



**PROFILE FOR THE PARISH
OF FINCHAMPSTEAD &
CALIFORNIA**



INTRODUCTION BY THE RECTOR

The Parish of Finchampstead and California is a fantastic parish to minister in! We are mission focused, looking to reach out and make Jesus known.

The parish has a lot of scope for new and different methods of outreach, as well as opportunities to build on good foundations of work already being done.

We are looking for someone to join us who has a pastoral heart and can take a lead in organising our pastoral and bereavement care. As the associate minister would be living in the Gorse Ride regeneration area we would also want someone who wants to build community in this area, who would be willing to join resident groups and create good relationships with their neighbours.

We are an active parish with a lot going on representing different churchmanships and traditions. We welcome everyone regardless of background, situation etc. and would need the new associate minister to be able work across the parish as a whole.

Having arrived in parish in April 2025 (though with a prior relationship with the Parish), I am looking forward to working with someone to help me discern all God is already doing here and build on this. This role will be well supported by myself, an active ministry team, administrator and opportunities for rest, retreat and reflection. Please be assured of my own ongoing prayers for your discernment.

Our profile will give you a great insight into who we are as parish and if you have any questions or wish to visit the parish do be in touch with the office: office@pfc-church.uk or 0118 973 0133.

Reverend Gemma Donnell



Welcome to the Parish of Finchampstead and California; Otherwise known as PFC

‘Proclaiming Jesus in Word & Deed’

We would like to tell you who we are, what we are currently doing and how we hope to discern where God is directing us.

We are 3 worshipping communities who have come together to form one parish, with one PCC. We have 5 locations where we can offer services which gives us the opportunity to embrace the breadth and depth of the Church of England liturgy.

We are a welcoming and inclusive parish, liturgically based and not afraid to try new things in order to attract people from the new communities emerging in our area, recognising the potential this presents for further Christian outreach.

We are looking for an Associate Minister with experience and enthusiasm to support and help lead the ministry in the parish as we seek to build God’s Kingdom.

Your PFC Churchwardens



Is God calling you to join us?

WHO ARE WE?

Three churches, one community, one PCC



St James' Church, Finchampstead –
Grade 1 listed building in village setting with
Manor House Church Centre



St Eligius in Arborfield Green –
Former Army Chapel in the centre of a modern
and growing housing development.



St Mary and St John, California –
Parish Centre in Gorse Ride Community with
services in Gorse Ride School

OUR VISION

We held an Away Day for PCC and other members of the parish to re-examine our priorities where we identified the following 3 key areas:

Be fun – to increase our provision for young families and our young people – to give them an amazing experience.

Be together - to meet the spiritual needs of every generation of our worshipping community – to provide something for everyone.

Be there - to reach out even more to bless our wider community spiritually and materially – to help our local community.

We have already put this some of this into practice by introducing some new initiatives, including:

- Offering breakfast for our 8am congregation (Early Risers) once a month
- A men's weekly coffee morning and a men's curry night.
- A bereavement support group

We accept that some changes may be needed as we discern the ways in which we can have the most impact on our communities. As our new Rector arrived in April 2025, we look forward to exploring and shaping our vision further.

PARISH SURVEY

As part of this process, we asked for feedback from all our parishioners, and this is what they told us:

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT THE PARISH

Our friendly, welcoming, happy and supportive atmosphere was the number 1 theme highlighted by all members of our parish community.

The variety of services and mix of different types of worship is also valued by many. “I appreciate the variety of worship from 8am BCP, to young families to the 11am communion – lovely”.

Our strong choral tradition, the “beautiful music and hymns” and the overall importance that music plays in our worship is seen as something which significantly enhances many of our services.

Although there is more to do in this area, our current provision for families and young children is proving to be increasingly popular “Excellent family service. Lots of provision for children”.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE FUTURE

Continuing all the good work which is being done but with the number one priority of engaging more with young families and children and developing further outreach opportunities, particularly in Gorse Ride and Arborfield Green.

