



Chairman's Report AGM 2026

Membership

I shall start with membership, because, of course, that is why we are all here tonight.

The Committee have a goal to increase the Membership roll of the Friends by 10 Life members a year, and I am happy to report that since the last Michaelmas we have been joined by 11 new Life members as well as our renewing Annual members.

Additionally, we are also allowed by the Constitution to invite people to Honorary life or Annual membership, and we do this to thank and recognise them for their contribution to the work of the Friends. This year I am happy to say that Fiona Davies is among the new Honorary Life members, with others to come.

Committee members in 2025/26

Our Vicar, The Reverend Michael Molano and the two Church wardens, Kit Stallard and Richard Wilson, automatically became committee members by virtue of their office.

In our first meeting after the AGM 2025 the following officers were agreed by resolution;

Elisabeth Barratt – Secretary

Alison Heard – Treasurer

Felicity Wilson – Chair

Simon Edkins – Membership Secretary

Bill Price – chair of the events sub-committee

Maggie Durkee and Simon Edkins are on that sub-committee, together with some of Elaine's team from the Tower Stories, including Rachel Hanson and Helen Watts. A huge vote of thanks goes to all of this group – I am grateful for their vision as well as well as their time and skills. Underpinning the success of every event is a good understanding and knowledge

of the community, and this group of people – steered gently and with ineffable good humour by Bill Price achieved a series of fantastic events.

I would also like to highlight the work that Simon, as Membership Secretary has done this year. Not only does he keep track of the membership database, and writes personally to each new member, but he is in charge of all communications with everyone. He tested out and recommended that we start using Mailchimp to co-ordinate all emails – and he liaised with our website designer and Elaine Stallard to move the material on the Tower Stories website onto our own website when that programme closed. We appreciate all his work for the Friends greatly!

At the APCM Kit stood down and Barry Hooton was elected as Church Warden in his place, and we were pleased to welcome him to the Committee in April.

James Hobhouse was co-opted onto the Committee and we are very grateful to him for his time and help over the Summer, particularly at Concerts and the Church Fete where he ran the bottle stall.

In the Summer Alison Heard moved away from Mere, and we had a chance to say a proper goodbye and thank her for all her work., not least on the Tower Stories and the modernisation of how we do things. I am glad to say that we were able to welcome back Jane Rees to the Committee by co-option and after handover period Jane officially stepped into the rôle of Treasurer in June. We are in safe hands – Jane has held the position before.

And now I have a chance to say a personal ‘thank you’ to someone who has made an enormous and effective contribution to the Friends of St Michael’s over the last 5 or more years. I am sure you will want to join me in expressing the gratitude of all of the Committee to Elisabeth Barratt, our Secretary, who is now standing down.

We have all benefitted from Elisabeth’s deep knowledge of this Church, The Friends and the wider community that she brought to her role. She is completely dependable and generous with her time; not only taking minutes and helping keep the Charity Commission up to date, but also supporting us in all our events and, knowing her natural modesty, in a myriad of unseen ways (including sorting out cupboards of paperwork and other clutter).. Elisabeth’s interest in the Church, its history and its present life and people means that she contributes in so many ways outside the Friends – flower arranging, Heritage weekends, hand bells to mention a few. We are grateful that you have given The Friends your time and skills these past years, on top of all your other commitments!

Expenditure

There are three reasons The Friends exists; set out in the Constitution as our “Objects”;

- 1) to preserve, repair and maintain the fabric and furnishings of this Church;
- 2) to promote its use as a place of worship,
- 3) and to promote the appreciation of the Church as a building of architectural and historical interest.

All our activities are directed towards one or more of those three aims. We give money to the PCC from our funds, and we put on events that allow people to worship here or appreciate the architecture and learn about the heritage. We also hold related events and invite donations to replenish those funds.

This year we have paid out money to repaint the North Wall, and to trim the trees in the Churchyard where roots were thought to be creating a threat to the walls of the Church and neighbouring properties.

We have held concerts where we sold tickets; we have held free concerts where people gave a donation if they wanted to at the end, we have provided refreshments, which again people were happy to donate for. We advertised and supported the wonderful Service of Nine lessons and Carols last December: and the Team of Tour Guides led by Chris Mosler gave some very well-appreciated Tower Tours throughout the year.

