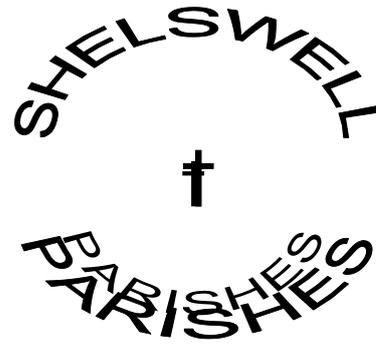


# THE SHELSWELL BENEFICE

A Rural Benefice of ten churches in North Oxfordshire

<http://www.shelswellparishes.info/>



## Benefice Profile

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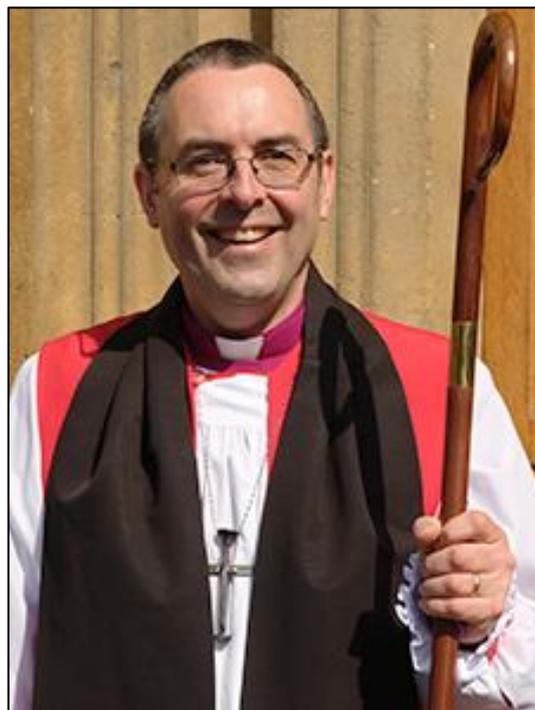
## Letter from the Bishop

Dear potential applicants,

I am delighted that you are reading this profile and encourage you to pray about whether this position might be the role to which God is now calling you.

It's true that the Shelswell Benefice is a beautiful place to live and work and that it also offers excellent transport links. But it's also so much more than this.

Here is a benefice that is made up of committed Christians who care deeply for the congregations and their communities. Here are people who collaborate together for the sake of the Kingdom such as with their children's work and in the Shelswell by the Sea project. Here are people eager to continue to grow in faith and for a Rector to come and lead them in listening to God and discerning what God is calling them to next.



This is a great post for someone who has a love of rural life and can bring an understanding of this and an awareness of its joys and challenges.

If you are someone with energy and enthusiasm and who thrives working with others and can engage with all sorts of people then please do consider exploring this role. The benefice is praying for a people person who is open minded, able to offer encouragement to parishioners and able to inspire faith and spiritual growth.

You will find a friendly deanery with supportive colleagues. Our episcopal area and diocese are in good heart, expectant for all that God will do and thankful for all that God is doing.

Please pray about whether you might be the right minister to join us. If you decide to apply, I would be delighted to receive your application for this key position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague and partner in the Gospel.

With every blessing

*+ Gavin Dorchester*

Rt. Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester

## The Diocese and The Deanery

The Diocese of Oxford serves the mission of the Church in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. The Diocese comprises more than 600 parishes, with over 800 churches, serving a diverse population of more than 2 million people located in all types of settings. More information can be found at [www.oxford.anglican.org](http://www.oxford.anglican.org).

In September 2016, the Right Rev'd Dr Steven Croft was appointed Bishop of Oxford. Bishop Steven's vision for the Diocese is that we can become a more Christ-like Church: contemplative, compassionate and courageous.

Because of its large size, the Diocese of Oxford is divided into four smaller episcopal Areas, each overseen by their own Area Bishop. The Area Bishop of Dorchester (within which Shelswell lies) is the Rt. Revd. Gavin Collins who has been in post since 2021.

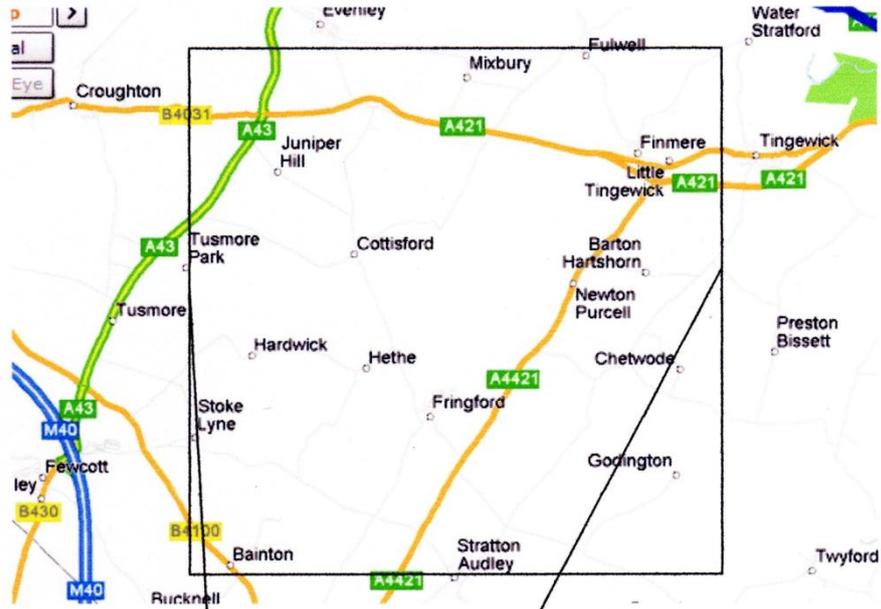
The Shelswell Benefice is part of the Bicester and Islip Deanery and has a Deanery Chapter which meets, on average, about once every two months under the guidance of the Area Dean, Peter Wright. All clergy (stipendiary, HfD and NSM) are encouraged to attend Chapter meetings.

