

newt

schools café church



Nature & Sustainability p.4-5



Engaging pupils p.6



Platinum parties p.8-9

On the Move:

'Engaged'

SUMMER 2022

St John & St Stephen's, Newtown Community Magazine
stjohnandststephen.org.uk



Staying **ENGAGED**

Welcome to
NEWT 36



See back cover

Engaged? ... so, what do you mean by that?

We continue to explore words that are important to us at St John and St Stephen's, and one of those is the word: "Engaged".

Something that often surprises people is the idea that the church exists, not for its own sake, but to bless the people who live in its vicinity. One of the key ways we try to do this is by remaining engaged with the issues that face our community. This means spending time in the community, getting to know the people that live nearby (in old Newtown and St John's Village, but also in the areas of new housing that are part of our 'catchment' or 'parish').

It also means being a church where we don't shy away from 'real life' in all its pain, frustration, boredom and struggle as well as its joy and excitement. Again, it can be assumed that people who go to church know exactly what they believe and always have an answer to all their prayers. In fact, it often doesn't feel like that at all!

But we do believe that as we engage deeply with the realities of life, God finds us in the struggle. Sometimes God seems to be absent though. In a recent talk for 'Trinity Sunday' we got into small groups on Sunday morning to explore times when we had felt the presence of God, in a situation, in a spiritual practice (like prayer or song) or in a relationship. We also acknowledged times when it had appeared that God was absent. 'Real' faith is faith that is realistic about the times when things go wrong, and when we struggle to believe that God will come through for us.

You have received a copy of this magazine because you're in the parish of St John and St Stephen's Reading, and as such your local church values you. We pray for the people in our parish, street by street, and would love to connect with you, if this is something that appeals. Our services are live streamed so that anyone who cannot come to church can join in. (Contact the office for details.)

We have a website that can link you into some of the things we're engaged in: www.stjohnandststephen.org.uk and a clergy member can visit if you get in touch.

If you have something on your mind about the established community of Newtown, or the newer communities growing up in the housing area north of the Kennet, do get in touch. Maybe you know someone who is struggling and you'd like to know someone is praying for them.

All good things come from a source of ultimate goodness we believe to be God. We think God calls us to make a difference in the world by being engaged in the world. Uniquely, the Christian hope is that God was so engaged with the world that he became part of it – in the person of Jesus Christ.

May you find the solidarity of God alongside you in your daily life. And may God bless you wherever you are in your search and journey.

Claire.



Copy date for NEWT's Harvest edition will be 16th September 2022

Please send contributions to the Parish Office office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk or directly to the editor at chris@meunier.org.uk

Feeling the pinch?

YES WE ARE!

*We all are ...
- but what can you do if
you are really struggling?*



Have you received your £150 council tax rebate yet? Are you in Council Tax band A-D? (search Gov.uk's Council Tax band checker if you don't know). If you pay your council tax by direct debit you should already have received your £150 rebate payment into your bank account, and you won't have to pay it back.

If you do not pay by direct debit, you'll need to apply on the reading.gov.uk website. Search for 'Council Tax Rebate'. You then set up an account so they can pay you. If you have difficulty doing that, you can phone 0118 937 3727 for help in making your application

(Residents in higher bands (E-H) are not automatically eligible for the £150 rebate, but some - such as households on income support - could still get help with energy bills. An application process for discretionary payments of £150 is expected to begin later this month.)

Are you eligible for a Council Tax Reduction?

If you are on Universal Credit or receive Pension Credit, it is always worth checking to see if you can also get a council tax reduction.

Do you know about *Communicare*? It's behind Wycliffe Church at Cemetery Junction – 233 Kings Rd. It's a drop-in centre open 10am – 4pm Monday to Thursday. You can phone before you come if you want to ask if they are able to help you 0118 926 3941

It offers free advice about benefits, and can assist with applications and appeals, it can tell you where to get the best debt advice, assist in filling in the necessary forms for divorce and separation support, mediation and general advice, assist with CV writing and employment advice including job searches, offer advice with various housing issues including late payment of rent or energy bills. There are also **public computers** that you can use if you need to do anything on line.

Food Emergency? *Communicare* can help you access **the local food bank**.

Foodshare If it's not quite an emergency, but you are on a low income and struggle with food bills, then every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday at 8pm, fresh food, donated and collected from local shops, is given away. It operates from the back-side entrance of Wycliffe Church, next to the Church car park.

