

# The Weobley & Staunton Group of Parishes

GROUP BENEFICE PROFILE 2020

OPEN TO ALL  
growing together



— Diocese of —  
Hereford



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# The Weobley & Staunton Group of Parishes



# Introduction

Welcome to our *Group Benefice Profile*. If, in tandem with our *Statement of Needs*, it speaks to your aspirations for the future and so the next leg of your journey in ministry, we hope you may look favourably on our benefice and the post of Rector for our group of parishes.

From the opening days of the interregnum, when discussing the future of our benefice and the recruitment of ‘our new rector’ with our communities, congregations and committees, what has been apparent from the outset is the desire to work and worship better together. Out of this has come already the introduction of our Group Benefice Council to facilitate working together and our benefice-wide hope for ministry is that we can grow together while being open to all; we welcome inclusivity and the desire to reach out to everyone in our benefice.

Interregnums can be times of uncertainty and loss of focus but not for us here in the Weobley & Staunton Group. We are constantly thankful for the active support of retired clergy, both four well respected, long-serving regulars as part of a ministry team and three, ever-welcome ‘occasionals’ in all aspects of ministry as well as direction and good counsel in helping us shape the benefice we would like to become.

Our new incumbent can look forward to wholehearted, welcoming support from our Rural Dean and the Deanery Synod team and our clergy collective. In equal measure they can be sure of a very warm welcome, committed support and excellent hospitality from the parishes; a welcome we hope you may come to experience at first hand later this year with God’s blessing.

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Herefordshire, UK



Weobley & Staunton Group of Parishes



# Welcome from the Deanery Leadership Team

## KINGTON AND WEOBLEY DEANERY

Weobley & Staunton Group Benefice is one of the five benefices which make up the Deanery of Kington and Weobley. The five benefices include 31 churches in 27 parishes with a total population of around 14,000 spread across no less than 250 square miles.

We are an active Deanery with a Chapter which has built good personal relationships over many years. The Deanery Synod meets four times a year and is moving towards less formal business as well as becoming more of a gathering with speakers and discussions on matters of interest and relevance to our common life and ministry. We encourage mutual relationship and support between the benefices, valuing their different strengths and traditions.

The Deanery Leadership Team of Rural Dean, Lay Co-chair, Treasurer and Secretary – enjoy our picture! – meets regularly and supports the PCC Secretaries, Treasurers and ministers across the Deanery. We are currently working on the Deanery Pastoral Plan and Mission Action Plan and amongst much else, are looking at ways in which the administrative burdens on clergy can be reduced.

Financially we are a Deanery which fully meets the costs of professional ministry through the parish offers and are blessed with significant reserves in the parishes. But we are not complacent and are constantly looking at ways to strengthen our financial position including through the Parish Giving Scheme and currently through card readers and QR codes.

The Deanery will provide a warm and supportive welcome to the new incumbent of the Weobley & Staunton Group Benefice, and we look forward to welcoming you to our parishes soon.



*L to R: Chris Smith, Treasurer; Rev'd Guy Wilkinson, Rural Dean; Elizabeth Shayler, Lay Co-chair and Secretary Marcia Lynch-Staunton.*





# Welcome from the Diocese



Thank you for showing an interest in the role of Rector for the Weobley and Staunton Group of parishes. This is an exciting post in a vibrant and friendly benefice.

A great deal of prayer, thought and planning has gone into the preparation of this benefice profile. It provides an outline of the role, the skills and experience that we are looking for. This is an exciting time to join in the work of this group of parishes and the Diocese. As the Rector you will have pastoral oversight for the communities and churches and also play a major role in mission across the whole benefice in line with the gifts which you bring. There is considerable potential for growth and a willingness to engage in mission.

As a diocese we are committed to spiritual and numerical growth – growing Christians of all ages and backgrounds, contributing to the common good and reimagining ministry. Our vision is one of proclaiming Christ, growing disciples and inspiring each generation to follow Jesus Christ. There is a real energy to reconnect with our communities and reimagine our calling as God's church for this and future generations. And of course we are greatly looking forward to welcoming Bishop Richard Jackson to lead us as our new Bishop of Hereford in early 2020.