Encouraging more regular ‘mixing’ of the different services to widen the demographic and encourage people to try different worship experiences.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR & WHAT WE OFFER

We want our associate priest to be:

- Prayerful
- Compassionate
- Creative
- Organised
- Enthusiastic to work across the breadth of the parish
- Collaborative
- Positive about working within a team, deanery and diocese
- Excited about and experienced in outreach and evangelism
- Desire to build and engage with community in the Gorse Ride area

In return we can offer:

- A strong team including church wardens, administrator, director of music and children's worker
- Support from a large and dedicated team of volunteers
- Regular quiet days and retreats
- Ongoing support from and opportunity to work with our Rector
- Opportunities for professional development and training

ST JAMES' CHURCH

This Grade 1 listed building dates from around 1134 and sits in a conservation area. The tower containing 6 bells was added in 1720. The inside has a traditional layout with predominantly fixed, wooden pews, a pulpit and vestry. There is seating for about 150 but the addition of a video and audio link enables an extended congregation to use the Church Centre.

The building underwent a major conservation project in 2010 and is in a good state of repair. A recent energy audit gave it a good report. Both the bells and traditional pipe organ have also undergone restoration in the last 25 years.

We open the church on weekday mornings for visits or private prayer



The Church is surrounded by 10 acres of land including the re-discovered Lost Liddell Gardens, which are a haven for wildlife, and a beautifully maintained and recently extended churchyard. Maintenance is overseen by the Churchyard Committee which includes representatives from the local community and other local churches. The new churchyard won a Church Times Biodiversity Award in 2017 and was featured by Bible Society, linked to their Psalm 23 Garden at the Chelsea Flower Show 2021. We encourage use of our outdoor space by holding events in the gardens including a prayer walk. Still Waters, our bereavement group, and the Church School's Wellbeing group both take advantage of the beauty and tranquillity of the grounds.



The Church Centre is housed in an early 20th century Manor House bequeathed to the church and to which a modern hall was added 30 years ago.

The building houses the Church Office and provides facilities for

- Café-style services
- Children's groups
- Social and community events

It has meeting rooms and a newly re-fitted kitchen and coffee bar. The Centre is popular with other churches and organisations for Away Days and Quiet Days.

The building also includes four flats, rented out and providing a source of revenue.

