Winter 2026-7

St Mary's STOKE BISHOP

Messenger



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St Mary Magdalene, Stoke Bishop

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The Messenger

St Mary's Messenger is published quarterly and distributed to 3,000 homes in the parish. Contact us by email: messenger@stmarysb.org.uk or through the church office.

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Ideas for the next issue to the editorial team in time for the meeting on Friday 4 December.
Copy date for next issue: Sunday 10 January 2027.

The Messenger **is printed by Doveton Press Ltd**
15 Willway Street Bristol BS3 4BG
www.dovetonpress.co.uk

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9th Brownies	Wendy Hughes	962 4580

St Mary Magdalene Church
@StMarySB

@stmarystokebishop

Sundays at St Mary's

10 am Holy Communion

Week A: with band-led worship

Week B: with organ and choir-led hymns

SHINEon Sundays groups for children aged 0-14 yrs take place during the service on week A

Explore@4

An informal service open to all and planned for families with pre/primary school children. It takes place at 4pm during term time on week B.

Audio recordings of the Sunday sermons can be accessed at any time via the church website.

From January, our morning service times will be 9 am: traditional choir-led Holy Communion 10.45 am: contemporary band-led worship

Weekdays at St Mary's

Contact the church office for more information

Bright Sparks
Baby and Toddler Group
Mondays during termtime
2 - 3.30pm

Fuel
Fridays during term time 6-7.30 pm
for young people in school years 6-9

Bulb
Alternate Sundays 5.30-7 pm
for young people in school years 7 and up

Connect on Tuesdays
Conversation, coffee, craft in church
10-11.15 am with Communion service to end

Thursday Lunch Club
A hot lunch in the church rooms
Please book in advance

St Mary's Singers
Rehearsals alternate Tuesday evenings - see our website What's On calendar

Bellringing
Contact the church office for more information

Small Groups
Bible study and informal support
Daytime and evening groups

Alpha
An opportunity to explore the Christian faith in a small group or 1 to 1



Church Rooms update: We're moving in!

One step closer

By the time you read this, we expect to have some use of the interior of the building again! It has been wonderful to see the new spaces take shape, and we look forward to opening wide the doors next year as we share this space with the community of Stoke Bishop and beyond.

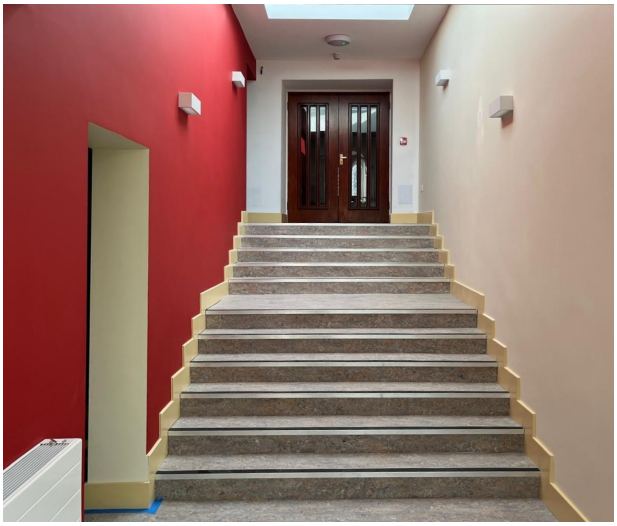
The work on the outside of the building will continue into the new year when we will be doing some further work on parts of the interior that were not included in our main contract with the builders, ensuring that both the entrances are fully accessible for everyone.

We are so grateful to everyone who has supported the project. The generosity and encouragement of St Mary's congregation and the wider community have made these improvements possible. Thank you to all who have donated, helped or followed the work with interest. We hope you will enjoy seeing the development starting to come together.

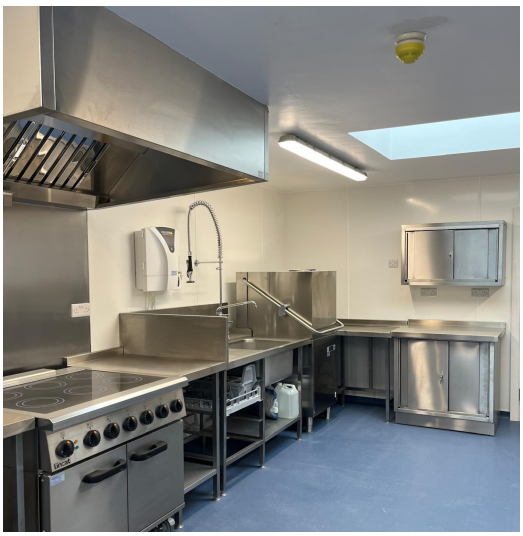
The pictures offer a hint of the changes inside, including the new toilets, foyer, office and hall, as well as the fresh paintwork. We hope they bring the progress to life.

There is still time to give towards this project - just use the QR code. With your help, we can complete the final stages and create a space that will serve our community for many decades to come. Thank you for sharing in this vision.

Jema Ball, Vicar







Scan to donate
Or visit www.stmarysb.org.uk



Welcome to the Winter Issue of The Messenger!



This issue takes you from Advent through Christmas and into the New Year. Our special feature is Christmas with our Mission Partners on pages 16 and 17. We hope you like the cover picture of Rev Tabitha Ddembe giving Christmas sweets to children in Uganda. You will also find our usual eclectic mix of local news, historical perspective, green matters, puzzles and more; read on!

Find our Christmas services on page 11. We look forward to seeing you there.

Exciting times are ahead as we move back into the refurbished Church Rooms, first with Bright Sparks on Mondays and, in the New Year, revert to two Sunday morning services but with slightly different timing. Our traditional service of Holy Communion with organ and choir will be back to 9 am every week and our contemporary worship will be at the new time of 10.45 am. We look forward to everyone socialising over coffee between the services.

Gillian Baxter, Editor





A New Year at Stoke Bishop Primary School

By Mike Clarke

As St Mary's School and Community Chaplain, I have enjoyed spending lots of time in our local school since the academic year began, supporting the staff and children in a variety of ways. From helping at the Good Morning Club and lunchtime Calm Club, spending 1-2-1 time with some of the children and leading Collective Worship once a week, I have appreciated all the ways the staff have welcomed me so warmly into such a lovely, affirming and child-focused school.