Currently the deanery is made up of one large, urban conurbation (Bicester Team Ministry) and four large, rural, multi-parish Benefices.

The Deanery Synod meets quarterly to discuss a variety of topics with the meetings usually starting with a guest speaker. The Deanery Plan reflects the two main challenges facing the Deanery: the rapid expansion of Bicester and the challenges of ministry in a rural area.

The Deanery is currently supporting two projects: Pilgrim Pathways and the Greenhouse/Potting Sheds Initiative.

# Shelswell Benefice



## THE SHELSWELL AREA

The Shelswell Benefice serves the ten villages of Cottisford (together with the hamlet of Juniper Hill), Finmere, Fringford, Godington, Hardwick (and the Tusmore Estate), Hethe, Mixbury, Newton Purcell with Shelswell (and the hamlet of Newton Morrell), Stoke Lyne (together with the hamlet of Bainton) and Stratton Audley.

Shelswell falls in the area administered by the Cherwell District Council.

Our small villages and hamlets are sandwiched between the rapidly growing towns of Bicester, Brackley and Buckingham. The total population of the Benefice is only about 2,550 of whom more than half live in Fringford (600), Finmere (400+) and Stratton Audley (430+).

The area is rich in farming, mostly arable with some sheep and a few cattle. There are also several stables, and the Bicester and Whaddon Hunt is based in the area.

Most of the Benefice's economically active residents commute to their workplaces. However, a number work in farming or on the Tusmore Estate. There is also a relatively high proportion of home-based workers.

Although there is a very small amount of social housing in some of the villages, most houses are owner occupied. Additionally, a number of houses in Hardwick, Newton Purcell and Stratton Audley are tied to the local Estates. House prices in the area are high in relation to average earnings, and it is difficult for adult children of local families to live within the Benefice.

Car ownership overall is high, but the people most likely to be without a car are pensioners. The bus service was drastically reduced in 2016, and those without their own transport can struggle. There are good train and bus services from Bicester to London, Birmingham and Oxford, and the M40 is close.

In line with national trends, the proportion of older people living in the villages is expected to increase significantly over the next 20 years. Within the Cherwell District it is anticipated that the percentage of those 65+ will increase from 17% in 2014 to 25% in 2034. The percentage of those aged 85 and over is expected to more than double. Further socio-economic data is at Appendix 2.

Other than a farm shop very recently opened in Hethe, there are no shops in the Benefice and no post offices. People tend to shop in one of the nearby towns. The Benefice has three public houses, the Butcher's Arms in Fringford, the Red Lion in Stratton Audley, and the Peyton Arms in Stoke Lyne. The last two are part-time.

There are two Church of England Voluntary Controlled schools in the Benefice, both covering Reception to Year 6. Finmere School currently has about 43 children on roll, and Fringford about 100. In Fringford there is also the Shelswell & Fringford Pre-School Playgroup. Check out their websites:

[www.finmere.oxon.sch.uk](http://www.finmere.oxon.sch.uk)

[www.fringford.oxon.sch.uk](http://www.fringford.oxon.sch.uk)

[www.fringfordpreschoolplaygroup.co.uk](http://www.fringfordpreschoolplaygroup.co.uk)

Currently little new housing is planned within the area, although the Government's new planning policy is encouraging developers to explore the scope for new development, particularly in Fringford, where there is currently a new build of seven houses under way. There is significant local concern about the possible impact of new development on the rural character of the villages. The building of HS2 and the East West Rail Link are making a significant impact.

## THE SHELSWELL BENEFICE

The current Benefice came into being on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1995. It comprises 10 churches organised into 8 parishes. The churches at Cottisford and Hardwick constitute a single parish, as do those at Stratton Audley and Godington. Over the years the parishes have learnt to take a 'Benefice-wide' approach to certain aspects of church life which, for lack of numbers, cannot be adequately addressed on an individual parish basis, for example, children and young people's work, small group work and choir. These matters are discussed and decided (at times after referral to individual parishes) by the Benefice Council which was set up when the Benefice was formed. The Council meets quarterly.

Under the Church Representation Rules a scheme to establish a Joint Council with delegation of specified functions only was approved at the end of 2024. The Joint Council has legal status and replaces the Benefice Council. The first meeting of the Shelswell Joint Council took place on 20 January 2025.

