



## Press Release

### **Jewel in the Strand Project secures National Lottery Heritage Fund support**

St Mary le Strand Church has received a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £118,500 for an exciting resilience project. St Mary le Strand stands at the heart of the Strand-Aldwych district in London and is in many ways the 'Jewel in the Strand'. Made possible by money raised by National Lottery players, this resilience project will enable this beautiful church to reopen after lockdown and prepare for the transformation of the area as this part of the Strand is pedestrianised. Projects will start straightaway with lots of activities planned for the Autumn, including a community party to celebrate the reopening of the church and the Strand becoming traffic free on the Weekend of 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September.

St Mary le Strand is often called an 'island church' because it is right in the middle of the road with traffic moving either side. For many years it has been cut off by the busy roads and inaccessible to visitors. A major public realm scheme by Westminster City Council and the Northbank BID will see this section of the Strand pedestrianised. St Mary le Strand Church will be liberated from the traffic and become the centrepiece of this new piazza. The grant will enable the church to re-engage with its local community and become open in many new ways to residents, visitors, tourists, office workers and students.

St Mary le Strand has a rich history. After the Great Fire of London destroyed so much of central London there was an Act of Parliament to create 50 new city churches. St Mary le Strand was the first of these to be built and was completed in 1721. It was the first commission for, James Gibbs, a young architect who went on to build many famous buildings including the Radcliffe Camera in Oxford, the Senate House in Cambridge and St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square. St Mary le Strand is celebrating 300 years of history and beginning an exciting new chapter in its story.

#### **Quotes**

Commenting on the award, the Priest in Charge Canon Peter Babington said: "We are thrilled to have received this support thanks to National Lottery players and are confident the project will enable us to re-open St Mary le Strand as a place that is open to all."

Ruth Duston OBE, OC Chief Executive of the Northbank BID said: "There is huge opportunity for St Mary le Strand to take an active role in the area's recovery as we work through the



impacts of Covid. Supporting peoples' wellbeing is a high priority and we look forward to developing initiatives which will support the return to central London."

## Notes to editors

### The Church and Pedestrianisation

The Church is situated in a central island on the Strand and by default will become, at least physically, an integral part of the Strand Aldwych Project (<https://strandaldwych.org>). The now-approved proposals will transform the Strand between Waterloo Bridge and Arundel Street into a public space for people rather than a space dominated by vehicles. Aldwych will be converted to two-way traffic, rather than the current one way gyratory system. Part of the design intent of the Strand Aldwych scheme is 'to create a sanctuary' around the Church which fits with its own plans to be a place for quiet contemplation and the development of wellbeing projects. The Church is a stakeholder and a member of the Strand Aldwych Joint Project Board and as such has agreed to work with the aims of the pedestrianisation scheme.

### Heritage Value:

St Mary le Strand with St Clement Danes, is of high heritage significance, designated a Grade I listed Parish Church, and lying within the Strand Conservation Area

It replaced a mediaeval church to the southwest demolished in 1547-8 to make way for Old Somerset House and was consecrated in 1724. The Church was designed by James Gibbs for the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches, the first to be completed and a showpiece.

The Church's location, apart from allegedly being the site of an ancient maypole pulled down by the Puritans, was part of the principal (and Royal processional) route between the economic centre of the City of London and the royal and political centre of Westminster for centuries. The Strand became a commercial strip, and significant landmark buildings were established; later it was renowned as an area for restaurants, public houses, music halls and theatres as well as shops and businesses.

The Church has narrowly escaped destruction twice: at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century for demolition to widen the Strand; a campaign involving Walter Crane succeeded in averting this. During the Second World War there was major damage to the surrounding area but the Church avoided destruction.

In 1982 St Mary Le Strand became the official church of the Women's Royal Naval Service and this important role will continue - the Church being a focus for remembrance and celebration of its service.



The Church is a very fine example of baroque design which cleverly overcomes the constraints of the site to produce a building of satisfying proportions, sculptural interest and visual drama; there is a remarkable degree of survival of the original fabric inside and out which shows the design skills and craftsmanship of the masons, carvers, plasterers, joiners and other craftsmen of the period both in their own right and as a harmonious and through-designed ensemble. There are some items of particular beauty, design interest or grandeur, especially the paintings in the chancel, the pulpit and the communion plate.

The Church therefore has considerable communal value and is much loved being the focus of the accumulated memories and associations of the parish which it has served over three centuries, in particular those associated with the memorials and the donated furnishings, those baptised in the font, those married in the church and those buried in the crypt and churchyard.

## Notes to editors

### About St Mary le Strand

We are a Church of England (Anglican) parish church in the Diocese of London. This is the parish church of the united parish of St Mary le Strand with St Clement Danes. The church of St Clement Danes, which stands just to the East, was gutted by an incendiary bomb in 1941 but beautifully restored after the Second World War to become the Central Church of the Royal Air Force.

St Mary le Strand is often said to be the loveliest Baroque church in England. It was designed by James Gibbs, built between 1714 and 1723 and consecrated in 1724. The Italianate building with its intricate spire dominates the triumphal route along the Strand from Trafalgar Square to the City of London. Architecturally, there is a two-storey effect – Ionic and Corinthian orders on the exterior and Corinthian and Composite on the inside, with windows only on the upper level because of the noise of traffic (substantial even in the eighteenth century!)

We are an inclusive and welcoming community in the heart on London situated on the bustling North bank. The church is not just a beautiful and inspiring building, it is the setting for Christian worship, prayer, friendship and fellowship. Whether you live just around the corner or on the other side of the world, you are welcome.

In 1982 St Mary Le Strand was chosen to become the official church of the Women's Royal Naval Service, the Women's Royal Naval Reserve and the Association of Wrens. The dedication took place on 28 October 1984 when the WRNS Book of Remembrance was moved to the church from the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. The Association holds its annual Carol Service in December and details of that can be found in 'The Wren'.



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Follow @StMaryleStrand on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram #JewelInTheStrand  
#StrandLondon

### **About The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we **Inspire, lead** and **resource** the UK's heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future.

[www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk).

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#NationalLotteryHeritageFund

### **Further information**

For further information, images and interviews please contact **The Revd Canon Dr Peter Babington**, Priest-in-Charge of St Mary le Strand on:

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