As I stood at the school gates on the first day of term to greet people as they arrived, I was surprised by how calm and peaceful everybody was. Having anticipated first-day-back chaos, I witnessed the complete opposite; smiles and waves from many, friendly greetings, and plenty of loud laughter!

Discussing this a few weeks later with Vickie Melton, Deputy Headteacher, she agreed. *"We're so glad that it has been such a settled and peaceful start to the term,"* she reflected. *"We had an exceptionally busy time last year, with both OFSTED and SIAMS inspections. We were so glad to have such good feedback from both these inspections, and it feels like this has given us all a huge boost this academic year as we look to improve even further."*

In September all the children took part in a sponsored walk around the school grounds to raise money for the PTA. From Reception to Year 6, everybody got involved. I joined them for a few laps and enjoyed chatting about what they most enjoyed about school.

Reception's Teddy Bears' Picnic once again proved a joy for all involved, with the youngest members of the school making their very own picnic!

The school's Harvest Celebration in October helped focus our thoughts on how we can share what we have with others. As well as all the kind donations received for the local Foodbank, the children were encouraged to look at how they could also give the gifts of kindness and joy.

The school's Values Ambassadors did an exceptional job leading the Celebration, taking us on an exciting and educational trip back through time and explaining what food growth in Bristol looked like 100 years ago. They then compared that to how we get our food now. Having worked for a food logistics company previously, I was able to share some real-life experiences of how food travels to us today. (See photo of me in the chill jacket and Hi-Viz from my warehouse days!).

Continues next page >



A new roof for the Village Hall

Stoke Bishop Village Hall is one of the most recognisable and attractive buildings in our area. It was built in 1885 – you can see the date above the big window facing Kewstoke Road – and in its time has gone through plenty of changes. Much work has been done to improve the interior in recent years; all the rooms have been redecorated and new heating and sound systems installed. From outside however the Hall still looks much the same as the architect Edward Gabriel designed it.

The Hall is managed by Stoke Bishop Community Association, a charity run by a small group of volunteers, who decided some time ago that the large tiled roof over the main part of the Hall was coming to the end of its life and, after 140 years, a full retiling would be needed. Being a listed building means that the correct replacement clay tiles had to be used. The money came from income from lettings, grants, and a welcome payment from the BBC for the use of the Hall as a location for filming. (They shot the graduation in the final episode of *Boarders*.)

The retiling work was carried out recently over the summer holidays (when the Hall is less busy) with scaffolding covering the whole area of the hall roof. At the same time the roof insulation was upgraded and two chimneys repointed. In all the project required 180 square metres of new tiles and the cost came to over £100K but, as the Community Association says, that should keep the Hall dry and warm for us for the next 140 years.

For more about the Hall, an information panel in the lobby tells its history; how it came to be built as a church hall for St Mary's and the various uses it has had over time.

Peter Weeks



Before and now!



< from last page

October saw the school hosting visits for prospective parents. These sessions are a fantastic way to see what makes Stoke Bishop Primary School such a special place. If you would like to arrange a visit, please contact the school office on 0117 377 2173.

Time tends to accelerate for everybody in December, and this is possibly felt most keenly in a school environment. With a Christmas Trail in the church, learning about Diwali and spending time exploring the Christmas story, there is plenty to fill the days!

As you read this edition of The Messenger, the staff and children at Stoke Bishop will be well into their preparations for the school Carol Service. Taking place on 16 December at St Mary's Church, this service is always a highlight of the year for the children and staff, and sees the church packed and bursting with life, excitement, creativity and joy. I'm looking forward to it already!

Stoke Lodge Update

At the time of writing, we are halfway through the public inquiry into the rights of way across Stoke Lodge. All of our community witnesses supporting the application have given their evidence, speaking of how they crossed the field from (in some cases) the 1940/50s onwards to go to and from friends, school, the shops, work, scouts and St Marys.

It has been a fascinating trip back through the decades, looking at the part Stoke Lodge has played in the wider community through time. The Council's expert witness said that he has never seen a rights of way case with so much user evidence.

We are very grateful to everyone who has supported the application to get these routes properly 'on the map' for future generations to continue to use.

Helen Powell



Photo by We Love Stoke Lodge

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What's next?

If you would like to have a chat about hourly or live-in care, please do get in touch. You can call us on **0117 435 0066** (live-in care) or **0117 435 0068** (hourly care) or visit **www.homeinstead.co.uk/bristolnorth.**

Home Instead Bristol North is locally owned and run, and has been serving the community of North Bristol since 2015. Also, now under the same ownership, are Home Instead Bristol East and West.



The *Harry Brown and Steepholm* Remembered by June Miller

By Keith Sheather

St Mary's Parish is landlocked, but it has a number of connections with Bristol's maritime past. Those with long memories will recall the last ship to work out of the City Docks. With its distinctive black and red funnel, the Harry Brown was a stirring sight as it edged its way through the lock gates into the Floating Harbour, laden with sand for the building industry.

Harry Brown was a sand dredger, part of a fleet of ships owned by T R Brown & Sons, which went out into the Severn Estuary to dredge for sand and gravel. June Miller, a longtime worshipper at St Mary's, is a member of the Brown family. 'Harry was my grandfather. He had thirteen children, eleven boys and two girls. They even had their own football team!'

Sand dredging was a tough business. The sand was sucked into a tank filled with water, which was slowly displaced by the incoming sand. It was a queasy operation for which I can personally vouch. As part of a BBC film I was making, I and my crew joined *Harry Brown* on one of its expeditions. Once anchored over the sand bank, the ship was at the mercy of the unpredictable tide. We were violently sea sick.



June Miller with her treasured photograph of the launching of Steepholm.



June Launching Steepholm in 1950

By the nineteen eighties *Harry Brown* (right) was the last commercial vessel operating in Bristol Docks and in 1990 delivered its final load, thus ending centuries of trading activity. The ship was eventually sold to a company in the Middle East.

But it was not all work. One of the dredgers doubled as a private yacht. 'We used to go for outings down river. They'd fill the hold with clean water and heat it up. It made a marvellous swimming pool.'

In 1950, June had the honour of launching *Steepholm*, a purpose-built dredger. 'It was a bitterly cold day. The ship stuck on the ramp and had to be freed.' (See picture left). Sadly *Steepholm* was holed by a rock in the estuary, ending her short career.

