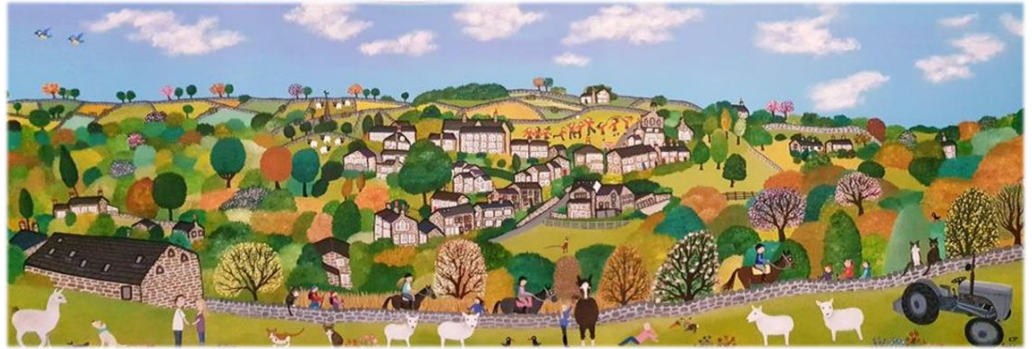


# Mill Bank & Cottonstones Newsletter

March 2025



## St Mary's - Our Brilliant Primary School

This year St Mary's school celebrates its 175<sup>th</sup> year. Built in 1850, there were 304 children on the roll then, though many worked half-time at the mills, and helped out at harvest time. At school, they were seen but probably not much heard. At the mills they weren't heard much either, above the roar of the machines.

Contrast this with today's children at their school. From classes 3 and 4, Alfie, Phoebe, Nelly, Piper, Amelia, Harry and Milburn have plenty of good things to say about St Mary's. They are already confident, articulate, thoughtful young people who know how to contribute and listen to each other. Alfie likes it because *'there are loads of nice people to play with...we've got a whole field...and a playground. We're lucky to have all the space'*. Phoebe, on the other hand, loves the library because *'we take turns to go and read a book...it's so quiet'*. Piper adds *'It may be a small school but it's a good community and you can make friends here'*. Others added - *'The teachers are all very friendly and happy to help...and with smaller classes we get lots of teacher attention'... 'It's a really nice community and no one will ever leave you out'*.

We really should have started with the news that St Mary's achieved outstanding results in last year's SATs (standard assessment tests), in which year six pupils achieved exceptional results in reading, writing and maths that both exceeded national expectations and were the best in Calderdale.

Of course, this gives the children a great head-start as they move into secondary education, but it is their cheerful confidence and reasoned thinking that stands out so clearly when you meet them.

Head of School Miss Barker is very pleased with the SAT results in 2024, particularly as the whole class reached national expectations in reading levels, far exceeding the national average of 74%. The combined results across all subjects also showed 92% of children meeting national expectations, in contrast to the national average of 61%.

It's no coincidence that the four teachers are all experienced and committed, though Miss Barker emphasises that no one spends too much time worrying about performance tables.

During the 2024 Ofsted inspection, the school was rated good overall and within that, outstanding for personal development. Beyond the national curriculum focus on core subjects, there is a rich variety of opportunities to encourage children to find and develop their interests – with clubs most nights ranging from music through to sports competitions, gardening and film.

Miss Barker says, *'We know our children so well, and we have an amazing staff here – really committed. It's not nine-to-five, and we try to give the children the best experience we can, including extra support when they have additional needs.'*

There's more about the school's 175<sup>th</sup> celebrations on page 4.

This is **your** newsletter, so please do get in touch with information, photos, or news.

**Newsletter: contact Michael-** michaelbeazley40@gmail.com / 07756 822995 **Website:** <https://www.millbankvillage.co.uk/> **WhatsApp:** Search for the Mill Bank Group; See **561/562** WhatsApp group for bus chat. **Email Newsletter:** On the website, enter your email address to receive the newsletter, as a longer edition. **Facebook:** search for the Mill Bank Group

## **The Village Year Ahead**

With a year of successful activities and events in 2024, the new Mill Bank Group committee has been looking ahead to 2025.