Parishes in the Benefice continue to elect their own churchwardens and PCCs, and continue to be financially independent and pay their own Parish Share and the upkeep and repair costs of their Church buildings and churchyards. However, they do contribute to Benefice funds to meet the expenses of the Ministry Team, the cost of the part-time administrator, and to fund ministry initiatives. They are represented on the Joint Council. For the last two years all our parishes have paid Share in full.

### Ministry Team

The Ministry Team comprises:

- the Rector [vacancy],
- a retired Minister (Revd. Liz Welters) with PTO,
- an Associate Minister, the Revd. Alex Mahlava, (House for Duty, two days a week),
- a Licensed Lay Minister (Penny Wood) with PTO,
- the Lay Chair of the Benefice Council (Flora Skinner),
- the Benefice Administrator (Becky Adams), who is employed by the Joint Council (see paragraph below for further information).



Additionally, a number of people help lead different services around the Benefice and a great team of volunteers help with various activities including running coffee mornings, providing refreshments after Finmere School services, organising events, helping at the 'Lighthouse' summer holiday club, and assisting at our adults 'holiday at home' sessions.

All members of the Ministry Team work across the Benefice. They meet weekly for morning prayer, and monthly to share, reflect and plan.

The Team shares the opportunities that arise for occasional offices. In 2025 these amounted to 10 baptisms, 11 weddings, 4 funerals, and 7 burials of ashes.

The Benefice Office has recently been relocated from within the Rectory to a private house in Finmere. It would be possible for it to return to the Rectory, but this would not happen without the consent of the new incumbent.

### **Benefice Administrator**

The Benefice Administrator (Becky Adams) is based in the Benefice Office and works 12 hours a week plus extra hours for meetings that do not fall within her usual working hours. Becky has held this post for over 20 years and has been able to build very good relationships with members of the Ministry Team, Churchwardens and others across the parishes. She acts as a first point of contact for many general queries and deals with most routine administration, including producing orders of service, weekly notice sheets and other service material; servicing meetings of the Ministry Team and Joint Council; liaising with key personnel in relation to funerals, weddings and baptisms; drawing up a monthly service plan with staffing; organising visiting clergy and handling publication and distribution of the Shelswell News.

### **The Rectory**

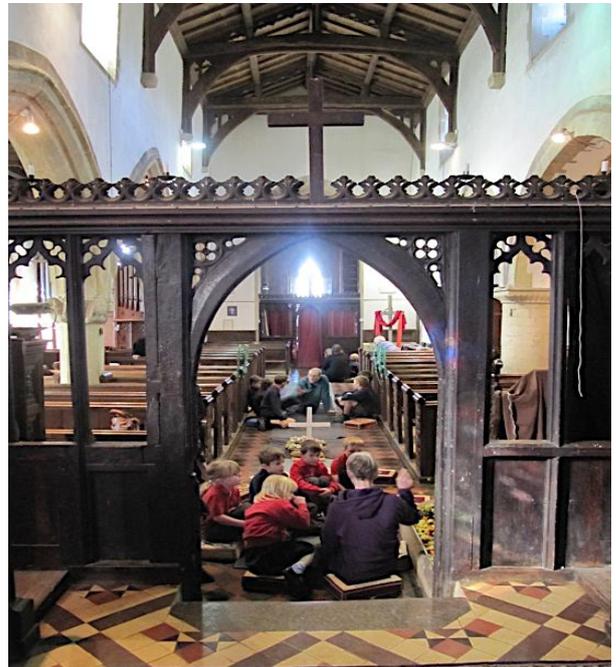
The Rectory is a 4-bedroom, detached house in Finmere, in the north of the Benefice, and is currently being refurbished. Further details are in Appendix 1.

## Children's work

Children's work is generally carried out on a Benefice-wide basis.

Currently we have:

- the Little Lambs Toddler Group which runs weekly during term times in Stratton Audley Church. The group is well regarded, and attendance varies between 8 - 12 families a week. The Joint Council employs a co-ordinator for the toddler group (Jennifer Ashby).
- 'Open the Book' – a Bible Society programme where volunteers prepare and present a 10–15-minute scripted Bible story to a school assembly, involving the children as much as possible.
- An 'Experience Easter' event for both primary schools
- 'Schultute' prepared by church volunteers and given in September to all new school starters
- Fun @ Four – a 'messy church' style service for families and children – paused at present
- special events planned through the year, for example, a Light Party on Halloween.
- Lighthouse Shelswell – our children's holiday club which is run for the first week of the summer holidays by an enthusiastic group of volunteers. This year it was attended by 60+ children. We very much hope it will continue.



## Shelswell by the Sea

Our holiday at home scheme which runs two or three times a year, offering three days of **companionship**, activity and food to older folk within the Benefice.



## Shelswell Choir

The Benefice has a small but keen choir made up of members from various parishes. It has been in existence for over 20 years. The choir usually sings at the monthly Evensong Service, at quarterly Benefice Services, and other services as requested.



## Shelswell News

The Shelswell News is the magazine of the Shelswell Group of Churches. It is issued every month and contains contact details for the Churches, events happening in the Churches and villages, police advice and local advertising. It is currently delivered to around 465 homes in the Benefice. It is a very valuable source of outreach as it is taken by people who do not attend church but who like to be kept informed of events in the Benefice.