Another connection with St Mary's and linked to the Browns, was Charles Hill & Sons, a firm of Bristol shipbuilders who built *Steepholm* and *Harry Brown.* Charles Hill's son, also Charles Hill, gave the great west window of the church in memory of his wife, Mary Elizabeth. David Wright, the first vicar, writes in his *Memorials of Stoke Bishop:* 'In April 1864 one of the most valued of our friends was suddenly called away, Mrs Charles Hill of Avonmore.' He describes the window as 'the Jesse window, representing the lineage of our Lord.'





Care Homes at Christmas

At St Mary's, we have thoroughly enjoyed this past year of running our 'Care Home Sunday' initiative where each month a team of volunteers from the church have been visiting a care home in Stoke Bishop to lead a communion service.

Our team currently visits Druid Stoke Care Home, Saville Manor Care Home, Stokeleigh Care Home and Waltham House Care Home.

We are so grateful for the staff at these homes as they welcome us in, and we love meeting with and chatting to the delightful residents and hearing about their lives.

December is always a special time for our involvement with these care homes, as we visit each of them for a time of carol singing together. Both staff and residents thoroughly enjoy this festive addition to their days, enthusiastically joining in to sing some of their favourite Christmas carols. Here are the dates:

8 December	***2 pm, Saville Manor***
	3 pm, Waltham House
14 December	***2 pm, Stokeleigh Care Home***
15 December	***3 pm, Druid Stoke Nursing Home***

If you would be interested in joining us for any of these carol singing visits, please contact the church office.

Julie Summers

Luna's Marathon

Luna Stevens, one of our young people, featured in the spring issue of the Messenger, is fundraising again for the Foodbank.
She's doing a 'marathon with a twist' and would love your support.
https://www.gofundme.com/f/26-miles-to-make-some-smiles-bristol-north-west-foodbank

Just The Right A

It is not uncommon for me to find myself in a supermarket aisle, dithering and causing an obstruction with my trolley, as I deliberate over which items to buy. The sheer amount of choice laid out before me can feel overwhelming. If I shop when I'm tired it's even worse as my brain struggles to weigh up all the different aspects of each item – cost, quality, value for money, brand, will everyone in the family like it, and so on.

On the other hand, I've also experienced seasons of life where it has felt as if I've had very little choice. Various factors can cause us to feel this way; such as when caring for the very young or those in later years or loved ones who are ill; or when work is particularly busy, or we are needing to juggle many competing demands in order to make ends meet. At these times, most people cope by having 'tunnel vision', focusing only on what is essential, which leaves no time, energy or capacity to choose to do things that might involve creativity, play, joy or rest.

It's clear that as human beings we need to find the middle ground between 'choice overwhelm' and having no choice at all.

This summer I had the privilege of enjoying three months where I felt I had just the right amount of choice. Once a Church of England priest has been ordained for ten years, most can apply for an extended period of leave, informally known as a Sabbatical. Those who are given permission to take this time are encouraged to use the weeks for **relaxation, restoration, reflection and reconnection.**

It was these wonderful 'R' words that I devoted myself to during June, July and August of this year. At the beginning of my Sabbatical an unexpected gift arrived on my doorstep – a hamper of cakes, biscuits and teabags from an anonymous giver. It seemed symbolic, as if God had placed before me a basket containing wonderful gifts – relaxation, restoration, reflection and reconnection – and giving me permission to choose which to unwrap and enjoy at any given moment.

Whilst each of the gifts nourished me in different ways, it was ***the ability to choose*** what to enjoy at any given time which will be my abiding memory of the Sabbatical. Having the freedom, over such a prolonged period, to consider what I might need to receive on any given day or hour was been a novel experience, and one that I profoundly appreciated.

Sabbatical is closely linked to Sabbath, a word which may seem rather dated, even peculiar. Our society has largely lost touch with the idea that there might be one day each week which looks and feels significantly different from the other six.

mount Of Choice

Christians understand the Sabbath as a gift created by God and given to humans for their benefit and enjoyment. Throughout history it has had something of a bad press, with many people seeing it as a day focussed on avoiding the things they 'not allowed' to do on the Sabbath. It is a day where we exercise choice, choosing not to do our usual work (whatever that might be), but far from being a day of abstinence or boredom, taking a weekly Sabbath creates space for things that are even better: **relaxation, restoration, reflection and reconnection.**

Throughout the Bible, God commands His people to observe the Sabbath, but this instruction is born of love, just as a caring parent knows what is best for their child; God knows what is best for us. He knows that we need to carve out the time to intentionally do things differently for (at least) one day each week. It doesn't have to be a Sunday (that certainly doesn't work for Vicars!) but having a consistent day which we can designate as our Sabbath day, ideally which coincides with when other important people in our lives are taking their Sabbath, is vital for our long-term wellbeing, and our spiritual health.

During my Sabbatical, I chose to take time to read and reflect. Much of my reading led me to thinking deeply about how my two vocations of being a mother and a priest dovetail together, and how my leadership style is influenced by how I am as a parent. If you're interested to hear more about this, let's get together for a cuppa! It was also a great opportunity to reconnect with myself, through times of solitude and silence, and with those I love, enabling me to be fully present to people without many of the usual distractions.

