



# REPORTS FROM THE ENGINE ROOM

aka RTM Parish Office



Richmond  
Team Ministry

## Intro

In the Richmond Team, we are blessed with a parish office, staffed by an excellent team. I often refer to the office as the 'Engine Room', the place where things happen to make our shared ministry possible.

We have experienced quite a few changes in 2023. First Ronan, the Property Manager, left us in July to move to a new post at Wilson School. Then in September, Tina, the Parish Administrator, moved to a job closer to home. Thankfully we were able to find a new Parish Administrator in John, fill the vacancy of the Bookings Administrator by appointing Denise, welcome Emma as our new Children and Young People Ministry Leader, and finally have Peter join us as interim Property Manager.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each member of the Engine Room for their contribution to the workings of the Richmond Team. Together they make a fabulous team, who work well together. As I live above the Parish Office, I often hear laughter, which is a good thing. I also know that there is great mutual support and care. Highlight of the week is our Team Meeting on Wednesday afternoon, especially when we celebrate birthdays, which means there is cake!

I hope you will enjoy reading the reports prepared by the Engine Room members and learn a little more about what is going on in the Parish Office.

Wilma

*Revd Canon Wilma Roest, Team Rector*

## Meet our Parish Administrator, John

Shortly after starting my job as Parish Administrator in October 2023, the office doorbell went and I was suddenly helping to carry 20 frozen chickens to the outdoor freezer for the soup kitchen. It was at this point that I realised this was going to be an interesting and varied role!

My first week was one of gentle induction, including an interesting tour of St Matthias courtesy of Reverend Anne. However, I knew that wouldn't last long having quickly read through my predecessor Tina's enormous and invaluable hand over folder!

The role has given me a fascinating insight into how churches work. I had no idea of the scale of work that goes on behind the scenes. Initially, working in the basement office at Wilma's vicarage felt quite odd, but six months on it feels totally normal now. It soon became clear that I had joined a fantastic team, who immediately made me feel welcomed and supported.

I see myself as a central part of the "engine room", working closely with Denise, Peter, Emma and James in the office, the clergy, our church wardens and all other helpers alike. Sharing an office with the delightful Denise is very enjoyable and I'm always interested to see Emma's art preparations for Eaglets.

Often being the first point of contact for wedding, funeral, baptism and other enquiries meant I faced an initially steep learning curve! I now feel a lot more comfortable and am glad to have successfully navigated the very busy times of Christmas & Easter!

One of my major challenges was putting together my first edition of Team Talk. Getting familiar with the software was very time consuming, but it felt enormously satisfying when I finally got to print off the final version, and I foresee it being a little easier next time round!

One of the most amusing experiences so far was reviewing the baptism anniversary cards with Emma. I'm very much looking forward to using our own designs resulting from Emma's competition.

In summary, I thoroughly enjoy my job and feel blessed to have joined such an incredible Team.

## Meet our Bookings Administrator, Denise

It's just over a year since I became Bookings Administrator and it has been an enjoyable year working alongside our wonderful Team Vicars and Parish Office team. The departure of Tina Roberts in September was a blow for me, as having worked for the Team Ministry so long, she was very knowledgeable about all aspects of Bookings. But we are fortunate to have a new kind and astute Parish Administrator, who is a great support.

St John's Hall remains our busiest venue. As well as classes for adults/children, it continues to host well-attended support groups. All our Hirers remain on the whole straightforward to deal with and after re-designing the invoices and making payment terms clearer, we now have **far fewer instances of late payment** compared with when I arrived. We also streamlined the cancellation terms too. There are now virtually no late cancellations as there is a clear expectation that fees must be paid if adequate notice is not given. I find our clients appreciate the clarity and the firmness!

I conducted a **fees review** last Summer and after fair and friendly negotiation, all our Hirers accepted a fees increase which took effect in January this year. We lost only one longstanding client – and that was due to her retirement. We continue to have a healthy list of booking queries, but most hirers want the *same slots* – weekdays early evening – and we are fully booked each weekday evening. Our voids, like in other Halls, are in the *midday/mid-afternoon* period.

We have taken on new clients – some with more success than others – but regular Saturday morning bookings in the Hall, though requested, are not easy to deliver, due to Parish activities in there until 12pm. I did consider last year making Hall bookings a minimum 2 hour contract. But potential clients tell me that the **cost of living crisis** is still having a big impact on their businesses, and they prefer a one hour initial booking to establish their brand in Richmond. We accept this and hope that they will eventually add to their hire hours.

**Parties** have not really picked up in the time I have been here – disappointingly, as advertising posters were put up across Richmond and a notice placed in the Newsletter. It is something that continues to puzzle me as the Hall is very convenient and very *good value* for a children’s party. I hope this picks up as the year progresses. In the meantime a longstanding booker has asked for any spare Sunday afternoon slots.