As a team we are learning all the time on what makes a successful and popular fundraising event and have modernised the way we sell tickets – which are now available through our website as well as through Sprout and Flower (whose support we cherish). We have shifted our focus from print media advertising, to digital platforms such as Mere Mutters, Alfred Radio and Instagram, and our members have prior notice of our events through emailing and early-bird offers. Non-members also have the opportunity to be on our mailing list and we can directly advertise to them as well.

A quick run-down of events gives an idea of our diverse offering this last year;

October - The Phoenix Café orchestra gave a concert of popular Classics

November – Bishop Andrew Rumsey’s folk music gig attracted huge interest

January – The Rat Pack girls gave a cabaret-style performance in the Grove Building

April – Emma Marie’s concert of violin music of classical and folk melodies

May – Ensemble Hesperi gave a beautiful baroque concert in the Church

In the Summer we had two treats; Sue Cook (of this parish) gave a song recital of popular classics and our former composer-in-residence Richard Nye returned to premier a vivid piece of his music for choir and Professor Richard White from Nebraska gave an amazing performance of very short works for solo voice.

I thank all those who took part in, helped to organise, or came to watch these performances.

In all we raised £2,575.56 from these events, and of course, the events are not only about the money. They bring people into the Church, and they increase the profile of the Friends, which is what lets us continue the work we do.

The Tower Stories

The Tower Stories projects (led by our redoubtable administrator Elaine Stallard) came to a close at the end of January 2026. Thanks to the fact that the original budget had not overspent, the National Lottery gave us permission and the money for three final projects.

Firstly, they paid for improved lighting in the Tower stairway, the belfry and the Clock room.

Secondly, they paid for the recording by a choir of local singers of “Windelstan” – the Anthem for Mere composed the previous year by Richard Nye and sung in a moving performance at the Medieval Weekend in the summer of 2025. Richard came back and rehearsed the volunteer choir and child soloists in the autumn, and a professional recording was made in the Church. It was a fascinating process to be part of, and as The Friends owns the copyright to the recording, it would be great to develop and share this in the future.

The final project that the Tower Stories facilitated was the commissioning and production of a brand-new Guidebook for the Church. You will hear much more about that later on, as Fiona is here to talk about the process of writing it. I hope that as members of the Friends, you will enjoy reading your own copy. Many visitors to the Church mention the need for one in the visitors’ book, and I thought it was definitely required.

The brief was to

provide information for visitors and encourage the appreciation of the church’s architecture, and highlight relevant stories of the people who use the Church and the Tower in the past and the present.....

It is intended to be an interesting read about the people who built and use the Church; accessible to the general reader, rather than a dry and specialist history!

As you will see, it is full of pictures taken by the brilliant Steve Hawking who was the resident photographer for the Tower Stories, and has a handy map for reference.

You are the first to see the Guidebook and it will be available at the back of the Church and at events. Again, we own the copyright, and can be reprinted and updated as required.

Please also have a look at the plaque which commemorates the Tower Stories project in the Friend’s corner.

Governance

The rest of the business of the Committee has undertaken this past year is making sure that The Friends' comply with all our obligations to the Charity Commission. We are up to date with our reporting requirements and our financial controls are in order. The Vicar checks that all members of the Committee are up to date with their safeguarding training, and the Committee are presently considering the draft Safeguarding Policy. This will need to be adopted at the earliest opportunity after the AGM. We have recently been considering fundraising streams open to us under our Constitution, and I am glad to be able to report that we will, amongst other things, be able to create merchandise for sale. This is work that the future committee can explore and develop.

The Strategy document which we adopted in February 2025 is designed as a road-map for the work of the committee with a checklist of aims we want to achieve and two or three actions of how we are going to achieve them. In meetings we keep an eye on how we are following it, and I am happy to report that 18 months into the 3-year duration of this Strategy we have met our goals in almost every area.

As I prepare the hand-over papers for my successor (whoever they may be). I will include a list of remaining actions that need to be taken. (eg safeguarding Policy & developing the Anthem recording/ Springline book).

It only remains for me to thank you very much for your support and help in all that the Friends have done this year and in the past five that I have been involved.

Felicity Wilson
Chairman

6th October 2026