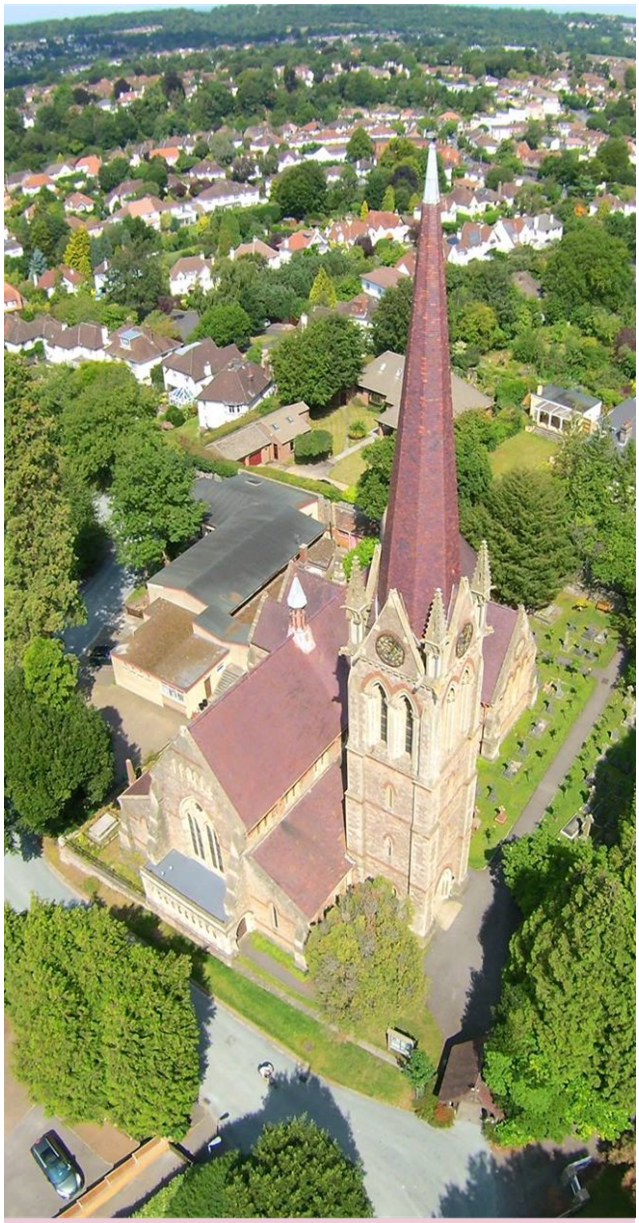
I'm writing this after being back at the ministry 'coal face' for nearly 4 weeks. I can still feel the positive effects of having had this extended time of **relaxation, restoration, reflection and reconnection**, but inevitably the tiredness will creep back in, and unhelpful habits may slowly return. What joy then, that God has gifted me with a Sabbath day every week. A day to return to these life-giving disciplines. Space and time to choose to lay down my work and choose to remember how I have been made, and who I am called to be.

Sabbath is God's gift to each of us. Why not consider some new ways in which you could make one day every week special and different, choosing habits that will help you relax, reflect and reconnect, so that you might be restored in a multitude of surprising ways, ready once again for the week that lies open before you.

Jema

Revd Jema Ball
Vicar of St Mary's





From the Church Registers
August - October 2026

Baptisms

2 August	Tommy Bartlett
	Hayley Bartlett
27 September	Joe Ng
	Echo Mok
	Madison Bacon

Reaffirmation of Baptism Vows

27 September	Nichola Bacon

Funerals

17 August	Peter Taylor
1 September	Janet Witch
23 September	Louise Lloyd
25 September	Peter Swithinbank
23 October	Peter Calvert

A Favourite Work of Art

By Jason Smith

This beautiful altarpiece, now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, shows the moment when the Archangel Gabriel visits Mary to tell her that she has found favour with God and will bear a Son. This is the moment which might be considered as marking the beginning of Christianity and became an important subject for painters across Christendom.



The Annunciation with Saints Margaret and Ansanus (1333) by Simone Martini (c.1285-1344) and Lippo Memmi (c.1291-1356)

This example, dating from the 14th century is in the late Gothic style. The image is flat, with very little sense of depth, and the figures, while representational, are stylised. The gold leaf background takes us out of our earthly state and conjures up a transcendent heavenly realm.

The central section, framed by three Gothic arches, shows Gabriel to the left, descending from Heaven, the swirl of his cloak alluding to his journey, his wings extending up and filling the left-hand arch. Mary, to the right, is disturbed from her reading and recoils in fear at this unexpected visitation. The drama of Mary's reaction is exaggerated as she turns away from the Angel, clutching at her cloak in a protective gesture of modesty. However, we can see that the Angel Gabriel is holding an olive branch which is a symbol of peace, while his other hand is pointing towards Heaven. Between the two stands a vase of lilies, symbolic of Mary's virginity and purity. At the apex of the central arch we can see the Holy Spirit, symbolised by a dove (surrounded by seven cherubim), descending to the Virgin Mary.

Spoken by Gabriel to Mary, and included in this painting as embossed script projecting from the mouth of Gabriel towards the ear of the Virgin, is the greeting in Latin: AVE GRATIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM, meaning "Hail, Full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee". This is taken from St Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:28).

Paintings at this time would be designed to tell a story to benefit the majority of the population many of whom would have been illiterate. Repetition of imagery across many churches would reinforce the message and the numerous signs and symbols would be easily recognised.

Like the early Christians, I enjoy a good story. So, paintings with a strong narrative are a bit of a favourite. This painting has long been in my consciousness and I first saw it on a visit to the Uffizi while interrailing many years ago. A gallery with many remarkable art works, this jewel-like work stood out for its beauty and serenity. It was only later that I began to understand the symbolic nature of much of its content and it is worthwhile to explore the iconography of such works as this will reveal a depth of meaning that is more than the outward appearance.

The Siena school of painters were very skilled for their time and their International Gothic style was edging towards the realism of the Renaissance. While Simone Martini predeceased the Black Death which came to Italy 4 years later, it was the plague of the 14th century which cut short the lives of so many of the remarkable painters of the Siena School and delayed the onset of the Renaissance.

Our painting was originally painted for the Chapel of St Ansanus inside Siena Cathedral. Saint Ansanus and St Margaret (both painted by Lippo Memmi, Martini's brother-in-law and closest follower) are depicted in the two outer arches of the altarpiece. St Ansanus, to the left, patron saint of Siena, holds a palm branch of martyrdom and the black and white flag of Siena, while wearing fine attire alluding to his noble origins. St Margaret (known as St Maxima of Rome), a Christian slave who secretly baptised Ansanus and brought him up in the Christian faith, balances the composition holding her own symbolic attributes of faith and martyrdom.

For me, this beautiful painting vividly portrays a moment of profound importance in the Christmas story.



st Mary's
STOKE BISHOP

Christmas 2026

Why not join us at St Mary's, Stoke Bishop this Christmas?

Sunday 29 November at 4pm
Explore@4 Christingle
an interactive Christingle Service for all ages

Friday 11 December at 7pm
Beer and Carols
Join us and get into the Christmas spirit with some well known carols, a meat or veggie pie while tasting beer or BYO wine!
Cost £22 or BYO £17.