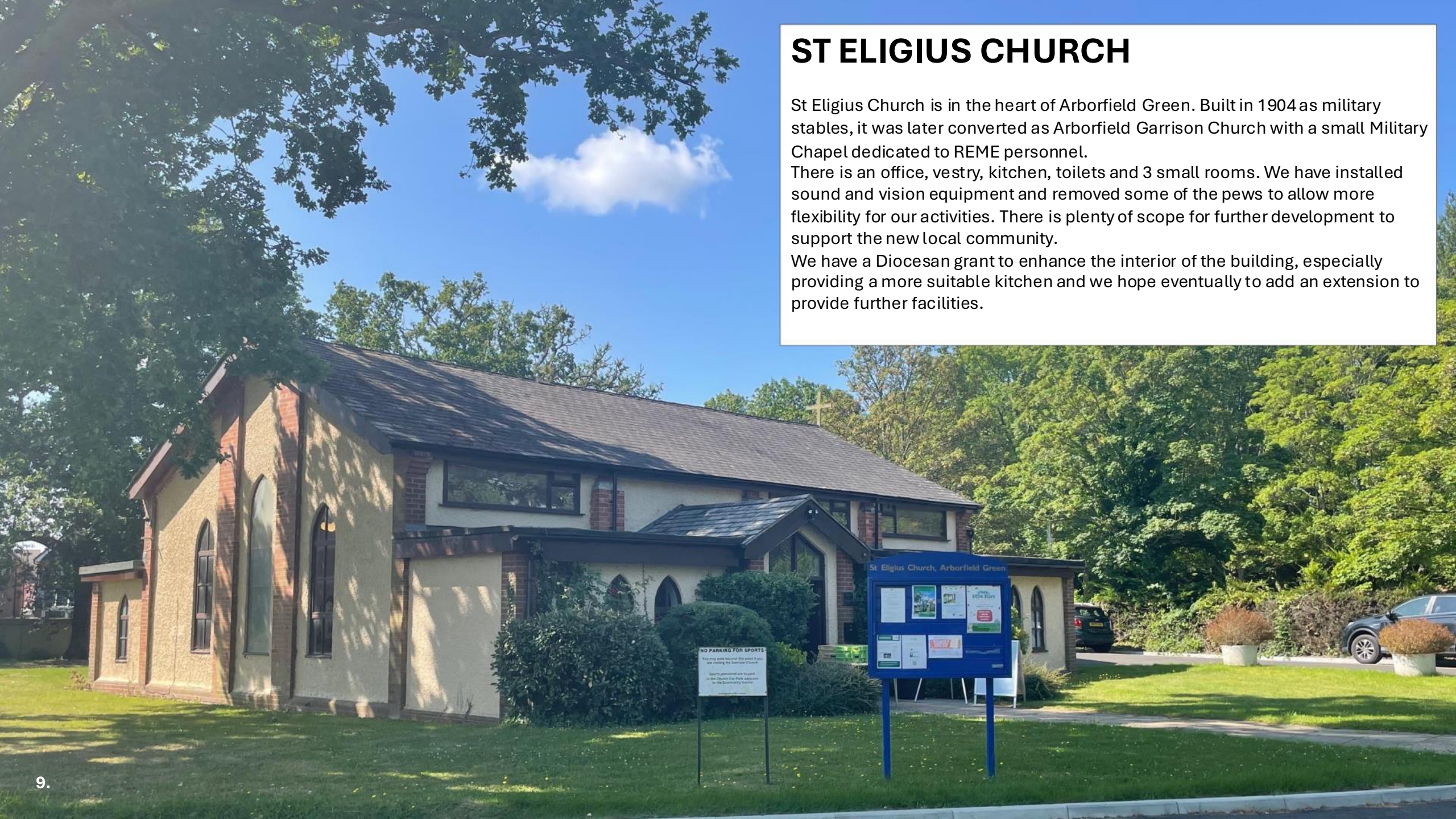


ST ELIGIUS CHURCH

St Eligius Church is in the heart of Arborfield Green. Built in 1904 as military stables, it was later converted as Arborfield Garrison Church with a small Military Chapel dedicated to REME personnel.

There is an office, vestry, kitchen, toilets and 3 small rooms. We have installed sound and vision equipment and removed some of the pews to allow more flexibility for our activities. There is plenty of scope for further development to support the new local community.

We have a Diocesan grant to enhance the interior of the building, especially providing a more suitable kitchen and we hope eventually to add an extension to provide further facilities.