More information about the diocesan context is provided as a separate file which can be found at [www.hereford.anglican.org/documents/statement-needs-web](http://www.hereford.anglican.org/documents/statement-needs-web)

Thank you for taking the time to consider and pray for this opportunity. If this is a role that excites you, we would very much like to hear from you and look forward to receiving your application. If you would like an informal conversation about any aspect of the post please do get in touch.

Please submit your application on the application form downloadable from Pathways.

Yours in Christ's name and service

Ven Derek Chedzey Archdeacon of Hereford



*“A lovely environment does not automatically make ministry easy. There is more deprivation than is immediately apparent. In many places, churches are responding to this. It has been the most fabulous place to live and work. If the new Bishop Richard is half as happy as I've been, he'll be a happy man.”*

Bishop Richard Frith



*“There's a real energy here. It's not a sleepy country city – it's a place of life and commitment, and that is really exciting.”*

Archbishop Justin

# Our New Rector

For each prospective candidate the *Statement of Needs* with its inelegantly titled *Person Specification* is an essential read. It sets out the qualifications, levels of experience, skills and personal characteristics the Benefice consider essential or desirable, and we commend ours wholeheartedly!

That said, our Group Benefice Council has always felt a simpler, more sensitive picture of the type of incumbent we hope for would enhance this Group Benefice Profile.

Over the last couple of years our seven parishes have enjoyed working and playing more closely together and we feel positive about the future for the benefice. To further this sense of new direction, we are seeking an incumbent who will find it both easy and fulfilling to enter in to a mutually supportive programme of activities designed to help us become greater advocates for mission and support for all the benefice; someone who sees themselves in this description of 'our new rector'.



- A person of clear faith who walks with Christ and leads by word and example; a person who possesses a deep, silent hidden peace that the world does not necessarily see.
- A person who seeks truth through the combination of reason and faith.
- A good preacher with a wide knowledge of scripture and religious texts, whose sermons engage with the issues of the time and who speaks with authority to inspire and challenge.
- Someone who is able and willing to experiment with worship, using a variety of liturgies and types of service to reach people of all ages and backgrounds.
- A person with a deep care for people, a good listener who will reach out and support all members of the community, whether churchgoers or not, according to their needs.
- Someone who has the ability to disagree without anger.
- An encourager who will help us to discern the direction that God is leading us and will support us in our journey.
- Someone with the ability to enjoy and cherish the idiosyncrasies of congregations in small rural parishes.
- Cheerful, easy, kind, gentle, courteous, candid, unassuming, with no pretence.
- Someone who will support and care for us from birth to death and all the messed up bits in between.



# Introduction to the Group Benefice

Set in a groundwork of rich red earth, so valued by the farmers and cider makers, Herefordshire is celebrated for its rural beauty. Deep in the heart of this rolling countryside, the Weobley & Staunton Group of Parishes are gathered together in a loosely drawn oval of rolling countryside where the river Wye runs close by on its way to Hereford, Symonds Yat and the Severn.

Throughout this profile, which we've titled the *Group Benefice Profile*, you may see that we will refer to ourselves as The Benefice, The Group Benefice or on occasion The Parish and this can depend upon who's 'talking'! There are seven parishes in the Group and each of them has presented their own written profile a little later in this document, and of course, each has its own heartfelt voice.

So, for the sake of clarity, our Benefice is in fact two benefices held in plurality, the detail of which can be seen in the panel here. (There is a strong sense of cohesion in the group and we would like to take steps to become a single benefice; this is seen more as a piece of administration which needs doing, rather than a major issue).