Sunday 20 December at 6pm
Traditional Carol Service
Favourite carols and Bible readings by candlelight

Christmas Eve - Thursday 24 December
Crib Service at 4pm
A short family-friendly service telling the story of Jesus' birth. Children might like to come dressed as a character from the Christmas story.

Midnight Communion Service at 11pm
A traditional Midnight Communion service to celebrate the birth of Jesus, 'God with us'.

Christmas Day Celebration at 10am
Family-friendly Christmas Communion, with well-known carols.

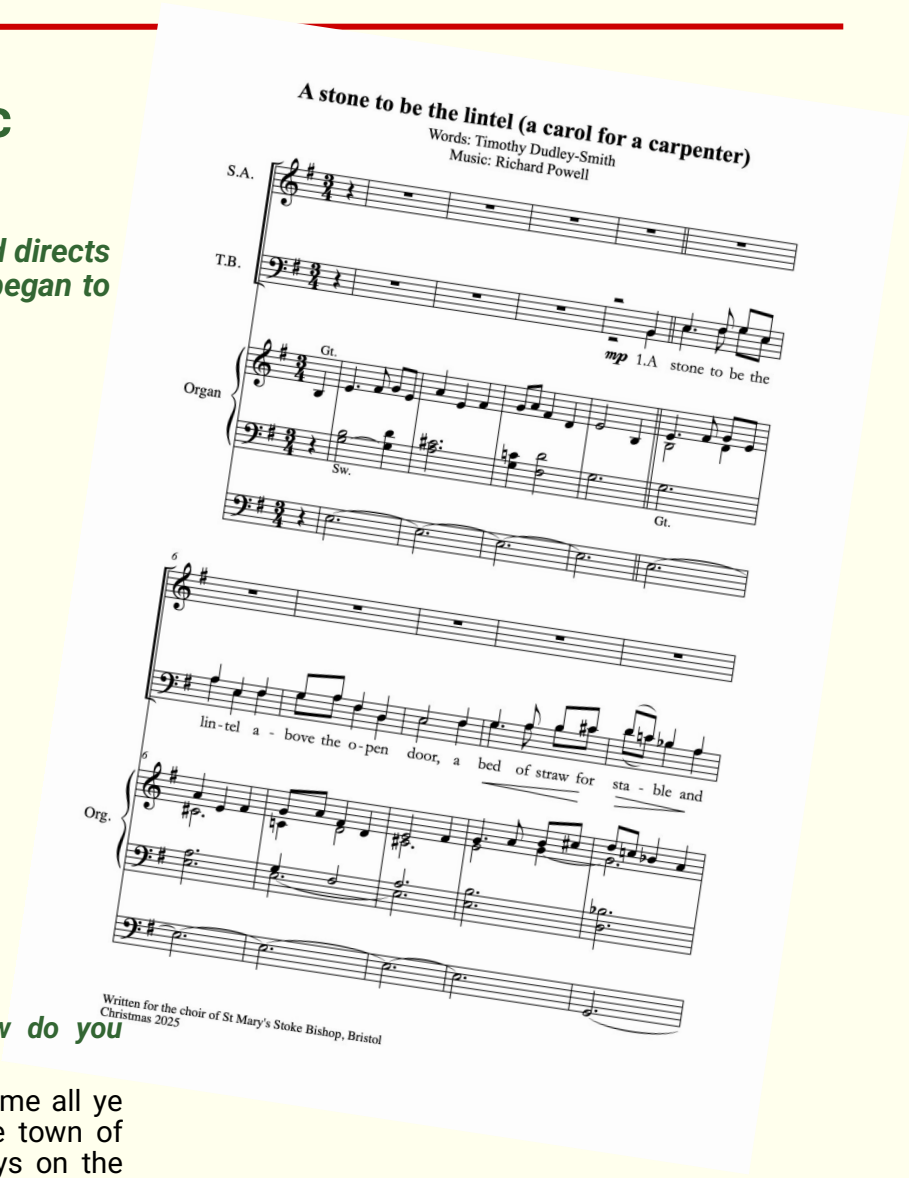
Sunday 27 December at 10:30am at St Edyth's
An informal service (please note there will be no communion during this service).
For those wanting to receive communion Bristol Cathedral will be holding a service of Holy Communion at 10:00am

Christmas Music

With Richard Powell

Richard Powell is one of our organists and directs our choir. We caught up with him as he began to make plans for this year's carol service.





With so many carols to choose from, how do you choose?

With difficulty! Old favourites such as 'O come all ye faithful', 'Once in royal David's city', 'O little town of Bethlehem', and 'Hark the herald' are always on the list. This year my older son is working in a war zone, so the words of 'It came upon the midnight clear' have new significance for me. Verse 3 concludes:

The nations, still at war, hear not the love song which they bring
O hush the noise and cease the strife to hear the angels sing'.

Tell us about the carol you wrote last year for St Mary's choir to sing.

I have written several carols over the years, but this was my first for the choir of St Mary's. Writing for your choir has distinct advantages: you can write for its strengths, and you can write something that can be mastered in the available rehearsal time. 'A stone to be the lintel (carol for a carpenter)' was a setting of words by Timothy Dudley-Smith. The lyrics contemplate both manger and cross. Both are made of wood. The final verse reads, 'With wood to work our ransom he mastered death and grave / the gates of heaven opened on all he came to save / a tree of life unfading beyond our mortal pains / whose leaves are for our healing, where Jesus lives and reigns.'

To capture the joy of the manger and the seriousness of the cross, I used modality that slipped between major chords (which we hear as joyful) and minor chords (tinged with foreboding or sadness). Usefully, modal music also sounds historical – reminiscent of ancient Middle East and monastic times – yet timeless. The Christmas story relates historical events of eternal significance.

When you sit down to write a carol, where do you start?

Always with the words. They inspire the melody and shape the composition. Choral music needs to capture the tone of lyrics along with twists and turns in narrative. In writing music for Christmas carols I try also to communicate the significance of the events. The incarnation – the immortal becoming mortal, the eternal stepping into time – changes everything, for all time. Overly sweet Christmas music (of which there is plenty) does not always do this justice, much as I enjoy listening to it!

What music are you looking forward to hearing this Christmas?

Lots! Whenever possible, I listen to the live broadcast service of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College Cambridge (3 pm on Christmas Eve, BBC Radio 4).