Working more effectively with others was helpful last year in getting things done – for example with our new councillor and the council, with the police, St Mary’s Church and with the school. We want to build on this in the year ahead.

Just as important, we want to make sure that everyone who wants to have their say, or get actively involved in looking after the village, can do so easily. So we will continue to produce the village newsletters this year, and invite more contributions, as well as maintaining the ever-popular WhatsApp groups. There will be more too on the website.

So what about specifics? Here are some of the things the MBG aims to tackle this year:

- ❖ Carrying out repairs and maintenance in the public spaces, keeping our litter bins and looking after the drains
- ❖ Engaging with St Mary’s Church to consider options for its future
- ❖ Opposing the incinerator at Sowerby Bridge
- ❖ Persevering with Yorkshire Water to fix the water supply, or at least to reduce road closures and bus cancellations
- ❖ Joining with the school to celebrate their 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- ❖ Building up the Neighbourhood Watch scheme to improve safety and security
- ❖ Exploring sponsorship to extend the Christmas lights
- ❖ Extending social events – for example a summer get together – as well as the Christmas Fair and Christmas Carols.

### **STOP PRESS...**

The grit bin on Nathan Lane has been re-instated; although the gullies are on a 5-year cleaning cycle, Cllr Webster has asked for them to be cleared from May. Gail has written to the Council on behalf of the village to ask for an update on the bins and when they’ll be reinstated.

## **The Mill Bank Group in 2024**

Last year was a good year for getting things done around the village, and we had a great account of these from Gail, the chair, at the AGM in November. We also said thank you to three retiring members, Mike, Tony and John, and welcomed two new members, Fi and Sarah.

With the active support of Cllr Leah Webster, we were able to tick off quite a few items on the priority list. This included the arrival of Tony and Scotty, who quickly set to and levelled the side entrance to the field.

### **Gritty Drama**

Stopping the gritting service would have put some people at risk, so there was a collective sigh of relief when the decision was reversed. Gail, our chair, wrote to the Council in November to ask that the decision be reconsidered, and this was supported by Cllr Webster. We had a stern reminder about cutting back overhanging vegetation and leaving 3.5m for the gritter to operate between parked cars. Or else...

### **Christmas Lights**

This year, Mill Bank Group village funds had to be used to pay for the tree lights to be switched on (and off!) over the Christmas period. Although the cost of 6 weeks use of electricity is negligible (thanks to the recent upgrade to LED lights) the switching on and off meant the total cost was £120. We think the lights add festive cheer to dark mornings and evenings.

Would anyone out there be interested in becoming the village’s winter lights sponsor? A business perhaps, who might like a sign to advertise their sponsorship?

### **Yorkshire Water**

The Mill Bank Group received a further response from Josh Fenton-Glynn’s office relaying Yorkshire Water’s decision not to renew the water mains. They simply didn’t comment on road closures and bus service cancellations. We have replied stressing the need to fix and re-open roads as soon as possible after repairs.

## Winter Village Tidy Up

Please join in! Two dates are planned to make the village beautiful - Sundays 9th and 16th March from 10.30 - 1pm. Meet at the noticeboard. Cake and hot drinks will be provided. Please bring gloves and usual tidy tools, and anything hi-vis for safety.

**Look out for** the emergence of bulbs planted by Keith and Marj in the triangle under the Old Chapel; also the flimsy barriers at the bridge repair on Lower Mill Bank Road, which quickly blew over in the last gale.

**Pavements;** we have asked the council to weed spray the full length of the pavements on Mill Bank Road, as removing and keeping down the grass by hand was impossible.

## Winter on WhatsApp

Ten thousand parcels went missing in Mill Bank around Christmas – or that’s how it felt anyway - and a new game called “guess the front door” was invented. It might just be a coincidence that a suspicious looking Muscovy duck was spotted hanging about the village at the time, and as Wallace and Gromit fans know, fowls can be evil kleptomaniacs.

But if it wasn’t the duck that stole the parcels, it was probably the bad boys in the get-away car who broke the sound barrier flying through the village, pursued by a helicopter and much slower police cars. The latter’s stately pace was well-judged to avoid colliding with the gritter driver, who was training for the world gritting championships, and was snapped reversing an enormous gritting rig downhill between parked cars on Lower Mill Bank Road in swirling snow, with millimetres to spare.