## Our Worship Pattern

Efforts have been made to encourage more benefice wide services, but most parishioners still prefer to worship in their own parish church. Some are happiest with a BCP service – others value something much more informal. With that in mind we sometimes enjoy an open air service in Evenley Wood Gardens, or a Plough Sunday service in a local farmer's barn. Currently we are trialling 'Connect', a service that might

provide a 'way in' for people who find formal liturgy alien and uninviting. We do our best to cater for all! See Appendix 3 for the typical service pattern.

### **Growing in faith**

There is one weekday home group that meets regularly for lunch and Bible study.

Once a month there is a weekday Communion followed by lunch.

In Lent this year we ran two study groups, one of them online. We hope to run another group in Advent.

### **Our church buildings**

Our buildings are largely in good order, although as with all historic structures there is always work to be done.

Stratton Audley has a toilet and servery, and Stoke Lyne has two toilets and a kitchen!

Several churches have aspirations to reorder so as to fit a toilet and servery and are working to find a means of raising the necessary funds.

### **Link with the Wulu Diocese in South Sudan**

The Benefice donated money to help with buying food during a crisis in 2018. Since then we have funded oxen and ox ploughs for the Women's Farming Project, and are now supporting the Girls Primary School, initially funding some equipment and now giving towards an incentive scheme for teachers. And we were delighted to welcome Bishop Zechariah to Shelswell in Summer 2024.



### **Ecumenical Links**

There is a Roman Catholic church, Holy Trinity, in Hethe. The times of services at Holy Trinity have always been listed in the Shelswell News. At Christmas time Hethe's Carol Service is shared, and held in one or other of the churches. The village coffee morning alternates between the Village Hall and Holy Trinity's parish hall, and is run by members of the churches.

## THE SCHOOLS

### Finmere Primary School and Preschool



We are a small, rural, church school in the heart of our village, where we offer a wealth of rich learning opportunities in wonderful surroundings. Although the village of Finmere has had a school from as early as the 1780's, the school on its current site was built in 1959 and recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. Finmere became part of the Warriner Multi Academy Trust in 2019.

The school site is large, with extensive outdoor grounds including a large school field, a wooded area, vegetable patches, a pond and

nature areas. We have 43 pupils on roll (Sept 2024) from ages 3-11 placed in three mixed-year classes and we consider our mixed-age teaching to be a strength of the school. We opened a preschool at Finmere in September 2022. We have a strong and stable staff; teachers are experienced and we have a strong team of supportive staff too. Our families come from a wide-ranging area including the villages and towns of Bicester, Brackley and Buckingham.

We have a higher than average number of pupils with SEN/additional needs and have excellent links with many external professionals to support this work. We have a higher than average level of mobility too, often accepting pupils mid-primary as families relocate or change schools. Parents are attracted to our small, nurturing environment, often commenting upon the 'family feel'.

We maintained our good rating when Ofsted visited in June 2024 and were successful in SIAMS in October 2024.

Our School Vision is "One Family rooted in love, growing and flourishing together" and we live this through our school values of "Be Kind, Be Honest and Persevere".

Mrs Clare Law  
Head Teacher

## Fringford C of E Primary School



### ***A School Where Every Child Flourishes***

At Fringford C of E Primary School, we are proud to be a vibrant Christian community where children and adults thrive together. Our recent SIAMS inspection recognised the following notable strengths that make our school truly special.

### ***Our Christian Vision: Lived Every Day***

Our Christian vision isn't just words on a wall – it's the heartbeat of everything we do. Staff, governors and pupils understand and live out this vision daily, creating a school where:

- **Every child is welcomed, known and valued** as a unique individual
- **Everyone belongs** to our caring school family
- **Pupils and adults flourish** in an environment rooted in Christian love and respect

### ***Nurturing Excellence***

Our caring leadership drives a culture of nurturing that empowers every child to reach their full potential. We believe that high aspirations and wellbeing go hand in hand, which is why we:

- **Foster ambitious goals** for all our pupils
- **Prioritise mental health and wellbeing** through dedicated support
- **Create an environment where children thrive** academically, socially and spiritually
- **Enable every child to discover their talents** and develop confidence

### ***A Community That Lives Well Together***

As a small rural school, we've cultivated something truly special – a genuine sense of responsibility to one another and to God's creation. Our children learn to:

- **Support each other** through successes and challenges
- **Celebrate together** as a school family
- **Care for our environment** and understand their role as stewards of creation
- **Develop strong values** that will serve them throughout their lives

## What Makes Us Different?

- ✓ ***Small school, big heart*** – we know every child as an individual
- ✓ ***Christian values in action*** – our faith shapes our daily life, not just assemblies
- ✓ ***Strong partnerships*** – working closely with families and our local community
- ✓ ***Outstanding pastoral care*** – supporting the whole child, not just academic achievement
- ✓ ***Rural setting*** – embracing our beautiful environment as part of learning

Franco Pastore  
Headteacher

## HOPES AND CHALLENGES

The Shelswell Family of Churches aims to bring people closer to God and to show the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to everyone by:

- living out our faith in our day to day lives, being loving and attractive disciples of Christ;
- reaching out positively to all in our villages, strengthening links between church and community, and supporting the lonely and bereaved;
- providing worship which brings people closer to God;
- building connections with young families and helping them discover more about God;
- growing spiritually, both as church communities and as individuals;
- looking beyond Shelswell to the wider world (for example in our links with the Foodbank and with the Wulu Diocese in South Sudan).