Closer to home, I am also looking forward to Bristol Choral Society's performance of Handel's Messiah (7 pm on 19 Dec at Bristol Beacon). Exultate Singers' 'Carols by Candlelight' in St James Priory (7.30pm on 9 Dec and 4.30pm on 12 Dec) is always worth attending.

Christmas Word Search

Find the following words hidden in the grid. They can be forwards or backwards, horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

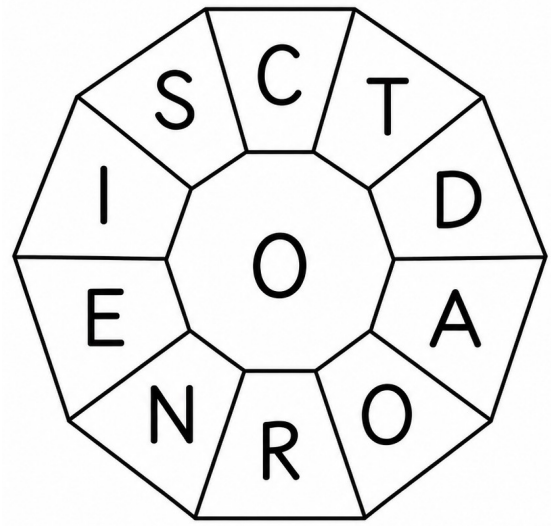
A	I	S	M	X	E	L	B	A	T	S	W	R	C	E
R	Y	K	I	N	G	S	K	Z	L	Z	C	D	Z	K
L	H	C	D	E	O	F	K	E	W	Y	R	A	M	F
D	T	O	O	S	L	Q	G	L	O	R	Y	A	A	R
L	E	L	R	N	D	N	C	M	B	J	N	L	H	A
A	R	F	E	E	A	D	T	S	Y	G	C	J	A	T
R	A	F	H	C	O	S	N	D	E	R	U	M	L	S
E	Z	T	O	N	U	Z	K	R	J	A	R	E	L	K
H	A	H	K	I	J	O	S	E	P	H	K	H	E	V
H	N	E	J	K	M	U	G	H	U	S	R	E	L	G
U	Y	F	B	N	Y	T	T	P	Y	G	E	L	U	D
Z	M	W	E	A	S	M	X	E	I	P	H	H	J	E
O	R	X	A	R	B	M	C	H	R	I	S	T	A	L
I	O	K	R	F	D	Y	K	S	M	E	L	E	H	K
O	I	L	G	R	T	H	G	I	N	T	B	B	Z	F

Words to find

ANGELS
HERALD
BETHLEHEM
STAR
MANGER
SHEPHERDS
KINGS
GOLD
FRANKINCENSE
FLOCKS
MARY
JOSEPH
EGYPT
GLORY
STABLE
HEROD
NAZARETH
HALLELUJAH
CHRIST
BABY
DONKEY
OXEN
NIGHT

Puzzles by Sarah Harris

Word Wheel



How many words can you make from the letters in the shape above? You must use the middle letter O.

There are at least two words which use all the letters. One is something you put on a Christmas Tree. The other is a mathematical term.

Sudoku

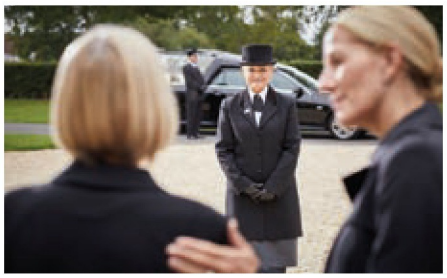
You probably know, but in case this is your first time: fit the figures 1 to 9 into each row and column

	2	8				4	5	
		7	1		5	3		
1		5	4	9	2	6		
		1	6	5	4	9		
3			8		7			5
		4	9	3	1	8		
7		6	5	4	3	2		8
		2	7		9	5		
	5	3				7	6	

Answers on p15

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PROUD WINNER
Bristol Life
AWARDS 2025



Get into the Christmas spirit with well-known carols and a hot pie meal (turkey, leek and ham or leek, mushroom and potato), served with potatoes and vegetables whilst tasting four beers (£22)

Alternatively, enjoy soft drinks or BYO wine. (£17)

Book online at www.stmarysb.org.uk or via the church office by midday on Tuesday 1 December.

Any profits will be donated to the NW Bristol Foodbank.



Do come and support the many members of St Mary's who sing in Bristol Cabot Choir! Scan the QR code for tickets or access the Beacon website.

SCAN TO GIVE TO ST MARY'S

If you would like to contribute to the production costs of The Messenger, or to the work of St Mary's, please use this QR code.

We are grateful for all donations.



Puzzle answers

The two words using all the letters are: DECORATIONS and COORDINATES

9	2	8	3	7	6	4	5	1
6	4	7	1	8	5	3	9	2
1	3	5	4	9	2	6	8	7
2	8	1	6	5	4	9	7	3
3	6	9	8	2	7	1	4	5
5	7	4	9	3	1	8	2	6
7	9	6	5	4	3	2	1	8
8	1	2	7	6	9	5	3	4
4	5	3	2	1	8	7	6	9

Community Diary Winter 2026 - 27

Friends of Old Sneed Park Nature Reserve

Saturdays 5 Dec, 16 Jan, 13 Feb, 13 Mar, 10 April: Working Parties, 10am—noon.
Meet Glenavon Park Entrance and bring gloves, loppers etc. Hot drinks and cake/biscuits provided. No Experience need.

For further details please see our website www.oldsneedparknaturereserve.org
To register for a working party, join the Friends, or contact the committee, email fospnr@gmail.com

Stoke Bishop & Sneyd Park Local History Group

8 Jan 27: Ashton Court, Past and Future Changes by Juliet Evans
5 March: Pevsner Revisited, Rewriting the *Buildings of England* for Bristol, by Andrew Foyle

All talks 7.30 on Fridays in the Village Hall. £6 pa membership. Talks £3 non members sblocalhistory@gmail.com Tel 077804 38303

University Botanic Garden

Nov-Feb open weekdays 10am - dusk
Wednesday is DAISY Day (Donate As It Suits You)

See website for up-to-date information on events www.bristol.ac.uk/botanic-garden

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project

For information and full programme, contact the Project on 0117 903 0609 or e-mail avongorgewildlife@bzsociety.org.uk. Www.avongorge.org.uk /whatson

Stoke Bishop and Sea Mills Ward Forum

Public meeting with Local Councillors tba.