The Weobley & Staunton Group of Parishes  
*Held in Plurality*

Benefice of Weobley with Sarnesfield and Norton Canon

Benefice of Letton with Staunton-on-Wye,  
Byford and Mansell Gamage, and Monnington-on-Wye

We are happy to record that among the patrons of the Weobley & Staunton living are the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, Oxford who acquired the patronage of Staunton-on-Wye in the early 19th Century. With this extensive history of patronage it

means that Christ Church is in the happy position of being able to support the incumbents of its 90 livings through the revenues of the Dr South Trust, which is able to assist with grants for study, administration and holidays, as well as offering a biennial conference and loans for the purchase of a car.

## TYPICALLY, PLEASINGLY RURAL

Much is made of our rural environment in this profile - dispersed rural one might say - and we value it highly while working all the time to maximise our potential and outreach as one community rather than seven whenever we can. The population is about 2,500, half of whom live in Weobley. Weobley (pronounced *Weblee*) is a well-served, fast expanding village and although rightly celebrated as one of the county's most lauded and visited 'black & white villages', new modern housing development is adding vibrancy to the village and a slightly younger demographic. This we believe offers a positive opportunity for 'our new rector' to work with us to engage with a new audience for a well-established, traditional church. Much is spoken about Weobley in its parish profile but it is right to



# Introduction to the Group Benefice

add that while the benefice is rural, it's not isolated and the importance of Weobley, identified by Herefordshire Council as a key village for community expansion, is central to sustaining the cohesion of our group and we believe firmly in the informal doctrine of 'growing together'.

## WELL SCHOOLED

We're unusual for a rural benefice with regard to our school provision in that we have a highly-regarded secondary school in Weobley as well as two primary schools - one in Weobley and one in Staunton-on-Wye - and then two nurseries allied with the primary schools. We would particularly like our new incumbent to be ready and enthusiastic to engage with these school communities, both in school and in the wider community as young families move into the Weobley catchment area.

## OVER THE HILL, BUT NOT FAR AWAY

Outside the village, our parishes and churches are every bit as attractive as one might hope they would be. Time spent walking from Byford to Monnington and then on to Francis Kilvert's parish church at Bredwardine is never wasted.

Our listed churches - all of them key mission assets and expressions of the faith that caused them to be built - are all fine examples of varied architectural styles and lovingly cared for by their congregations; but they belong to the whole community. While not all parishioners will attend regular services, they will attend festival services in sizeable numbers - Byford recently welcomed more than half its population to its Carol Service - and engage with conservation and improvement projects. Relatively recent restoration and modernisation works in all our parishes reflect this, while at Staunton-on-Wye the truly extensive

£250,000 project on schedule for completion in April 2020 is testament to the effectiveness of the leadership and fundraising team, and the ways in which a local community will find joy and engagement in delivering a project.

Fundraising plays an ever-increasingly important role in balancing our PCCs books as well as contributing to the maintenance of our churches and although we say it ourselves we're pretty good at it; not least because we are a cheerful and gregarious lot, most of the time!

One initiative still gaining real traction in the Diocese has been the roll-out of the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) and in the Kington & Weobley Deanery more than £8,000 per month is now flowing into PCC bank accounts despite our Deanery Treasurer's assertion that there's still scope to increase the number of 'givers' significantly; so there's room for improvement there and we will be seeking it out. Across the benefice as a whole we cover the cost of stipendiary ministry, but we recognise that there's always more to be done.

## POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE

In all our parishes, the church can be found at the heart of the local community. On the one hand, still active family connections go back hundreds of years, and on the other there are always new parishioners to welcome and offer both ministry and pastoral care. We are an Inclusive Group of Churches and each church has signed up to safeguarding protocols and inclusivity statements which underpin our open arms and welcoming approach to worship and life events. We encourage everyone, whatever their understanding of faith to participate in the church's activities, value the pastoral ministry and love and sustain the buildings.