Reading Draught Busters Are you living in a cold & draughty home? ...and do you consider yourself to be in energy poverty? The work will be done by experienced volunteers and will take up to a couple of hours – with an average cost of £22. If this is an impossible amount contact us anyway! via readinguk.org/draughtbusters/ and use the contact form, or call Reading Council on 0118 937 2100.

Your home will feel warmer and you may be able to turn down your thermostat and save money.



Cost of living payment £650

Households on means tested benefits, including Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Tax Credits, will receive a payment of £650 this year. The first half of this will be paid automatically from 14th July.

In addition there will be a separate £300 payment for pensioners, and a £150 payment for disabled people, which can be paid on top of the £650 payment.

costoflivingsupport.campaign.gov.uk

ENGAGING *with Nature and* SUSTAINABLE FARMING

at St John's CE School

We have had an incredibly busy summer term at St John's CE Primary. Traditionally this term sees our engagement with the wider world come to fruition as we go off on trips to see things we might not get to see every day at school.

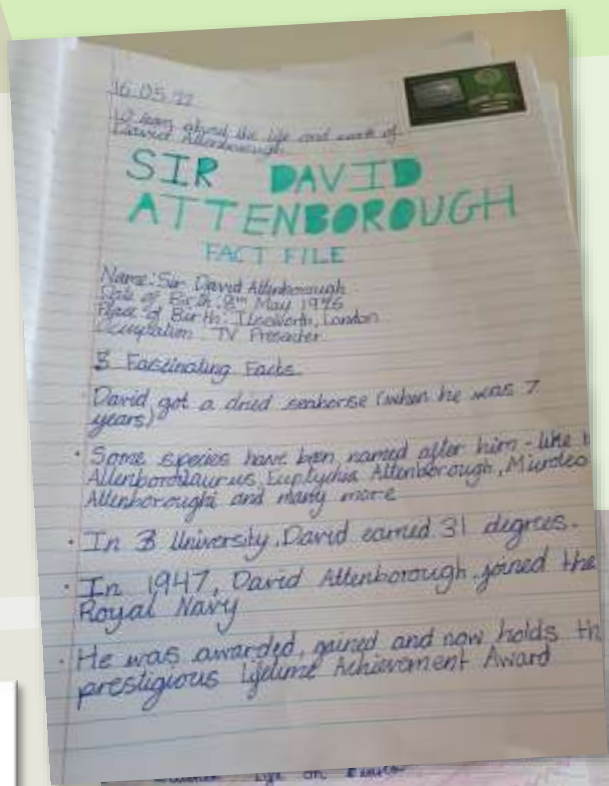
Our Year 3 children went to Marwell Zoo and were delighted to see tigers and giraffes. We always try to ensure our children can give context to their learning and seeing these creatures up close resulted in gasps of wonder as the children marvelled at their size and movements.



Our Year 5 children became engaged with wider environmental initiatives. They visited Englefield estate to consider ways to harness renewable energy and all things sustainable. It was a day full of learning about different aspects of the countryside and how agriculture is trying to develop its sustainability.

We know our children are the future generation who will need to take on this mammoth task of advocating for and protecting of our planet and all that encompasses. With our children we know the world will be in safe hands.

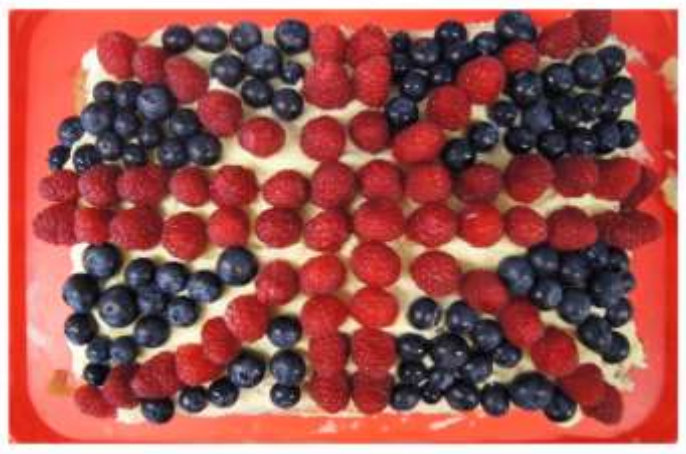




We have also been learning about those who have been great examples of putting their beliefs into action. Sir David Attenborough has been a strong and consistent voice in the need for conservation and we are incredibly proud of the research carried out by our children.