To receive notice of meeting, join the mailing list: email stokebishopforum@aol.com

Stoke Bishop Townswomen's Guild

1st Thursday of each month 2.15 pm in St Mary's.
No meeting January.
From February in the Hulbert Room

Friendly tea, chat and social outings.
For details, contact Gay 9685813

Cubbaccinos

1st Saturday of month 10am -12.30 pm

Coffee, cakes etc in the new Scout Community Hall, Kewstoke Road

Christmas With Ou

Christmas at Sixty-One

Christmas is a poignant time for many, not least for people who are in prison or who have lost connection with their friends and family. Every year, the charity Sixty-One, with the support of local churches and our wider community, provides over 1,400 gift bags to our three local men's prisons. That's one for every single prisoner.

Christmas in prison is a peak time of loneliness and desperation. Reduced regimes over the festive period mean that prisoners spend far more hours locked inside their cells. Away from loved ones, Christmas becomes a stark reminder of isolation, leaving many feeling completely forgotten and without hope.

Much like a traditional Christmas stocking, each gift bag contains a handwritten Christmas card alongside useful items (socks and shower gel), practical items (a toothbrush, water bottle, and diary), and treats (a chocolate bar, sweets, and coffee sachets). The items bring a sense of normality to a difficult season and convey a vital message to every recipient: you are seen, you matter, and there is hope for a different future.

We know how much these small gestures mean—every year, we receive heartfelt letters from prisoners and their families telling us the difference a gift bag has made to them.



"This Christmas is the first time I have not been with family and friends. Knowing I will not be at home with family means great sadness and to receive a gift from people who I don't know is very humbling." - Letter from a serving prisoner

"I write to thank you for your generous gift bag this Christmas. I feel loneliness deeply in prison, especially at Christmas … your assertion that I am not alone brought a lump to my throat …" - Letter from a serving prisoner

These acts of kindness remind prisoners they are not forgotten and make them aware of the vital support available to them on release to Bristol, such as our MentorMe mentoring project for people with a criminal conviction and rehabilitative hubs.

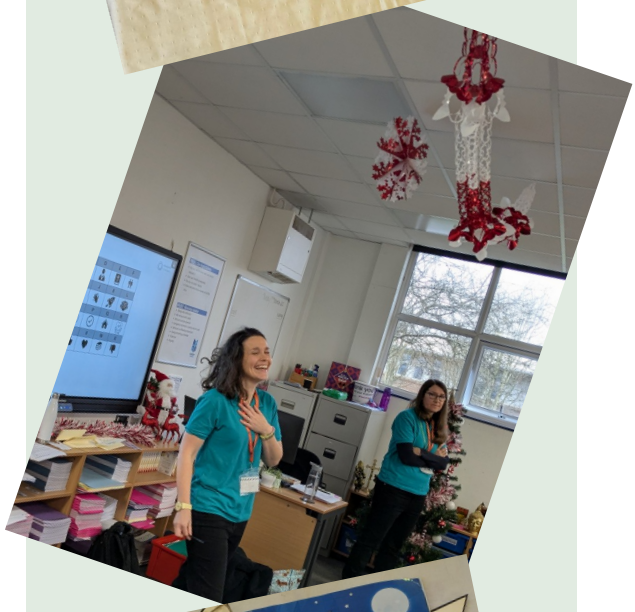
A small gesture really can transform a life. If you would like to give financially towards our Christmas Prisoner Gift Project, you can do so via the QR code. To find out more about our projects, please visit our website at: https://www.sixty-one.org/

Elizabeth Preece, CEO Sixty-One

Christmas with Encounter Christianity

Taking the Christmas message into schools with laughter and artwork.







r Mission Partners

Christmas at the Food Bank

Last winter Bristol North West Foodbank provided 250 Christmas hampers, as well as meat joints and Christmas presents. This supported around 800 adults and children to be able to celebrate Christmas.



It was a privilege to be able to hand out the hampers and gifts to families, many who were overwhelmed and in tears when they collected them. One family shared that only that morning they had been looking at a Peppa Pig toy for their little girl for Christmas and they couldn't afford it. When they came to the Foodbank to collect their hamper, that exact toy was put in the bag of presents for them. You can imagine the reaction. That was definitely a God moment.

We are hoping to do the same this Christmas. It will cost £4700 to provide these hampers. So far this year, we have raised just £500 towards our Christmas hamper project. If you would like to sponsor a hamper and presents for a family, we'd be grateful for a £25 donation. Please use this QR code or call the foodbank on 0117 9235343. Thank you so much for your ongoing faithful support.

Emma Murray, Foodbank Manager





St Mary's Eco Church Update

By Nicky Woodfield

A Rocha UK is part of the international A Rocha family, (A Rocha translates as The Rock) a network of Christian organisations which operate in more than twenty countries, across six continents. Ten years ago, it launched its Eco Church programme, run in partnership with Christian Aid, the Church of England, Tearfund and many others, to equip churches to care for creation and the wider environment.

Since launching, over 9000 churches have registered, with almost 5000 receiving an award. In August 2022, St Mary's was awarded one of only 1500 Silver Eco Church Awards across those registered.

Many individuals have helped with this journey over the years – and maintaining our Silver Award is underway through revisiting our all-important *Eco Church Survey* over the year ahead. This means continuing to embed caring for creation through worship and teaching, buildings, land, community engagement and lifestyle.

Top Tips for making a difference to wildlife this Winter ...

If you've a garden or small outside space, why not help birds find a home by popping a new nest box somewhere; leave some seedheads to provide winter food; thaw icy water for wildlife to drink ... and avoid turning over your compost heap which might disturbing any hibernating hedgehogs, frogs or slow worms!



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Chocolate—The True Cost

By Nicky Woodfield

Few of us will avoid buying some form of chocolate product this season, whether a satisfying treat for ourselves, part of a recipe or a gift. There are few offerings that symbolize love, comfort and celebration in quite the same way and shelves are packed with all manner of chocolate boxes, slabs and individually wrapped assorted delights to choose from. How do you decide what to buy? Is it simply the presentation, the cost or the taste of a familiar brand?