Like any rural Benefice, we face the challenges of small and ageing congregations and a limited pool of volunteers. However, whilst our villages and churches may be small, they comprise close-knit communities, which provide opportunities for strong and fulfilling relationships. There is often enthusiastic support for our churches in the wider community, as demonstrated by the numbers willing to take part in cleaning, gardening or related activities or events. There is potential to welcome younger people into our churches, particularly because of the presence of two Church of England Primary Schools, with good connections to the Church.

## WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

We are looking for someone who can:

- work with our PCCs and congregations to discern where God is leading in this place;
- help us to live lives faithful to the Gospel, and to grow as Christians;
- engage with a wide variety of people within and without the church to build up our village communities;
- encourage what is good and develop opportunities for improvement.

## THE PARISHES



### Cottisford and Hardwick

The two parishes of Cottisford, which includes the neighbouring hamlet of Juniper Hill, and Hardwick, which includes the adjoining estate of Tusmore Park, operate under a single PCC. The two parishes each have mediaeval churches dedicated to St. Mary. Although both church buildings are in good order, they both lack modern amenities, which restricts their ability to host community activities, despite each being the only public buildings in their respective parishes.

Each parish and its respective church have quite distinctive characters and histories. However, they have, in recent years, both shared the experience of declining numbers at regular church services, as old age, infirmity and death have taken their toll. There undoubtedly remains a residue of good will towards the churches in both parishes, as evidenced by the volunteers who support the churches by organising, cleaning, gardening, etc. Both churches also experience increased attendances at services for major festivals, when congregations are more likely to include younger families with children. Both churches continue to be well used for marriages, baptisms and funerals.

The finances of the PCC rely heavily on regular donations from a small number of generous individuals and organisations, especially the Tusmore Estate and the M.E. Whyte Bequest (a charitable trust whose principal asset is a cottage bequeathed to Cottisford for the benefit of the parish and its church). Cottisford has a small but active "Friends" group, which raises money towards the upkeep of the fabric of the church. The PCC continues to be able to pay its parish share. However, doing so has recently required funds being drawn down from reserves.

## Finmere



The church in Finmere (St Michael and All Angels) dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was rebuilt in the Victorian period. The church is in pretty good condition (the Quinquennial is ongoing at present). Attendance at services is usually 8 to low teens. Finmere has a Church of England primary school, with two classes totalling between 35 and 50 children. The Rector holds a weekly assembly, and the school has at least one service in the church each term.

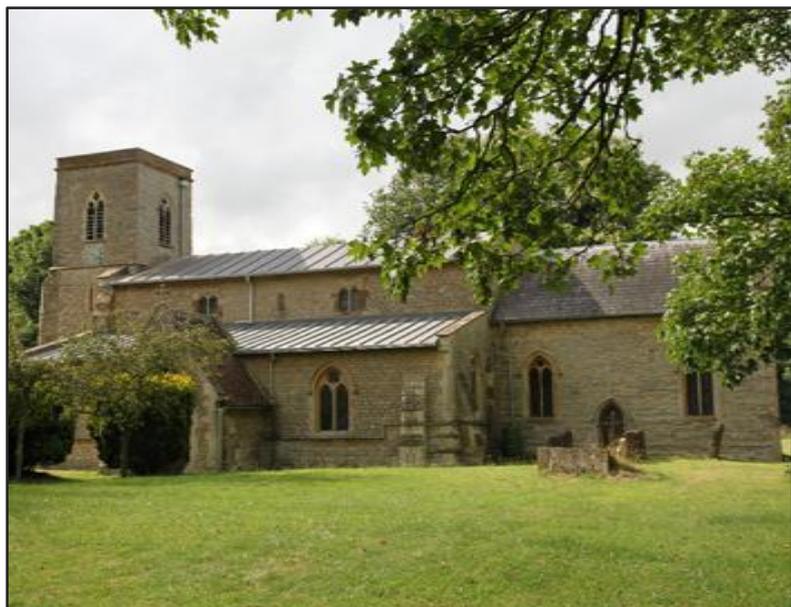
The PCC is involved in with village/community events, using the building where appropriate. Regular

community events involving the church include a monthly Pop-up Pub, a monthly Tuesday Tea (free to attendees) and a monthly Light lunch (donations accepted). The village also holds an annual Fete, to help all village organisations (the church habitually 'does' the tea and cakes).

Thanks to judicious and careful spending, the finances are at break even. The community are happy to support the church with fundraising to keep the building in good condition. There are a lot of people who volunteer to help in church i.e. cleaning, mowing the churchyard, cake making, reading, etc.

The village has just had a planning application granted for a new estate on 3 acres in the middle of the village. Our pub has closed, and is unlikely to reopen. The village has an active garage for repairs, and a new Co-op service station has opened on the ring road, a quarter of a mile outside the village.