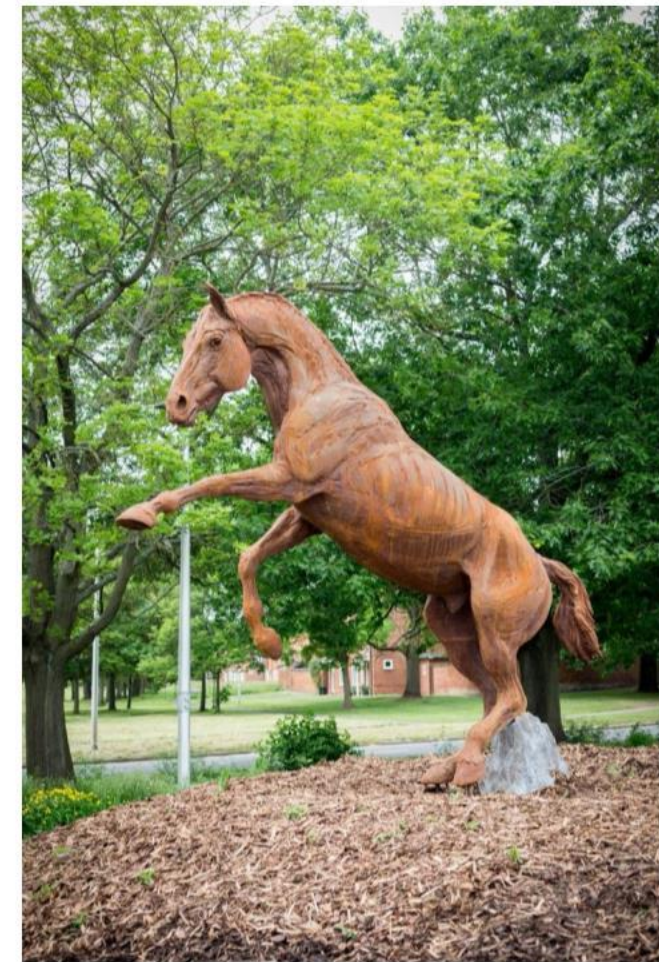
ARBORFIELD GREEN

On the western edge of the parish is the major new Strategic Development Location (SDL) at Arborfield Green on the former Arborfield Garrison site and adjacent farmland.

Started in 2016, building work will continue until 2030, providing some 3,500 new homes divided between 3 ecclesiastical parishes of which 2,500 will fall in our parish. Many of the new houses are already occupied, and the area is greatly transformed with new roads, sports centre and additional leisure facilities, planned or under construction with plenty of open spaces remaining.

Bohunt Wokingham is the secondary school in our parish. There is a new primary school in Barkham parish and a second primary school is planned for the Finchwood Park area in our parish.

A District Centre including Sainsbury's, other shops, and a pub is under construction. The area includes former army houses, mixed housing from flats and social housing to 4 and 5 bedroom family homes and the recently purchased Rectory. The area is connected to other parts of the parish by the Greenway Network of cycleways and footpaths.



ST ELIGIUS CHURCH LOCATION

St Eligius church sits in a pivotal position within the new Arborfield Green development. Walking distance from ex Army housing and new apartments and family houses. It is surrounded by fields & parks which are in development to create football pitches, tennis courts, allotments, play areas and a pavilion for the local community.



ST MARY & ST JOHN'S PARISH CENTRE AND GORSE RIDE SCHOOL

There is no Anglican Church building in this part of the parish. Previously services for St. Mary's and St. John's were held in Gorse Ride Junior School, however this community now meets together with St. Eligius in Arborfield Green.

California is an area in the north of the parish, more densely populated with a variety of established residential houses, park homes and Gorse Ride Community which includes some social housing. In the area are: two state primary schools, a private school, the doctor's surgery, two dentists, a veterinary hospital, several shops, a post office, restaurants, takeaways, The Ratepayers Community Hall, a golf club and California Country Park with lake, extensive walks, play area, and café.

A further café, sports hall, library, Children's Centre, Parish Council Office and base for the Community Police are part of the modern Finchampstead Baptist Centre (FBC).
The Vicarage alongside St Mary and St John's Parish Centre will be occupied by our Associate Priest.



PARISH CENTRE LOCATION

The Parish Centre is a modular building in the heart of the Gorse Ride Community.

At present the building is at the edge of a building site as the regeneration project has meant the demolition and rebuilding of most of the surrounding social housing. It has a small hall, a meeting room, kitchen, toilets, and office facilities. It is used for small services, social events and by local organisations.

It is well situated for outreach into the community.

ST MARY &
ST JOHN'S
PARISH
CENTRE

WHAT'S ON IN THE PARISH

A snapshot of regular activities alongside our Sunday services;

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
9:30am Fledgelings toddler group 1:30pm Handbell practice	10:00am Gardening team 11:00am Men's coffee morning 2:00pm Tea and Chat 5:00pm Rainbows 7:00pm House group	9:30am Little Stars toddler group 7:00pm Striders running group 8:00pm Bell ringing practice	10:00am Gardening team 2:00pm Mothers' Union 7:00pm Choir practice 8:00pm Prayer group
FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	Notes
11:00am Flower arranging 6:00pm Girl Guides	9:00am Ladies breakfast 10:00am Green Team working party	8:45am Early Risers breakfast 12:00pm Coffee after regular services	*Not all weekly