Users still very much like **parking** in the one parking space we provide. Some would prefer to use more spaces, but we still don’t allow this. After some tension about two particular classes using too many spaces, we introduced a trial **parking permit** system for the Hirers who host some disabled clients – they are permitted up to 7 spaces. So far, complaints about parking have stopped so we think the permits will remain in place.

The **Hall Floor** is often discussed and there is a general acceptance that it needs replacing at some point. One or two clients mentioned last year that small areas needed repair. But the repairs are usually very good and on the whole our clients (including ballet and modern dance classes) do not contact me to discuss the floor. It will be important that as soon as the schedule to begin work on the floor is known, that we give **at least one, if not two months’ notice** to all our clients as their business/support group will be impacted.

**St Johns Church** hosted a successful **concert** in March but like the other churches, is not inundated with concert queries. This, I think, is not due to our recent fees increase which is not substantial, but due to what concert organisers tell me is a general post Covid decline in attendances at evening events. The wider London nighttime economy also reflects this apathy for evening events. Schools still regularly book the Church for concerts and prizegiving and we already have repeat Christmas bookings in the Church and Hall.

**St Matthias** hosts only one regular client the **Sallywags Nursery** in the Choir Vestry. It now operates 5 mornings a week, up from 4 and it usually requests extra weeks at the beginning of the summer holidays. Sallywags' fees were raised along with other clients in January after a lengthy but fair negotiation. SMT has built extra storage for Sallywags' kit, but the amount of equipment it now uses, has grown considerably in the past year. Some of this kit is left permanently in the CV and this has caused issues in that the CV can neither practically be hired out after midday to other potential clients, nor can it be used by SMT clergy/parishioners at weekends due to the play equipment lying around. Revd Anne is aware of this and continues regularly to urge Sallywags to store its kit in the outside cupboards provided. If it refuses to do this, it may be necessary to think hard about whether we can continue to host this client. We hope agreement can be reached soon.

In the meantime, **one-off bookings** -- usually from local residents' associations etc – use the Narthex. Richmond Council has hired the Church and various areas at the back for the May local election. St Matthias hosted a wonderful **Passiontide Concert** and although we don't receive too many requests for concerts at SMT, it was evidence that when done well, concerts could be very successful here.

**St Mary Magdalen** did not host any **concerts** this last quarter. And there were no queries for concerts either. This is a bit of a worry for me as it is in contrast to this period last year when I had 3/4 queries. Our fees did rise, but only moderately and in line with our competitors. Concert organisers have told me, that they simply cannot sell enough tickets to cover their costs. Sadly, I suspect other churches are seeing the same fall off in large concert bookings. But SMM **recital series** is back with a full, enticing programme and we hope these showcases will draw new and wider audiences to the church and will have the potential to spark a desire for more concert bookings.

## Meet the Property Manager (interim), Peter

Firstly, I had better introduce myself! Ronan, your Property and Facilities Manager left the Richmond Team Ministry last summer and to date, you have not recruited a replacement. In January, I was approached to assist on a part time interim basis until a replacement is appointed, to provide support to the RTM team. I have previously worked as a Church Operations Manager for several years, so have an idea of the 'workings' of the Church of England!

Apart from the day-to-day maintenance issues that arise with any church buildings, the following is a summary of the main projects taking place in the three churches:

### St Matthias

Preparation is being made for the re-roofing of the South Aisle and Organ Chamber. As I write, choice of contractor is being investigated with a timeline for the work to commence with scaffolding in around July and completion of the roof work around December/January. 16 tonnes of the wonderfully named Westmorland Light Green Slate from the Broughton Moor Quarry in the Lake District has been preordered. If you have an idle moment, google where this 450-million-year-old slate is coming from and how it's prepared! Also, an interesting statistic, bearing in mind the destination, is that the weight ordered is the equivalent to around 10,000 Peregrine Falcons – just imagine all those on the roof!

### St John the Divine

This church had the most recent Quinquennial Report (last August) completed by our church architect. Suggested works are prioritised in these reports by their urgency, but what is currently being planned is:

- Some high-level roof repairs being completed by steeplejacks.
- A contractor to re-lead and restore the remaining 8 out of 10 large windows is being sought. This is a big endeavour involving windows being removed for the works. Whilst scaffolding is up for this, high level stone repairs will also be undertaken.

- Investigations to replace the church hall floor with a new semi-sprung option are ongoing.
- And excitingly, a new sound system including video feed is in the stages of being finalised. When one of the lapel mics recently broke, I phoned the original supplier and they laughed and said in the ten years they had worked there, they'd never even heard of them! So, a full replacement is probably overdue!

### St Mary Magdalene

Currently, the main issue is the investigation and repair of the roof beams on the South Aisle. Last August, sawdust started appearing at the foot of a pillar. Several of the pillars have tree trunks at their core and it was feared it could be insects causing damage. Investigations have revealed it was from wet rot, that is now dry. Investigation has now exposed this at the top of the second pillar. The sawdust had probably appeared by general debris being blown through small cracks at the top of this pillar. An engineer has been consulted by our architect, and it is planned to temporarily support the first two wooden beams (which needs doing – but is not deemed 'dangerous') by using scaffolding and props. The weight needs to be spread across the floor to avoid damage to the underfloor heating. This will therefore be quite a large structure. However, the church will remain open apart from a very limited time when dangerous construction is taking place.