And we marked the Queen's 70th Jubilee in many different ways. The children all learnt the words of the national anthem and we joined as a whole school to sing it together and have a drink and a biscuit to toast the Queen on her special day. One of our classes also made this fabulous jubilee cake! It was delicious.



ENGAGING *pupils*

at New Town Primary School

This year we have been working hard at New Town to increase pupils' engagement in their learning. This has involved whole school training for the staff and lots of work for the pupils! We have introduced a "no hands up" approach across school so pupils need to be ever-ready to contribute by sharing their learning or adding to what their classmates have said.

We have also worked hard to re-introduce many activities to enrich our pupils' learning. Our after school clubs re-started and all our pupils who wanted to were able to attend at least one club - we had twenty-two clubs in all this term, these included soft archery, tennis, Makaton, ukulele, craft and origami, which meant a grand total of three hundred and sixty-five places offered out!



And we have ensured that all pupils in Years One to Six have had the opportunity to go on an offsite trip. Our Year Three and Four pupils took part in a poetry slam and all enjoyed a day at Englefield.

Our Year Five and Six pupils went camping to Rushall Farm, where they learnt survival skills, went pond dipping, made rafts, did shelter building and all sang around the campfire - we know they will cherish these memories fondly.



ecoENGAGEMENT *is* for **everyone**

'What could you do differently this week?' our ECO team asked visitors to St John's Summer Fair ...



The most popular answers were 'walk to school' and 'eat less meat' which is great because transport and farming are two of the biggest causes of climate change.

The next most popular options were 'pick up some litter' and 'turn off the tap when brushing your teeth': a running tap uses about 6 litres every minute, so for one person that's nearly 24 litres a day that can be saved. 'Avoid buying fruit and veg in plastic' came next (shopping at the market or Global Refills on London Street are good ways to achieve this) along with 'buy something fairly traded'.

After that came 'turn off vampire devices': most of us had never heard of vampire devices, but they're the ones you often don't notice are still switched on until the lights go out, like TVs on standby and phone chargers that don't need to be on.

Even the least popular options got a few votes - 'tell the politicians what you think about climate change' and 'learn about Reading Hydro' (the last is actually a rather exciting project - a community hydropower plant at Caversham Weir that you can find out about at readinghydro.org).

We also helped the children enjoy summer flowers with a craft project and gave them a chance to win (recycled) prizes with a treasure hunt for images of British birds.

THE *Pla* WEEK



Group photo opportunity at Coventry Road's Platinum Jubilee street party



St John's Street's Platinum Jubilee street party (left) included a donut eating contest.



Photos Reading Chronicle



Staff from Christian Community Action (CCA) were proud to take part in support of the ACRE (Alliance for

Cohesion and Racial equality) Platinum Jubilee event. They provided clothes and accessories for a fashion show event and read poems written and inspired by writers such as Maya Angelou.

CCA is still fully engaged - 'Keeping on keeping on in faith and with love' as their newsletter puts it - in its work of serving people's needs for furniture, white goods and now even computers too .

To find help or to make a donation you can visit any of their community shops, or phone 0118 951 2336 or e-mail mail@ccam.org.uk .



Continuum KEND



Photo Reading Today



Just a few of the many community events held for the Queen's Jubilee:

Above: Fun with flags and a Jubilee lunch at St John & St Stephen's church.

Below, left: Cakes and festivities at the Newtown Community Garden Jubilee street party.

Below, right: School Terrace taking over their street for a relaxed time of food and drinks together.



Know your Newts

meeting the people in our community

Hugh & Judy - a golden couple - married but still engaged!

Being engaged is something of a way of life for Hugh and Judy Fisher - with neighbours, church and the wider community. They recently celebrated their golden wedding anniversary with family and friends at a tea and concert party at St John & St Stephen's Church, and because it was close to Christian Aid Week, they asked their guests to donate to the charity instead of bringing gifts (raising £3,276). But, as NEWT discovered, giving time and care is a thread that has run throughout their lives ...

You're both retired. How do you spend your time?

Judy I'm a member of a book club that meets monthly at Southcote Library and I enjoy watching TV programmes like *Prime Suspect*, *Shetland* and *Vera*. I am also involved with a U3A Photography course.