SERVICES

St James', Finchampstead (SJ) –

8:00am - Said Communion, alternating CW and BCP

9:30am - Café Style service in Church Centre or Family Communion in Church

11:00am - Sung Parish Communion following seasonal CW with robed choir and servers

6:00pm - Monthly Sung or Choral Evensong

St Mary and St John's, California (SMSJ)

9:30am - Previous services were held in Gorse Ride school. Currently combined Holy Communion with SE congregation (using seasonal CW)

St Eligius, Arborfield Green (SE)

9:30am – Currently combined Holy Communion with SMSJ congregation (using seasonal CW)

The whole parish comes together to celebrate significant events such as Advent Carols, Nine Lessons, Midnight Mass, Ash Wednesday, Easter dawn service, Pentecost, All Souls and Remembrance.

STATISTICS

FROM 2024/2025

298 Electoral Roll (APCM 2025)

145 Average Sunday attendance across the parish

244 Attendance at Easter

418 Attendance at Christmas

10 Baptisms

4 Weddings

17 Funerals in church

2 Funerals at crematorium

18 Burial of ashes

A photograph of a simple wooden bench in a natural setting. The bench is made of two thick wooden planks supported by two vertical posts. It is situated on a dirt path with green grass and purple heather plants around it. In the background, there is a dense forest of tall trees under a cloudy sky. The text 'Finchamstead Ridges' is carved into the side of the bench.

PASTORAL & BEREAVEMENT CARE

THE NEED

As a large parish the need for pastoral care is great.

We have many parishioners who need additional support and/or are unable to attend church regularly.

We take several people home communion, as well as wanting to offer regular services in two local care homes.

We are also aware of a growing need for bereavement support. Previously a 'still waters' group was run which was very well received but closed due to COVID and has not been reopened.

THE OPPORTUNITY

We have a core group of volunteers willing to visit people and support any groups which were to be restarted. The way pastoral care is run can be changed and developed to meet the needs of the parish.

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Our work with children and young people is vitally important to us.

They are always welcome at our services. At St James', our child friendly Café Church is held in the Church Centre with a monthly Family Communion service in church. There are always activities for children at the currently combined service for St Eligius with St Mary and St John.

We hope our two toddler groups and our links with local schools will help us make an increasing number of positive connections with children and their families in our community.

School assemblies are occasionally taken by our Associate Priest, our Children's Worker and volunteers in addition to video assemblies sent weekly to 3 primary schools in our parish by lay volunteers.

We regularly prepare adults and children for confirmation and have agreed to admit young people to Communion before they are confirmed subject to appropriate preparation.

Re-establishing youth groups across the parish is a priority and funding for this is in our budget.

We regularly hold special events such as Christmessy, Easter Messtival, Family Picnics, Family Bingo etc. and work hard to encourage families to get involved in the life of the church.



MUSIC

Music plays a major role at all our worship centres.

We have a Director of Music who leads weekly choir practice with our junior and senior choir at St James'. He is supported by our regular organist.

The robed choir lead the sung Parish Communion and monthly evensong.

There is a less formal choir at St Mary & St John's together with St Eligius which occasionally sings during communion. There are several organists / pianists to support these services.

The choirs come together for some whole parish services such as the Good Friday service and Nine Lessons and Carols at Christmas.

There is an annual choir concert offering the opportunity to perform secular as well as religious music.



MISSION PARTNERS



The parish supports Christian work here and abroad with regular annual donations to various organisations. Locally they include **SOULSCAPE** and **JAC** (Just Around the Corner) which both work with young people.

Further afield they include **THE BIBLE SOCIETY**, our **CMS** mission partner in Kenya, **MITYANA CHARITY** working in Uganda, **OPEN DOORS** supporting persecuted Christians, and the **MOTHERS' UNION OVERSEAS FUND**.

A variety of other organisations are supported less frequently including the local Food Bank and **CIRDIC** (Churches in Reading Drop in Centre),

The **CHILDREN'S SOCIETY** is supported annually at our Christingle Service.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Social and fundraising events are a great way to bring together church members and the wider community and often raise funds for the parish and other good causes. We regularly hold quiz nights, concerts and family bingo, organise the village fete every 2 years and a major celebration of St James' Day every year.