As vast consumers, we rarely stop to consider the actual origin and true cost of our indulgence. Chocolate is the world's third most traded agricultural product after coffee and sugar, with 9 in 10 people in the UK consuming chocolate or cocoa last year. Yet despite this multi-million-pound industry, it remains rife with exploitation.

Millions of cocoa farmers live in extreme poverty, earning less than a dollar per day (*World Bank, 2022*). Child labour remains widespread, deforestation continues to devastate cocoa-growing regions and major chocolate brands world-wide continue to profit.



More often than not, a chocolate bar's journey begins in West Africa, which produces about 70% of the world's cocoa - with Ivory Coast and Ghana leading global production (*International Cocoa Organization, 2021*). Once the ripe cocoa pods are harvested, so the process of fermentation, drying, roasting, grinding and final transformation into chocolate as we know it, begins. The various roles of farmers, intermediaries, manufacturers and distributors and the complexities of sourcing, processing and distributing materials at all stages reveal the huge global effort behind every delicious chocolate bar!



Although our UK chocolate market continues to be driven by a demand for everyday comfort and indeed healthier options (i.e. dark chocolate!), sustainable and ethical sourcing is beginning to become a standard expectation for British consumers (*Innova Market Insights*). Once we know and understand more about the impact of choosing one chocolate bar over another, then we can, as individuals, begin to make a difference.



As you may know, *Fairtrade* works to make the cocoa industry more sustainable, working with small-scale farmers to organise themselves into co-operatives and unions to negotiate better working conditions and to reach wider markets. Incentives to farm organically and ethically … and we can all be ethical consumers by changing our habits and choosing only products with the *Fairtrade* symbol locally.



St Mary's has a long history in supporting *Fairtrade* and *Tradecraft* - the UK-based *Fairtrade* organisation established in 1979 to sell products. Early St Mary's pioneers in 1970 sought to bring *Fairtrade* to our church parishioners, which only ended in recent years when in 2023 the trading arm, *Traidcraft plc*, went into administration. As a church we aim to increase our *Fairtrade* stance even further in the foreseeable future as part of our Eco-Church commitment.

Many charities and organisations are working hard to ensure a brighter and more sustainable future continues for the chocolate trade. VOICE Network is a coalition of around forty non-governmental organisations and trade unions from producing and consuming countries united in a mission to achieve a sustainable cocoa sector.

So, join me as I look for the *Fairtrade* symbol for my festive treats this year!

For further information, try these links:
www.voicenetwork.cc/key-issues/enabling-environment/
www.bristolfairtrade.org.uk/
www.worldcocoafoundation.org/from-bean-to-bar



Helping Hand

HEALTH

Doctors

Sea Mills Surgery 968 1182

W-o-T Primary Care Ctr 962 3406

NHS Direct - 111
For Dentists, Opticians and other medical services: **www.nhs.uk**

Chemists

Buxton & Grant 973 5025
(Blackboy Hill)

Nexus Pharmacy
(Westbury-on-Trym) 962 3415

Westbury Pharmacy
(Stoke Lane) 962 8986

North View Pharmacy 973 3140

Well Pharmacy 968 1272
(Sea Mills Surgery, 2 Riverleaze)

Hospitals

BRI 923 0000

St Michael's 921 5414

Children's Hospital 927 6998

Southmead 950 5050

Bristol Eye Hospital 342 6888

Spire 980 4000

Chesterfield/Nuffield 911 6919

AGE AND CARER SERVICES

Age UK 922 5353

Care Direct 922 2700
adult social care

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help for over 60s and young disabled
www.wecr.org.uk

Carers Support Centre 965 2200
free advice and training
www.carerssupportcentre.org.uk

Dementia Wellbeing Service 9045151
www.bristoldementiawellbeing.org.uk

Action for the Blind 934 1719
Advice on support

Holidays for Carers: 0800 999 3365
www.carersholidays.org.uk

Growing Support 07419 825261
http://growingsupport.co.uk/get-involved

Bristol After Stroke 964 7657
Support for those recovering from Stroke
www.bristolafterstroke.org.uk.

POST OFFICE

Welcome 968 1961
Druid Hill

EDUCATION

Pre-School

W-o-T Baptist Church Pre-School
Church Office 962 9990

Muddy Boots Nursery
Trinity College 968 4493

White Tree Pre-School 07804 269289

Primary Schools

Stoke Bishop 377 2173
Head Teacher: Darren Hunt

Elmlea 377 2266
Head Teacher: Becca Hine

Libraries

Westbury-on-Trym 903 8552
Sea Mills 903 8555
Henleaze 903 8541
Central 903 7200

At Home Library Service
for people who have difficulty visiting their local library. 07714 898 558

Darren Jones
is MP for Bristol North-West.
darren.jones.mp@parliament.uk
phone: 0207 219 2302
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Bristol City Council
www.bristol-city.gov.uk

Switchboard 922 2000
(inc. refuse, streets, litter etc.)
Emergency 922 2050

Stoke Bishop Councillors
John Goulandris 922 2227
Henry Michallat 922 2227

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Non-emergencies 101
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Power Cut Call Line
Phone 105 to check for or report a local area problem.

Save money on phone calls:
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go to www.saynoto0870.com

Helping Hand
is compiled by Paul Lewis-Smith.
If you have changes, additions or updates to suggest please contact him on 968 4221 or e-mail:
plewissmith@blueyonder.co.uk

CINEMAS

Scott Cinemas,
Henleaze 0300 124 0275
http://bristol.scottcinemas.co.uk

Vue Cribbs Causeway 0345 308 4620
w.myvue.com

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3 *and 4 link Broadmead to the Mall via stops in Stoke Bishop*

11/11A *to Southmead Hospital via stops in Coombe Dingle/Canford and Westbury village.*

Portway Park & Ride

9 *to Centre, stops at Roman Way*
http://www.travelwest.info/parkandride

For information about bus and coach travel in UK contact Traveline
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Trains

Severn Beach Railway
Temple Meads to Severn Beach via Sea Mills (No official parking)

National Rail Enquiries 0345 748 4950
www.nationalrail.co.uk

Bristol Airport 0871 334 4444
www.bristolairport.co.uk

Cover Story
Rev Tabitha Ddembe handing sweets to children at Christmas in Uganda.
See page 16 - 17 for Christmas with others of our Mission Partners.