I love taking photos when we're out but wasn't sure what to do with them all until I realised that I could use them to make birthday cards to give to family, friends and church members. I got the idea from a friend called Jane Denny because she always remembered people's birthdays and noticed if someone was missing from a service.

That's not all though, is it?

Judy No. I volunteer as a nurse's assistant on Thursdays and Fridays at the Sue Ryder Duchess of Kent Hospice in Liebenrood Road. I started there first, and then in 2003, when they were short of drivers to collect and return patients, Hugh became a volunteer driver.

Hugh Yes. In fact, it's usually Judy who gets involved in something and then I get corralled in!

Ten years ago, Margaret Dimmick, a minister at Caversham Park Church, got in touch with her and asked if we would like to host some visitors from Düsseldorf.

Reading has been closely linked with Düsseldorf since 1947. The inter-town



friendship, which later became a formal twinning, started when the then Mayor of Reading, Phoebe Cusden, answered a call for help for people who were hungry and homeless following the war. The call came from the Royal Berkshire Regiment, who were occupying Düsseldorf, She sent help, visited Düsseldorf, and invited six children to stay. A return visit followed and in due course the churches became involved with visits. 2022 is the 75th anniversary of the link; there's a superb new free exhibition about it in Reading Museum (see page 15).

And what else takes up your time?

Hugh I've been on the PCC (Parochial Church Council) at St John's

church for nearly 30 years, and the church treasurer for nearly 20. I took over from John Scoble when he and his wife Pam left. Interestingly, they're friends we'd already known even before we were married, when we lived in North London. I am also treasurer for two other groups and chairman of an enthusiast society involved with the collection and study of transport tickets, which takes up quite a bit of my time.

**"Judy gets involved ...
then I get corralled in"**



Were you both Londoners?

Hugh Yes. My family lived in Muswell Hill, North London, when I was born in 1944

Judy And mine was in Arnos Grove when I was born three years later - in thick December snow!

Our parents weren't Christians, but I was sent to Sunday school. Later I went to a Catholic school, only because it had good, caring teachers. I had scoliosis; my back was so bent that at the age of 11 I had an operation to take bone from my hip to be fused into my spine.



Wow! That sounds traumatic!

Judy I was in a plaster cast from my knees to the top of my chest for eleven months, followed by six months in a Milwaukee brace. My mother made an elasticated dress that I could wear over it. I had good hospital teachers and, in my plaster cast, I managed to gain my Girl Guide cookery badge by cooking a sausage whilst in bed!

In school, wearing the brace, I had to sit at the back so that I could see the entire blackboard! I left at 16 without taking exams.

My mother insisted I get a job at a bank and it was there that I met Pam Scoble - in the NatWest fencing group.



Meanwhile.... Hugh?

Hugh I remember my first day at primary school because my parents gave me a bus conductor's set! When I passed my 11+ exam, I was interviewed for a place at Haberdashers' Aske's School but they weren't impressed by my ambition to be an engine driver! My parents didn't drive a car so we went everywhere by, in those days, steam train. My passion for transport, and railways in particular, has been strong ever since my early teens.

My whole career was in railway administration, management and finance. A sad event in my childhood was the decision of my parents to split up, but they kept the family together until I left school in 1961. After working for a few weeks in my father's bookshop in City of London, I got a job as a clerk at the Divisional Traffic Manager's Office, Paddington.

So when did you become Christians?

Hugh When I was about 10, a friend invited me to join the Finchley Crusaders group that met on Sunday afternoons (Cliff Richard was once a member). We'd sing choruses, read the Bible and there would be a talk. It was during one such gathering, when a visiting missionary came to speak, that I first committed my life to Christ. There were summer camps too. Later in my teens I started attending church and subsequently a friend invited me to join the Friern Barnet Inter Church Youth Group. As well as meeting weekly, there would be youth hostelling weekends away. I also came forward at the Billy Graham Earl's Court crusade in 1966 to confirm my commitment to Christ.

Judy Snap! My friend Sandra had also invited me to hear Billy Graham and I too dedicated myself to Christ there and then. Before that she had encouraged me to join the Friern Barnet group and that's where I met Hugh! We married in 1972 at Christchurch, North Finchley.

And working with children became a theme for your Christian life together?

Hugh Yes. I became involved with, and subsequently led, some of the Ffestiniog Railway summer working parties in North Wales, using picks and shovels to help dig a new route for a section of the railway (we were known as

"we were known as 'deviationists' "



'deviationists'!). Then Judy and I also got involved with helping to lead summer holiday ventures at Felixstowe for 9 to 11 year olds. Amongst many other activities, they loved the game where they had to find leaders disguised in fancy dress!