At St Eligius we are beginning to build relationships with the new community. We organise a weekly running group and sell locally produced fruit there week after week. We recently supported the local community group 'Engage' at their annual fete which was held on the park outside St Eligius. We have many ideas for future events.

In the village we take part in the annual Remembrance parade and service in the park. St James' has a beacon which we light as part of national celebrations. These events have attracted several hundred people on many occasions.



MEET THE TEAM *



Gemma Donnell
Rector



Yvonne Pett-Ridge
Children & Family Worker



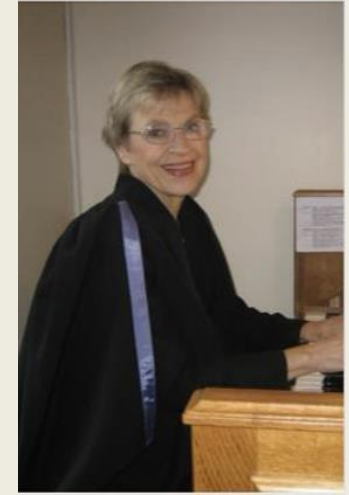
Kate Hembra
Parish Administrator



Chris Bond
Director of Music, St James



William Taylor
Organist, St James



Rita Le Var
Organist, St Eligius



Robert Alder
Church Warden, St James



Joy Scovill
Church Warden, St James



Martin Hembra
Deputy Church Warden, St James



LuciaGolding
Church Warden, St Eligius



Paul Marsden
Church Warden, St Eligius



Ashlyn Webster
Church Warden, St Mary & St John's

* Our Youth Worker post is currently vacant.

There is the possibility for a "House for Duty" post to expand our Ministry Team.

We would like to appoint a curate in due course. Our experience with two previous curates was fulfilling to both parties and we are fortunate to be able to offer accommodation.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

As well as our 5 Church wardens, deputy, PCC and sub-committee members we are blessed with very dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly in so many areas of church and parish life, supporting Sunday services as sidespeople, readers, intercessors, servers, junior servers, choir members, bell ringers, working with young people and the all-important coffee makers.

There are also pastoral visitors, gardeners, bakers, cleaners, fund raisers, flower arrangers, managers of our centres and odd job helpers.

Our deputy church warden at St James volunteers as manager of all our investment properties.





FINANCE & STEWARDSHIP

We are fortunate as a parish to benefit greatly not just from current congregational giving but also from the legacies of past worshippers.

We pay our parish share, currently £160,000, in full every year.

We have committed regular giving from around 250 individuals and families. We enjoy holding many fund-raising events throughout the year which also encourages our congregations and community to come together and have fun.

We support many local, national and international charities and donate 10% of our unrestricted income to charity.

We are embracing the opportunities of online and contactless giving. Examined accounts for 2024 are available on request.

SUSTAINABILITY & OUR PARISH

Our Green Team is leading the way on sustainability by:

- Raising awareness on sustainability across the parish
- We have been awarded an Eco Church Bronze award
- Monitoring energy use - promoting green energy
- Encouraging and enabling recycling
- Rediscovering the Lost Liddell Gardens at St James' to benefit the community and the wildlife
- Organising working parties to support grounds maintenance
- Rewilding projects
- Lent challenges – less car, recycling more, buy less
- Joining Deanery initiatives

THE VICARAGE

California Vicarage will be the home for the Associate Priest and is situated next to St Mary & St John's Parish Centre in the middle of the main residential area of Finchampstead.

It is a large modern four bedroomed detached house that was originally purpose built to provide worship space, counselling rooms and accommodation. There is a sizeable enclosed private garden that is not overlooked. The Vicarage is a five-minute walk from Gorse Ride School.