# Introduction to the Group Benefice

Positive influences in our lives often derive from working together with others of a common mind and in Weobley the ecumenical co-operation is significant and influential and is given expression through the CTIW, the Churches Together in Weobley initiative. More can be read about this in our *Worship and Mission* pages and the Weobley parish profile but it is pleasing to recall that our previous incumbent felt the ecumenical relationship in Weobley was better than anywhere else he had been engaged in ministry. Among the events organised and led by the CTIW is the singing of Christmas carols in the Rose Garden in the heart of the village and this year more than 10% of the village's population attended; a positive signpost for the future indeed.



Equally positive for our worshipping community is our extensive group of retired clergy who underpin the ministry across the benefice while supporting our incumbent as the Group's team-leader. We are blessed and very thankful to have such a wealth of experience in our midst. In broad terms, our parishes start from a baseline of traditional, middle-of-the-road Anglicanism, appreciating liturgy which includes Eucharistic worship as part of the mix and which is led with presence and confidence.

That said, the parishes each have their own distinctive feelings for what suits their congregations best within the Anglican 'big top' and our clergy are alive and welcoming to this. And in this respect, they will both lead and engage with the regular pattern of worship, which is so important to us all, as well as those occasions when 'something new or something a little different' is called for on a Sunday morning.

## PARISH AND GROUP ADMINISTRATION – MINDING THE STORE

While each of the parishes maintains a traditional PCC management structure, as a group we are alive to the recently introduced new Church Representation Rules 2020. It is early days to make any firm judgements or recommendations about such potentially significant change in our Group but the possibilities for fewer PCC meetings and the introduction of Joint Councils to bring greater centralisation to the management of group benefices are chiming well with PCC members and central administrators alike.

That said, change is coming to our Group as, last Autumn, we instituted our new Group Benefice Council and engaged a Group Administrator. Prior to this, there was less by way of 'central government' other than, of course, the traditional and valued leadership of an incumbent and meetings of the churchwardens. Moving into an interregnum, the parishes all felt we should find a way to first bring greater cohesion to our joint endeavours, hence the Group Benefice Council, and find ways to ensure there was no erosion of the vital link between the PCCs and our Deanery Synod and our clergy, and this has been achieved by the introduction of the Group Administrator; an important post for which we are actively seeking ways in which we can extend the hours they currently work.

# Introduction to the Group Benefice

## DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

This coming together has afforded us greater opportunity to consider more thoughtfully our direction of travel and in doing so we have been mindful of Hereford Diocese's leadership and its three priorities we all share in shaping our strategy for mission and growth.

These priorities are: spiritual and numerical growth by growing Christians of all ages and backgrounds, contributing to the common good and reimagining ministry. In reimagining ministry we have been active participants in the MAPping programme and our Deanery's Mission Action Plan was completed in 2018. Not all parishes have MAPs yet but some do and more are planned.

We are also considering whether the Festival Churches model better suits any of our smaller parishes and we reflect upon this in our thoughts in the *Worship and Mission* pages of this profile.

## CHARITIES, AND THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS

In three of our parishes our incumbent is likely to be involved in a number of local charities. In Weobley they are invited to be Chaplain to the Royal British Legion, and in Norton Canon they are invited to become an ex-officio trustee of the Norton Canon Charities which focuses on making grants for young parishioners in education.

In Staunton-on-Wye they are invited to become an ex-officio governor for the primary school and also an ex-officio governor for the Jarvis Charities. Under the Jarvis banner are three charities: The Jarvis Educational Foundation whose primary activity is to support Staunton's primary school and its pre-school nursery which it has done in 2019 by making a sizeable

donation towards the cost of providing a new classroom for 2020 as the school's roll is reaching its maximum of 105 children. The Jarvis Eleemosynary Charity has as its objective the prevention of need and hardship, or the provision of relief for those suffering need and hardship in Staunton, Letton and Bredwardine primarily, and principally through the management of 12 almshouses in Staunton and the giving of 'one-off grants, items and services to individuals in need'. The third charity, the Jarvis Recreational Charity, is smaller and the trustees are applying to the Charity Commissioners to merge these latter two together.