/continued *Know Your Newts* **a golden couple**

Judy We have always loved working with and encouraging children: in Sunday School groups like *Explorers* and *Exclaimers*, and at the outdoor summer *Greenbelt* festivals. I also helped run children's activities at Reading YMCA. I was invited to join the management committee. Then I became a trustee. I was there for 26 years. For a time I also ran a Pre-School Playgroup on the Dee Park estate.

Hugh has been a volunteer with *REinspired* (see also p. 14), supporting local primary schools in delivering their RE syllabus, since Suzanne Knight started this work at New Town School in 1997.

You moved to Reading, when?

Hugh In 1984. Judy gave up paid employment when Andrew was born in 1977 and Nathaniel came along three years later. We needed a larger house but couldn't afford one in our part of London. We had visited our friends the Scobles, who by then were living in Reading and attending St John's. Houses in Reading were cheaper

and it was convenient for me to travel to London by train, so we decided to move here too.

But for you, Judy, working with children hasn't been your only passion?

Judy Ah, you mean helping women. I volunteered at a drop-in centre on the Oxford Road where midwives could see mums and supply them with baby milk. It was during the Bosnian war and some of the mums were in a bad way. When the drop-in centre had to move, there were difficulties finding an alternative venue because some of the mums had had abortions.

I later helped at the Churches in Reading Women's Centre, which started at Wesley Church in Watlington Street and later moved to Emmanuel Methodist Church on the Oxford Road. I also volunteered at a pregnancy advice centre called *Lifeline*.

... while you were having treatment for cancer?

Judy Yes. I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2000 and again in 2020, and still have some ongoing treatment, but hope that I will get the all-clear by 2025. Hugh has also had a small operation recently.

It was great to hear Hugh sing 'A Transport of Delight' at your Golden Wedding celebration (we have always enjoyed his Flanders & Swann contributions at the church Cabaret evenings!), and a real pleasure to see your family there too.

Hugh Yes. It was lovely to have Andrew with his girlfriend Betsy and Nathaniel, his wife Hosanna, and our granddaughter, Hope, with us.

Thank you both for sharing with us at least part of the story of your very full lives .



Engaging with culture & making new friends at the



Imagine moving house ... to a whole new country. Imagine doing it because you are worried about your family's safety ...

- say Don & Bridget Barwick.

You're not confident speaking the language of the place you are going to, and you don't know anyone there. You will have to leave behind a good job where you have been well paid and well respected. Getting your children into school, registering with a doctor and transferring bank funds won't be straightforward.

This is the reality for many Hong Kong people who have recently arrived under the government's BNO visa scheme, and it's what the Welcome Course is helping with.

Having lived abroad ourselves (in France, in mainland China, and in Hong Kong), we had some experience of adjusting to life in a different culture, so we were excited when we found out about the Welcome Course, a national project by the Welcome Churches organisation to help arrivals from Hong Kong settle into life in Britain. With the help and support of several church members, a Welcome Course has been running on Tuesday evenings at St John and St Stephen's church, and on Tuesday mornings at Wycliffe Baptist Church. The six-week course is based on recorded videos, interspersed with discussion in groups. Each session tackles a different subject, such as "Understanding British Culture", "Making Friends" and "Wellbeing".

Our hope is that people who have come to Reading from Hong Kong will truly feel welcome, will settle in well, and will quickly make new friends .

*"I learn a lot from the quizzes
and discussion"*

*"It's very helpful to hear about
other people's experiences"*

Left: Another way local people have welcomed Hongkongers was through the *Friendship Festival* at the end of May. On a wonderfully sunny Saturday over 1,500 people gathered in Christchurch Meadows to enjoy musical performances, sporting challenges, HK and British food, a ceilidh, and an official welcome from the mayor. The stalls and activities encouraged visitors to engage with local community groups, and included the invitation to sign up for Welcome courses.



Engaging with **BIG THOUGHTS**

What are the hugest thoughts you can grapple with? Our universe, perhaps, its enormity and beauty - its past and its future - and maybe, within and beyond all that ... God? ... and then, our human place in it all!

These are concepts and questions that Year 9 students at *The Bulmershe School* have been engaging with in their RE lessons during this Summer term.