Only once this support work and a greater area is exposed, can the remedy be suggested, agreed and carried out. The best outcome will be to find only limited damage to the first two beams, in the area above the pillar and for it to be possible for them to be bridged by steel plating.

Lastly, on a personal note, I would like to say what a pleasure it has been to work with the Richmond Team Ministry. Your church traditions are something with which I had not been particularly familiar, and it has been enlightening to learn more of them. Your church buildings are beautiful, and I can see why they are so important to your worship and faith. But it has also been special to work with such an enthusiastic team, not only in the office, but with the wardens and of course your clergy and the wonderful Wilma!



## **Meet our Verger/Caretaker, James**

James has been part of RTM the longest out of the office team. He works mainly Monday – Friday from 8am onwards.

As verger and caretaker, James is responsible for opening and locking the churches in the team, for working with the clergy and churchwardens, for ensuring that cleaning staff can get in and that cleaning supplies are topped up, for dealing with recycling, for helping contractors who come in to work on the churches and so much more.

He can regularly be seen walking in and around each church, litter picking and looking out for any potential problems. He has good relations with the local police, whom he can contact if there is a concern about someone.

When we asked James what he enjoys most about his job, he gave a slightly surprising answer, namely ‘funerals’. It is at times like that James does a wonderful job. He ensures that the church is tidy. He works with clergy and organists and funeral directors and looks after mourners.

There are times when James works on Saturdays, for instance when there is a wedding or a concert. He then takes time off during the week.

James’ work means he walks a lot, from one church to another, especially on Fridays when he takes all printed materials and post from the Parish Office and distributes it to the churches.

## **Meet our Children and Young Persons Ministry Leader, Emma**

It has been such a joy to start working at Richmond Team Ministry. The clergy, the engine room and each of the congregations have welcomed me with open arms and I'm incredibly grateful. Thank you, whether you've been my biggest cheerleader or a silent supporter, thank you for all your time and prayers.

In mentoring, I was encouraged to find my 'why'. This is something that I always come back to – 'Why do I work in youth and Children's work?'. My 'Why' is I believe every child should have a place to feel known, loved, and safe. I believe that if we can show children just a small part of God's love, we can make huge changes within their lives. Looking back on these 8 months (ish), it's incredible to see the progress we have made and how, as a community, we have shown children they are known, loved and safe. Please read some the highlights below:

### **Eaglets:**

- Eaglets opened again in October 2023. We have a group of 15-25 toddlers each with their respective adult. Adults have mentioned how they notice the care that goes into the activities and each interaction. A massive thank you to the volunteers – each of you have been fab!

### **Work with local organisations:**

- Schools and nurseries: We have worked hard to form strong relationships with Kings House School (all departments), Christ's, Vineyard, Radnor House, Kings House Nursery and Scallywags Nursery. We go in and deliver assemblies, RS workshops, Collective Worship. It has been fun to form a relationship with each school and support their Worship or RS curriculum.

- Scouts: We delivered a Scouts session to each troupe of the 1<sup>st</sup> Richmond Scout Group, and it was fun to show the young people the beauty of St Matthias and how we use it to worship. Their questions were insightful, and each group took the evening in different directions.

### **Festivals:**

- Christmas: Christmas meant the return of the Christingles and the Posada. We, once again, saw people from all over the community come to church. We had a wonderful time sharing the joy of Christmas with both young and old. A particular highlight of mine was the St Mary's Christingle services where we worked together to tell the Nativity Story with a few moments of Pantomime.
- Easter: We welcomed more young people into church with two events: Pre-teens Prepare for Holy Week and Stations of the Cross for Children. Adults commented for how important they were for the children. It widened their understanding of Holy Week and Easter.

### **Junior Church:**

- Our Junior Church is quite different in each church, but each is a joy. Each church is blessed with such a lovely group of children. We have formed different routines to fit the children in each setting. For example, in St John's we always start by praying for the adults. In each church we follow the lectionary so the children can continue to discuss the readings at home with their parents. We hope to find ways to help our numbers grow in the coming years.
- One of my personal highlights was from Candlemas. For the first time, we had a group of about ten children together, all a similar age. They asked each other about their Baptisms, their faith, and their school life. We know through research, that at that age, children bounce of each other in faith, much more than they bounce off

adults. One of our aims is to set up a pre-teen group for these children to come together to discuss life and faith together.

**Special services:**

- Each month our Children's service continues to welcome children to St Mary's for a short service.
- Our first Exploring Together happened in February, including Hot Cross Buns. We look forward to our next couple of services.

I'm excited to see what we can all achieve within the next year!