In another competition, the prize for filling in holes as slowly as possible was awarded, as always, to Yorkshire Water, who took over 3 weeks to mend a small drain at the Watermill. Their cryptic “road closed” sign was obviously meant to amuse rather than inform - it was true on some Wednesdays, but not usually on Fridays.

Still, anyone left without a working toilet during the repair will have been cheered by the elegant chamber pot offered freely online, or possibly by the cannisters of laughing gas left around the place. We all need a little help sometimes.

## Toad News and Appeal

Wanted - Toad Patrollers. Cottonstones and Mill Bank are unique places to live, not just for humans, but also for toads. But our toads need saving. Every year, they are compelled to crawl across lanes from the undergrowth where they have over-wintered to their breeding pond in Lumb Lane, but every year many of them get squashed by traffic.

This is where you can help. Toad patrollers go out every evening for an hour or so at dusk during late February to April collecting toads in buckets and taking them to safety. Toads love warm, wet evenings! Full training (it is very simple!) is given. You must have a bucket, High Vis clothing, a torch – and a notebook.

The national organisation Froglife needs our numbers to assess the toad population throughout the country. If you can join the band of regular volunteers, please get in contact with Charlotte on [charlotte@charlottew.co.uk](mailto:charlotte@charlottew.co.uk). Children accompanied by an adult are very welcome – their eyes are super keen! There’s a one- minute read on the website with more information, plus what to do if you see a toad and need to help it to safety.

## Winter Thanks

To Linda W and Gail for dressing the village Christmas tree; to Cllr Webster for chasing up our requests for repairs and replacements; to Derek for clearing the weeds from the pavement on Mill Bank Road. To our anonymous benefactor for printing this newsletter; to Bronwen and other members of Neighbour Watch for their eagle eyes, and action to respond to anti-social behaviour; and to Fiona for her tireless organisation of village activity.

There’s more: Thank you Sue Walker for organising the Christmas Fair, and all stallholders; Linda for her Wreath Making workshop; Bruce and Keith for the 2025 calendar; the committee and Michael & Autumn for the carols. Heartfelt thanks to all those who attended and so generously supported these community efforts. To Andy for his hard work replacing the see-saw and zip wire in terrible weather with poor access.

All your local **crime news** is now on the sensibly renamed Soyland and Mill Bank Crime WhatsApp page. Fran and David Ackroyd are the Admins.

## Mill Bank History

The history group had a very busy year in 2024 and this year seems likely to be eventful too. The group will join with St Mary's School to help celebrate its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary during a Heritage Week beginning on 19<sup>th</sup> May. The celebration day will be on Friday 23 May with afternoon tea/picnic.

There will be two special Heritage Walks for children and parents, and a further public heritage walk to follow later in September. At the school, with an audience of children, members of the group will interview Richard and Bernard Armitage, who were the last children to live on the school premises when their father was headteacher. Ruth's exhibition of old photographs will be put up in the school hall. There will be a short drama performed by the children, telling the story of a day in the life of a girl aged 10, who was a "half timer" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, spending her morning working in the mill, and the afternoon at school.

Sue and Janet have transcribed the details from the headstones at St Mary's and the Methodist Chapel graveyards. This is important because many of the headstones are crumbling fast or becoming illegible.

The Group is continuing to interview and record the lives of older people who grew up in Mill Bank, and these are informing Ruth's forthcoming new book about Mill Bank will be launched in September.

## Neighbourhood Watch

Thanks to Bronwen for the new neighbourhood watch signs which have been put up around the village and out to Cottonstones. Also to those who reacted quickly or taken action when incidents occur.

The police have put on extra patrols in response to our requests, so it is always worth reporting anti-social behaviour to West Yorkshire police. Call 101 or online at [police.uk/101-WestYorks](http://police.uk/101-WestYorks). You can sign up for the NW email/WhatsApp communications by contacting Bronwen.

## Talking points

How can we mark the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school? A new bench in the park playing area? We would welcome your suggestions.

## Mind and Body

**Keep Fit** at St Mary's Church, Wed evenings 7.00pm. No need to book - just turn up with a mat for floor work. Great music too. Phone 823589 for more information. £5 per session.