## Fringford



Fringford is the largest village in the Benefice, but also one of the quietest, being mainly a cul de sac, with no through traffic. Community engagement is strong, helped by a village WhatsApp Group, established during Covid, that continues to be well-used. The village has the only full-time pub in the Benefice (the Butchers Arms); an active Cricket Club, which plays next to the pub; a village hall; a large village green and a Church of England school. The Church organises an annual Beer Festival, now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year, that attracts hundreds and that features live music, food stalls and charity events.

Services are attended by a small core of regular worshippers, who are mainly elderly or middle-aged. However, they are supplemented, in varying numbers, by those who attend occasionally, as well as by several from outside the village. Services at major festivals attract larger numbers and include younger people.

Despite low attendance, there seems to be strong support for the Church within the village, as evidenced by the numbers that participate in churchyard tidying, flower arranging and other church activities. The PCC is keen to attract more people into the Church by hosting community events but the scope for this is hindered by the lack of a toilet and servery. Advanced plans for this work had to be abandoned in 2019, following the theft of lead from the roof. Finances are now in reasonably good order, due in large part to the contribution made to the Church Restoration Fund by the annual Beer Festival.

## Godington



Since 2001, the PCC for the tiny village of Godington has been incorporated with Stratton Audley, which lies two miles to the south. Both churches have their own Church Warden and a separate fabric fund for Holy Trinity, Godington, is held within the PCC accounts.

This exquisite little Church, set amidst fields and seating approximately 30 people, was built in the 18th century, incorporating some mediaeval elements. There are just twelve dwellings in the village with a population of around 40. There is no regular service in the church, but villagers enjoy coming together for festival services, such as Easter, Harvest and Christmas.

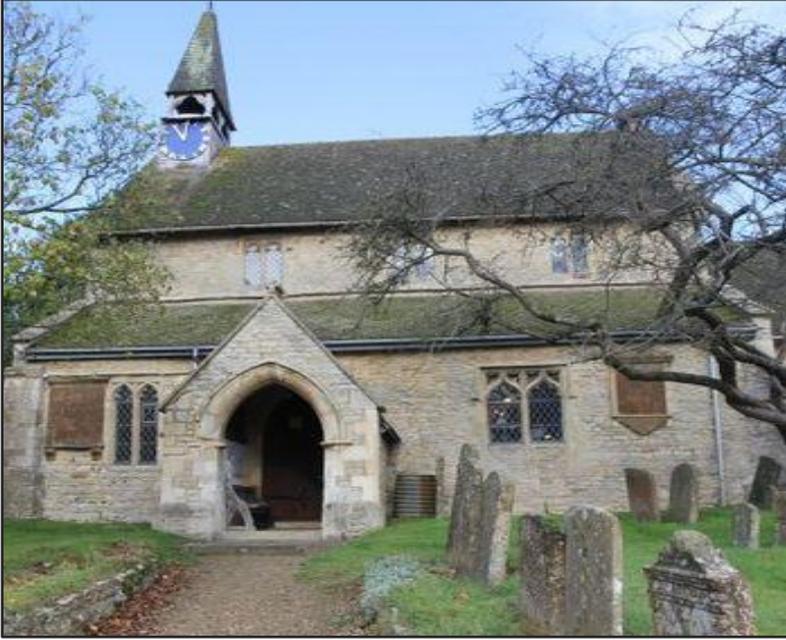
Godington is the setting for two long established arable family farms and a horse stud. Like many communities, villagers either run businesses from home, work

further afield or are retired. There is a bias towards residents aged 50+, with currently just one family with young children under ten, who have recently relocated to Godington.

Houses rarely change hands, so the community is stable, with everyone knowing each other. Villagers get together to help keep the graveyard tidy. The two local farmers freely give their time regularly to keep the grass and foliage under control, maintaining an attractive setting for this special little church.

Holy Trinity is currently in need of a new roof, as well as repairs or the replacement of several glass-stained windows. The PCC is currently applying for grants and looking into other fundraising ideas.

## Hethe



Hethe PCC is proud of its Rocha silver ECO award and we have been wilding the churchyard for about 4 years. The church roof has recently been repaired and internal replastering started in Oct 2025. There is a major stonework project outstanding but sadly no funds to cover it.

Inside the church there is a lending library and a small Food Bank, and we have held fundraising concerts, although the scope is limited by the lack of toilet and catering facilities.

The small regular congregation (which increases at Christmas and Remembrance) and the members of the PCC (4) are all over

55. Regular giving does not cover running costs. The few remaining long-established village families visit and maintain family graves but avoid involvement with the church, and support amongst newer arrived parishioners is patchy.

Hethe is in Fringford primary school's catchment area but due its being oversubscribed at present, most children go to schools outside the Benefice. The upmarket pub has been closed for a couple of years, but socials continue at the Village Hall, and we hope to see a café open next year at the recently established Farm Shop.

Hethe is the only village in the Benefice with a church from another denomination, Holy Trinity Catholic church which is served by the Bicester ministry team, and we collaborate in providing the village Carol Service at one or other of the churches and in the monthly coffee morning – again, alternating between venues.