REinspired, the local charity that helps our local primary schools deliver parts of the Christian content of their RE syllabus, also sends volunteers into our local secondary schools - Bulmershe, Maiden Erlegh, and Maiden Erlegh in Reading. This enables lessons to include small groups where students can voice and explore their own ideas and ask challenging questions - more inspiring than some of the RE lessons you might remember from your own school days!

For this topic, students were asked to distinguish between two types of thinking - objective and subjective thinking - something they had already discussed in school and were well able to do. We used the example of a family wedding, and found that they could readily distinguish between the objective, factual events of the wedding - like its time and location and the number of guests - and the much more subjective things - like the love between the bride and groom, the hopes, prayers and support of family, and the wedding promises made. Those things are subjective because they require us to become personally involved, but they are very real and arguably the most important aspects of the wedding.

Then the groups discussed the 'Big Bang' objective scientific 'story' of the origins of our universe and compared it with the two different creation stories that you can find in the first three chapters of the Bible. Are those scientific and religious views of our origins compatible or in conflict? And what can we gain from each?

If these questions interest you, you can read more on our church website stjohnandststephen.org.uk under Resources - NEWT.

Learn more about REinspired at reinspired.org.uk or to consider volunteering for them, e-mail Julia.Jones@reinspired.org.uk



Secondary school RE lessons supported by volunteers from *REinspired*





Tuesday 23rd - Friday 26th August 2022

To enquire or to book a place,
phone 0118 929 9911 or e-mail
office@wycliffe-church.org.uk

WYCLIFFE
BAPTIST CHURCH
Transforming lives through
Jesus Christ's love

Turbine House Art Gallery

**BISCUITS & BRICKS - 200 years of the
Huntley & Palmers Legacy
Friday 9th September – Sunday 18th**

Open daily 10am - 6pm
Reading artists respond to the heritage
left in the town by the great biscuit
factory with an exhibition of artworks
for sale. This is part of Reading's
Biscuit Town 200 celebrations.

M THE MUSEUM
OF ENGLISH
RURAL LIFE



Biscuit Town exhibition in the Victorian hallway of
the Museum, once Alfred Palmer's family home.

Until 25th September 2022

Visit merl.reading.ac.uk for family activity packs and
walking tour map of Reading's biscuit heritage

Summer Activities

Dates for your Diary

R READING
MUSEUM



Until Saturday 13 August 2022

In the Sir John Madejski Art Gallery



Tells the story of the friendship
between Reading and Düsseldorf.

From Saturday 18th June 2022

In the Welcome Gallery

Congratulations!



'In love, committed, but not yet married' is, of course, another meaning for 'Engaged'

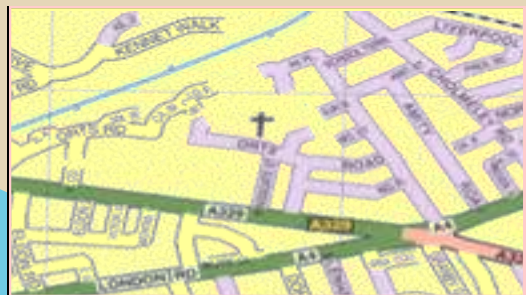
Jenny and Spence met last October, and three months later, got engaged on Easdale Island, at the end of the Isle of Seil, Scotland. Spencer's daughter lives there and she took photos and video of the day.

He says, "Having both lost our spouses and feeling lonely, it just felt right straight away, and our love for each other gets stronger day by day."

Our marriage is planned for August, and we thank the hand of God for putting us together. AMEN."



Church Contacts



Vicar
**Rev Claire
Alcock**



Assoc. Priest
**Christine
Bainbridge**



Parish Centre
Manager
Tanya Penn



Churchwardens
**Rosie Croft &
Ian Maynard**

Sunday worship 10:30 am
- everyone welcome →

For more details, please contact the Parish Office
0118 926 3633 email: office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk

School Contacts



Head teacher
**Polly
Cornish**



Assistant
Head Teacher
**Kate
Hawkins**



Assistant
Head Teacher
**Hollie
Appleton**



Head Teacher
**Martina
Parsons**



Assistant
Head
**Cameron
Purvis**



Assistant
Head
**Paula
Shuman**



Assistant
Head
**Jerome
De Silva**

New Town School 0118 937 5509
email: admin@newtown.reading.sch.uk

St John's School 0118 937 5540
email: admin@stjohns.reading.sch.uk