**French for Fun and Beginners Spanish for Fun** in Sowerby Bridge, Halifax and Mill Bank. Places are available and it is possible to join at any time. Please contact [ellie@languageforfun.uk](mailto:ellie@languageforfun.uk) or 07868 279513 for more information.

**Claire at *Bien Être* is a qualified massage therapist** and well-being coach specializing in chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and also menopause. She works from her therapy room in Sowerby Bridge. Text to 07971595648 for appointments, either for relaxing treatments or deeper treatment for pain or an injury, or if you would like a free coaching consultation.

## St Marys School News

A themed Owl Hunt will take place on Saturday 21st June. The PTFA is planning to repair and replant the Kitchen Garden - originally created by villagers and the school in partnership - to mark the 175th year.

If you'd like to be involved in repairing and replanting the kitchen garden, please contact Sarah on the committee.

Look out for more details about how to attend the celebration tea party and join in with the Owl Hunt.

For the 175th celebration day, there will be a small plant sale in aid of school funds, so please bring your spares for a swap.

### The Mill Bank Group Committee 2025

Gail Parker (Chair), Fiona Peach (Secretary 07962 474914), Linda Wilson (Treasurer, 0734 1443989),

David Bagley, Michael Beazley (077568 22995), Ellie Fitzgerald, Sarah Pittock, Peter Hardy (07531 806279), Keith Kemp (01422 823687), Glynis Lord, Bronwen Pendleton ([christopher174@sky.com](mailto:christopher174@sky.com)), Phillipa Walton, Fi Godfrey-Faussett.



## St Mary's Church Cottonstones

What is the future for St Mary's church? It's a live issue, and Rev Jeanette Roberts has announced a consultation that will begin in April, followed by an **open day at St Mary's on Saturday 3rd May, 10-2.30.**

*"We would like everyone in the village to save the date and come along. There will be refreshments and we'd like people to look at the spaces we have to offer, and put any ideas forward they may have. We could then look at whether some of the ideas might work in practice".*

With a small congregation, the Church Council is looking at other churches that have faced similar challenges. Without a sustained increase in the number of regular worshippers, closure is one possibility but is not the only option. The Church Council could partner with, or give the church to a community group, leaving the church available for occasional worship and for example, concerts or exhibitions.

As well as villagers worshipping at the monthly service, school children from St Mary's school also attend the church for major festivals, and there is some ongoing community use including an exercise group, Rushbearing, private functions, office space, Christmas events, and more. Adaptations to the church have already taken place over time, and it formerly hosted a play group.

All sorts of ideas for complementary and alternative use have been mooted so far by local people -community group activity, a café, an archive / museum, artists' studios and exhibition space, accommodation for visitors, and a music venue.



Making these alternatives work financially could be challenging. The annual insurance costs alone run into thousands. The non-worship parts of the interior would need upgrading to be re-purposed. But there are examples where churches with smaller congregations have taken on a new lease of life as busy hubs in their communities. St Luke's at Norland is a good local example, with Holy Communion three Sunday's out of four, and a cafe style worship on the the other, plus other events.

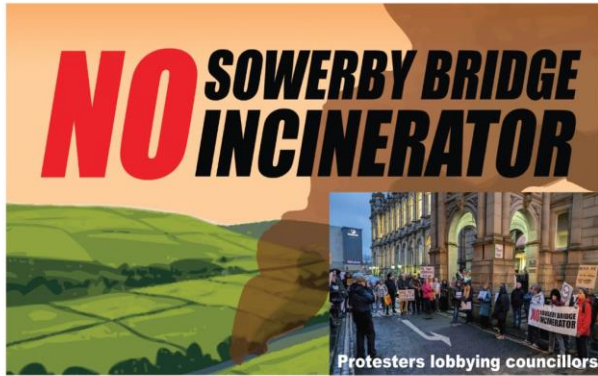
St Mary's is an important and much-loved feature in our landscape. It is of both historic and architectural interest and could be much more in our community again. The Mill Bank Group will use its communication channels to raise awareness of the dates that the church is open for worship, how to book the community spaces, and to promote engagement with the consultation process. Please look out for details of the public consultation, come along to hear more about the options and contribute your thoughts.