## Mixbury



Mixbury is a thriving community of 100 homes, located about 2 miles from the small market town of Brackley. There is no village pub and so 'All Saints' church, which sits right in the middle of the village, is very much at the heart of the community. The churchyard is accessible and well maintained with some very large specimen trees, providing an attractive and quiet green space.

The church is always open and seats 150 in a traditional format, which works very well for weddings, funerals and concerts. The congregation is typically 10 – 20 at the regular monthly family service and this usually doubles at festivals. The church is always full for the annual carol service with children's nativity, which is played out in the church, the churchyard and the bus shelter (stable) with accompanying livestock at every stage!

Funding of the church is mainly achieved through regular giving and a summer fete, which has become more of a festival in recent years. The objective for 2026 is to install a loo in the churchyard to help support both the spiritual and community use of the church. A number of annual events already take place, such as the Harvest Festival charity soup kitchen and Christmas bazaar. The church also hosts the village book exchange and food bank collection point.

The Incumbent and Church Wardens are trustees of the Mixbury Charity, which recently purchased a 6-acre grass field on the edge of the village to further its aim 'to support the social and physical education of the young people of the parish'. This has proved to be a very popular community asset and has created a new dimension to the social fabric of the village.

## Newton Purcell



get together.

Located on or near to the A4421, Newton Purcell is one of the smaller villages in the Benefice, with around 40 households. The parish also includes the hamlet of Newton Morrell and the Shelswell Estate. Whilst it is predominantly a farming community, the village includes many who are self-employed, business or professional people commuting either to local towns or to London. The PCC owns the village hall, which is used for both Church and secular events. Fundraising events such as the Christmas Concert, the Harvest Lunch, the Art Exhibition and Fete are vital for the continued financial viability of the parish and provide opportunities for the whole community to

The monthly communion service is attended by a small and loyal group. The service is popular with those who do attend and who come from other parishes in the benefice. Festival services are attended by those of all ages and many who live outside the benefice. The original 12th Century building was rebuilt in the 19th Century and many of the original features still remain, such as the Norman tympanum. The last quinquennial report was carried out in October 2023 and no major concerns were raised. Maintenance and repairs are funded by fundraising events and planned giving. This small parish manages to remain financially viable and there are modest reserves with the CBF. The PCC endeavours to hold two or three fundraising events per year. One of our most recent successes being an Art Exhibition of local artists work and Fete. Modest amounts are raised from regular giving.

## Stoke Lyne



Stoke Lyne is a small and tranquil village, with a population of approximately two hundred, spanning a broad social and economic spectrum. The parish includes the hamlets of Bainton, two miles to the South, and Baynard's Green, one mile to the North.

St Peter's Church, a Grade II\* listed building, showcases architectural elements from the 12th to 14th centuries, including a chancel, nave, north aisle, and south tower. The church has an electoral roll of twenty-three, all of whom are active communicants. A typical communion service will attract 15 – 20 communicants whilst seasonal

celebrations such as Christmas and Easter will have an attendance of around fifty. We consider ourselves a very welcoming church, quite often attracting people from elsewhere in the Benefice. We offer refreshments after every communion service, which delights our community as it allows all to socialize. St Peter's is open daily during daylight hours, offering a peaceful space for prayer and contemplation for villagers and visitors.

Being the only public building in the village (aside from a small part-time pub), the church also doubles as the village hall, hosting meetings of the Parish Council, quiz nights, musical evenings and other community events. This dual role was made possible because of a major refurbishment project in 2019, which provided improved heating, flooring and lighting; the introduction of flexible seating to accommodate varied events; the creation of a meeting room in the Lady Chapel with a glass partition; the installation of an AV screen for both worship and community use; and improvements to the kitchen, toilets and disabled access.

## Stratton Audley



Stratton Audley originally comprised land-owning, hunting and farming families. There are still two active farms, as well as the kennels of the Bicester Hunt. Residents not connected to land-based activities commute to London, Oxford or Bicester or work from home. The village puts on street parties and village fayre events, which the Church supports.

The Church of St Mary and St Edburga is a Grade I listed building and is one of only two public buildings in the village, the other being the Red Lion pub. Sunday services are attended by a regular congregation of 8-12 adults but support for the Church

extends beyond this group as there are around 25 volunteers involved in activities such as mowing, cleaning and flower arranging. The Church is currently in relatively good repair, with a well-maintained Churchyard.

The Church organizes a number of social events through the year (largely to raise money to pay the Parish Share and to support improvement and restoration work) and these are well supported by worshippers and non-worshippers. Other activities include a toddler group every Wednesday and coffee mornings each Tuesday. The Parish Council holds its monthly meetings in the Church and the village historical society also uses it for occasional events.

Our typical annual running costs are around £20k, including Parish Share. Due to the high costs of running two churches (Godington, in addition to Stratton Audley), the PCC has historically had a problem paying the parish share in full. Whilst the village is very active in its fundraising activities, this inevitably depends on the energies of a small number of people.

**THE RECTORY**

The Rectory was purpose-built in 1958 and altered and extended in 1996. It is currently being refurbished. The scope of the work includes a new family bathroom and kitchen, new windows and backdoor, internal redecoration of affected areas, and the installation of solar panels and an air source heat pump, as well as upgraded insulation. It is fitted with a burglar and fire alarm, maintained at the expense of the Diocese.

