Penguin Lessons (2024), directed by Peter Cattaneo & starring Steve Coogan, Jonathan Pryce & Bruno Blas

Sunday 17th May: 2.00 pm for 2.30 pm start

The Choral (2025), written by Alan Bennett & Stephen Beresford & starring Ralph Fiennes, Alan Armstrong & Simon Russell Beale

Sunday 12th July: 2.00 pm for 2.30 pm start

The Salt Path (2024), directed by Marianne Elliott, written by Rebecca Lenkiewitz & Raynor Winn & starring Gillian Anderson & Jason Isaacs

Sunday 13th September: 2.00 pm for 2.30 pm start

The Greatest Showman (2017), directed by Michael Gracey & starring Hugh Jackman, Michelle Williams & Zac Efron

Sunday 22nd November: 2.00 pm for 2.30 pm start

The Critic (2023), directed by Anand Tucker & starring Ian McKellen, Gemma Arterton, Lesley Manville & Mark Strong

Suggested donation, £5 per person, to include refreshments prior to each film. Booking will open 3 weeks before each date. Sign up in church or contact Chris: **chrisball2015@gmail.com** or phone **01606 593260**

Contacts

In this online edition of the NEWS, many contacts prefer us only to show their phone number. If you need to e-mail them, please call them first to ask for the address.

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March NEWS: Comments and contributions for the next edition of the Monthly NEWS are always welcome. Please send copy to chrisball2022@outlook.com by 15th February.

Movies in The Mews

Church Green, Whitegate

Sunday 1st February 2026

Refreshments from 2.00 p.m.

film starts at 2.30 p.m. prompt.



DOWNTON ABBEY - THE GRAND FINALE (2025)

"A perfect farewell"

"Saying goodbye to family"

"What a gift Julian Fellowes has been"

Written by Julian Fellowes, directed by Simon Curtis and starring Hugh Bonneville, Elizabeth McGovern, Jim Carter, Phyllis Logan, Brendan Coyle, Joanne Froggatt – all the cast we know and love!

When Mary finds herself in a public scandal and the family faces financial trouble, the household grapples with the threat of social disgrace. The Crawleys must embrace change with the next generation leading Downton Abbey into the future.

Sub-titled for the hard of hearing.

Suggested donation £5.00 per person

Book by signing up on the board in church, or contact Chris Ball:
01606 593260 mob: 07786 132938 chrisball2015@gmail.com

FIRST THURSDAY CAFÉ

The Mews
Church
Green
Whitegate
CW8 2AY

Thursday 5th February & 5th March

Come to The Mews, catch up with old friends & meet new ones. Chat over tea, coffee and delicious homemade cakes.



**Everyone welcome!
10.30 am to 12.00 noon**



SHROVE TUESDAY 17th February

Pancake Party



Join us in The Mews,
Church Green, Whitegate, anytime
from 4.00 – 7.00pm & choose your
favourite topping

Donations please,
for Christian
Aid