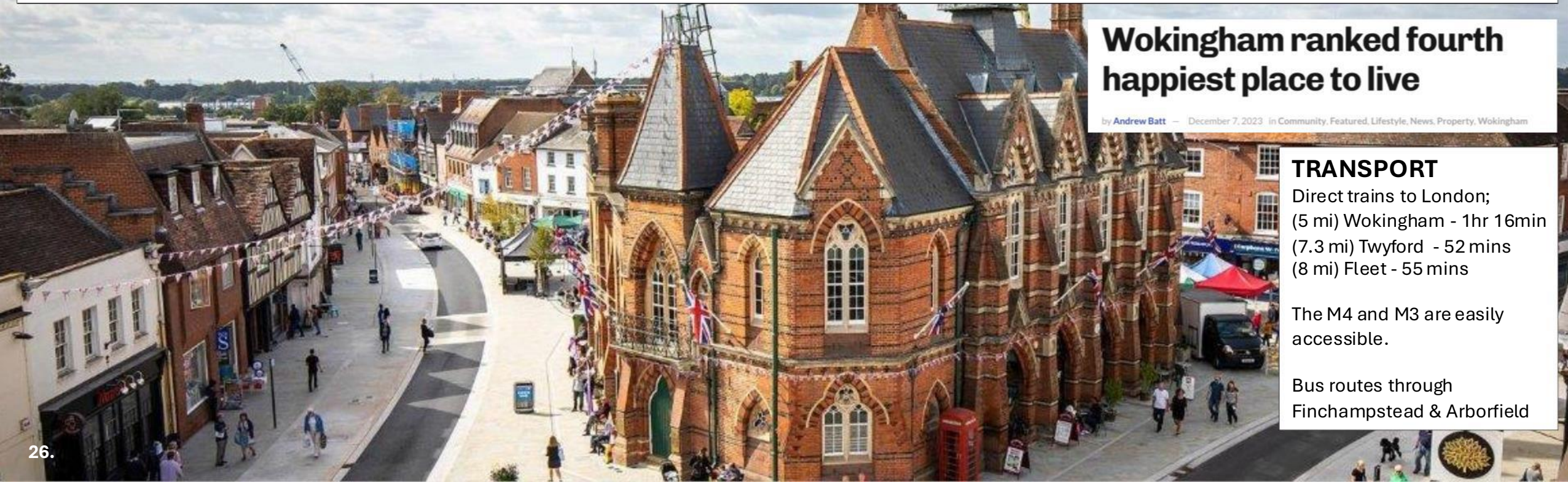
WHAT THE WIDER AREA OFFERS

Our Parish is in the Deanery of Sonning in Berkshire. The nearest town is Wokingham. The town has a good selection of shops, restaurants and cafés. Wokingham has regularly been listed one of the top places to live in England. There are two large NHS hospitals within 10 miles.

There are good sports facilities in the area with several gyms and golf courses. Children are well catered for with many local football groups in Finchampstead and at Arborfield Green. There are several swimming pools within easy reach and the luxury Nirvana Spa.

All local schools receive good inspection results. There are five primary schools serving the area, plus Bohunt Secondary school and Ranelagh, a church secondary school in neighbouring Bracknell. There is also a choice of sixth form facilities in the surrounding towns.

The entire area is served by a network of well-maintained footpaths and bridleways and the newly constructed Greenway route connects the new developments to existing amenities for walkers and cyclists. There are plenty of open spaces to enjoy with parks, lakes and playgrounds.



Wokingham ranked fourth happiest place to live

by Andrew Batt — December 7, 2023 in Community, Featured, Lifestyle, News, Property, Wokingham

TRANSPORT

Direct trains to London;
(5 mi) Wokingham - 1hr 16min
(7.3 mi) Twyford - 52 mins
(8 mi) Fleet - 55 mins

The M4 and M3 are easily accessible.

Bus routes through
Finchampstead & Arborfield

WEBLINKS

Parish website - <https://pfc-church.uk/>

Finchampstead Parish Council - <https://www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk/>

Wokingham Borough Council - <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/>

Finchampstead Church of England (aided) Primary School - <https://www.finchampsteadschool.org/>

Thank you for reading our Parish Profile.

Additional information is available on request.

e: office@pfc-church.uk Tel: 0118 973 0133

We look forward to potentially meeting you in the near future