**Location**

The Rectory is situated on Water Stratford Road, Finmere, a short walk from the Parish Church. It overlooks the village Cricket/Football Ground to the front and open farmland to the rear.

**Accommodation Upstairs**

Master Bedroom - 5.1m x 3.85m with en-suite power shower and washbasin.

Bedroom 2 - 3.7m x 2.95m with washbasin and built-in wardrobe.

Bedroom 3 - 3.75m x 2.25m with built-in wardrobe.

Bedroom 4 - 3.7m x 2.5m

Bathroom with bath, washbasin & electric shower over the bath.

Separate toilet; airing cupboard.

**Accommodation Downstairs**

Lounge - 5.75m x 4.2m with wood-burning stove, TV aerial point and sliding patio doors giving access to small paved patio & rear garden.

Dining Room - 4.35m x 3.35m with TV aerial point and alcove shelving.

Kitchen - 5.5m x 2.75m fully fitted, connection for electric cooker, cooker hood with extractor fan & plumbing for dishwasher.

Door from kitchen leads to passage off which there is

- Utility Room (former pantry) with plumbing for washing machine, cold tile slab & shelving.
- Storage room (former coalhouse) that also houses gas-fired boiler.
- Rear door to enclosed area for wheelie bins
- Rear access to single garage, which has up-and-over door at front.

At the front of the house is:-

Front Room – used to be the Benefice Office - 5.1m x 3.85m with shelving.

Study - 3.75m x 2.5m with shelving.

Cloakroom with toilet and washbasin.

The Front room, Study and Cloakroom are all accessed from the front door and hallway that also leads to the downstairs living accommodation and the stairs leading to the upstairs accommodation. If a future Incumbent did want to return the Benefice Office to the Rectory, a dividing panel or wall with a locking door could be provided, to more clearly separate the working and living areas.

## **Outside**

At the front, there is a large, graveled area providing plenty of parking space, a small patch of lawn and a flowerbed to one side. At the rear, there is a large area of lawn, a vegetable patch and an area at the far end of the garden that has been variously described as 'set aside' or 'the wildlife zone'! There is also a concrete garden shed with a locking wooden door.

## APPENDIX 2

### Information about the villages of the Shelswell Benefice (from the online Parish Returns System)

Parish	Cottisford and Hardwick-cum-Tusmore	Finmere	Fringford	Hethe	Mixbury	Newton Purcell	Stratton Audley and Godington	Stoke Lyne
Deprivation rank (1=most deprived, 12,519= least deprived)	5,531	8,072	5,531	5,531	8,053	8,072	8,072	4,742
Population (2021 update)	155	490	592	276	254	108	465	211
Age distribution								
0-4	6.4	3.9	3.8	5.1	5.7	3.9	4.8	4.6
5-19	15.9	17.6	14.2	17.6	15.3	17.6	13.6	17.7
20-29	7.7	8.2	8.5	6.3	6.8	8.2	9.0	8.0
30-44	21.0	13.9	13.5	19.9	15.3	13.9	16.4	19.8
45-69	33.0	41.6	43.9	40.8	42.2	41.6	39.9	39.2
70+	15.9	14.8	16.1	10.3	14.7	14.8	16.2	10.5
% white ethnicity	98.3	96.1	95.4	97.1	95.5	95.4	97.0	92.1
Number on church electoral roll	18	21	19	13	24	11	35	23
Average size of congregation	Cottisford 8  Hardwick 6	6	11	8	10	6	Stratton 12  Godington 6	12

## Service Pattern

	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday	3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday	4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday
<b>8.00 am</b>				<b>Alternating Finmere/Hethe</b> BCP Communion
<b>9.15 am</b>	<b>Newton Purcell</b> BCP Holy Communion	<b>Hethe</b> CW Holy Communion	<b>Finmere</b> CW Holy Communion	<b>Stratton Audley</b> CW Holy Communion
	<b>Alternating Cottisford/ Hardwick</b> CW Communion		<b>Cottisford</b> BCP Communion	
			<b>Mixbury</b> Mixbury Half Hour	<b>Alternating Finmere /Hethe *</b> Morning prayer
<b>10 am</b>	<b>Stoke Lyne</b> Food for thought			
<b>10.45 am</b>	<b>Fringford</b> Morning service	<b>Stratton</b> Morning service	<b>Fringford</b> Holy Communion	<b>Stoke Lyne</b> Communion
<b>4 or 6 pm</b>	<b>6 pm</b> <b>Alternating Stratton Audley/Godington</b> Compline	<b>6 pm</b> <b>Alternating Stoke Lyne/Fringford</b> Evening Communion		<b>4pm or 6 pm</b> <b>Hardwick</b> Evensong

Mixbury half hour – a 30-minute informal service for all ages

Food for thought: a lay led informal café style service with breakfast

\*Hethe's morning prayer is lay led and tends to have a creation focus to reflect Hethe's eco-church aspirations (using 'The Earth cries glory' - Steven Shakespeare)

### Weekday service

There is a monthly midday communion, followed by a soup lunch, held on the first Thursday of the month at Stoke Lyne.