**St Mary's Church Services** are held at 11.30, on the first Sunday of the month with cake and coffee afterwards.

### Book Group

***Staying On***, by Paul Scott, won the Booker Prize in 1977, and is a postscript to his Raj Quartet. It's a story of the irascible Tusker and his wife Lucy, who stay on in India after the partition in 1947. In a very skilful way Scott manages to blend together various elements of the couple's final years in India. They are the last English couple in this idyllic hill station who see their world shrinking. Bereft of other expats they rely on the good will of their Indian servants. The book explores the 40 years of a marriage that had so many hopes but is now withering. Added to this is a new assertiveness of a growing Indian middle class who refuse to make concessions to these relics of an Indian past.

It's both a sad and wistful tale amongst the backdrop of magnificent scenery (film available on YouTube) and was a well-liked book by the whole group. New members are always welcome. We meet every month on the last Thursday. **Contact John 01422 823589**



## Residents urged to sign the petition to stop the incinerator

A petition has been launched to support the legal action being proposed by a local resident (Malcolm Powell) namely a judicial review on the grounds that the Council's decision and subsequent issue of the Environmental Permit for the Belmont Industrial Estate Small Waste Incinerator was unlawful.

The petition asks that the Council does not impose on itself and the local community the significant costs involved in resisting the legal action in court and that the Council rescinds the permit without delay.

We need to keep raising our voices against the permit granted by Calderdale Council for an incinerator that poses a risk to the environment and public health in Sowerby Bridge and the surrounding areas.

The incinerator would operate for 24 hours, five days a week, in a narrow, steep-sided valley. Sowerby Bridge already has a much higher than National and Calderdale average of respiratory conditions of Asthma and COPD.

Campaigners protested outside Halifax Town Hall as councillors arrived for a meeting of the full Calderdale Council on 12th February. The decision to approve the permit was delegated to council officers, rather than councillors.

Please show your support to help stop the operation of this incinerator in Sowerby Bridge. Sign the petition today!



Scan the QR code for [www.change.org](http://www.change.org)  
SAY NO TO  
SOWERBY BRIDGE  
INCINERATOR



This picture of the Ryburn Valley is not an unusual one, and shows clearly how mist, fog or low cloud can become trapped in the valley. Imagine the incinerator burning rubbish all day in these conditions, and the impact on air quality for people living nearby and for the children attending schools in the area. If you wish to sign the petition online you can use the QR code above, or find <https://www.change.org/NoSBIncinerator>. If you have any difficulty, contact Fi on 07775560532 or Michael 07756822995 to sign a paper version.

## From Councillor Leah Webster

Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who took part in the Secret Santa scheme at Christmas. We were able to help nearly 50 families who were struggling to meet the spiralling costs of Christmas presents for their children. The response from donors was just fantastic and your generosity made it a great day for the children. We've had some lovely feedback from hard-pressed mums and dads.

I'm looking forward to seeing the completion of the playground renovation around the end of March and am pleased to see that the field side entrance has already been levelled to remove a trip hazard.

As you know, the council is facing some tough financial decisions, but I was glad that the winter gritting service was protected. It was helpful to understand what the impact of removing the service might have been, including risks to life and limb. I will continue to press council officers to clear the gullies (now expected in May) and for the return of the grit bin that has disappeared from Nathan Lane.

If you'd like to meet me at a surgery to discuss an issue in the ward, please come to St Barts at Ripponden on Saturday 15th March 10am to 11.30.

## Mill Bank Merchandise

- Heritage walks guide booklets. £4 for the pair or for family and visitors to the village a more detailed guide to Cottonstones and Mill Bank, £4.50; Mill Bank tote bags £8; Mill Bank. The story of a West Yorkshire Village by Hazel Whiteley £10; A Condensed History of Kebroyd Mills £1. Maureen Moor's cards – packs at £5. All available from Ruth 07753 748482
- Mill Bank and area special map from Fiona on 079624 74914

## Access Bus

For people who are older or with additional needs, the Access Bus can be booked to help with door-to-door transport, seven days a week between 9am and 5pm. Travel is restricted to local journeys, mostly shopping trips to the local supermarket. Before using, passengers must register: 0113 348 1903 or downloading/printing a form <https://www.wymetro.com/plan-a-journey/accessible-travel/accessbus/>