The Benefice has a good record of concern for charities beyond its boundaries or sphere of influence. Each year, Lent Lunches raise money for charities at home and abroad and parishes support charities of their own choosing. Among them, but not exclusively are WaterAid, local food banks, West Mercia Women's Refuge, The Mothers' Union, and The Cart Shed; a charity based in Norton Canon providing young and old alike with therapeutic support in a woodland setting to help address imbalances in their lives. This year's chosen charity is Forage Aid.



People & Steeple is our weekly Pew Sheet and is available in our churches and also by E-circulation. We also maintain close contact with our wider congregation through our Web and Facebook sites.

[WWW.WEOBLEYANDSTAUNTON.CO.UK](http://WWW.WEOBLEYANDSTAUNTON.CO.UK)



# Worship and Mission

## WE ARE A BROAD AND INCLUSIVE CHURCH

Life in rural communities means rubbing along with our neighbours, whoever they are. We take this approach in our worship, too; we are an inclusive benefice where the most common churchmanship is central. The welcome and the mutual support in faith are the key thing, and we'd like our new incumbent to be comfortable moving from a house communion for someone who finds comfort in the familiar words of the BCP, to a relaxed Messy Church session where many of the participants may have no formal knowledge of liturgy.

## ECUMENICAL ROLE

The Weobley community is fortunate, if unusual, to have three choices of Christian worship within the village namely Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist. The present Methodist chapel was built in 1861 and is led by the Reverend Frances Biseker. The Roman Catholic church of St Thomas of Hereford was built in 1834 and is led by Father Simon McGurk of the Benedictine Order. Father Simon was recently acclaimed as an Ecumenical Companion in Hereford Cathedral.

As we all worship and try to follow the same Christ, so we also take opportunities to worship and celebrate together by for example, carol singing, Lent study groups, the Walk of Witness on Good Friday, Harvest meals and Open the Book to name but a few. It is hoped the new incumbent will have a collaborative and open approach to sustaining these areas of joint mission and building upon and developing new ones.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN INTERREGNUM

Our interregnum has prompted us to move in various new directions. One is the formation of our benefice council and the employment of a benefice administrator; we're all slightly wondering why we didn't do it earlier, but we hope that our new incumbent will find it a source of support, just as we all have. Another is that several members of the laity have led services with great success. We are exploring the options for further lay training, both in leading worship and in other areas of mission such as pastoral visiting and bereavement counselling. We are very grateful to our team of retired clergy who play an active and supportive role in the benefice, but we are keen that they should be allowed to enjoy their retirement and that we should not simply assume that they will fill in all the gaps.

## PATTERN OF SERVICES

A fairly typical month's rota is shown on page 13. Weobley is obviously the hub of the benefice in every way, in terms of population, finances, and worship, and has regular weekly services. The majority of the other churches operate to a greater or lesser extent as festival churches, but none the less successfully for that. Staunton-on-Wye, for example, our next largest settlement, will revert to having regular services once the current repair works are complete; at the other end of the spectrum, Monnington-on-Wye has six or seven well attended festival services per year.

We would particularly like our new incumbent to be ready to engage with our two primary and one secondary school communities, in worship both at the schools and in church.

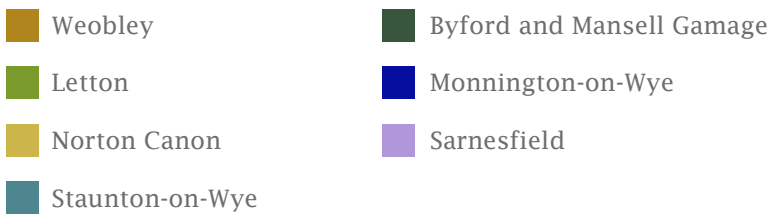
LIFE EVENTS

Life events and festivals are well attended, while remaining genuinely local occasions. Across the benefice in a typical year, there might be 10 weddings, 10 baptisms, and 25 funerals, which can attract very large numbers. These life events are a real mission opportunity; this has been a focus of learning in the diocese, producing quite a bit of experience and support, which we would like to learn and benefit from.

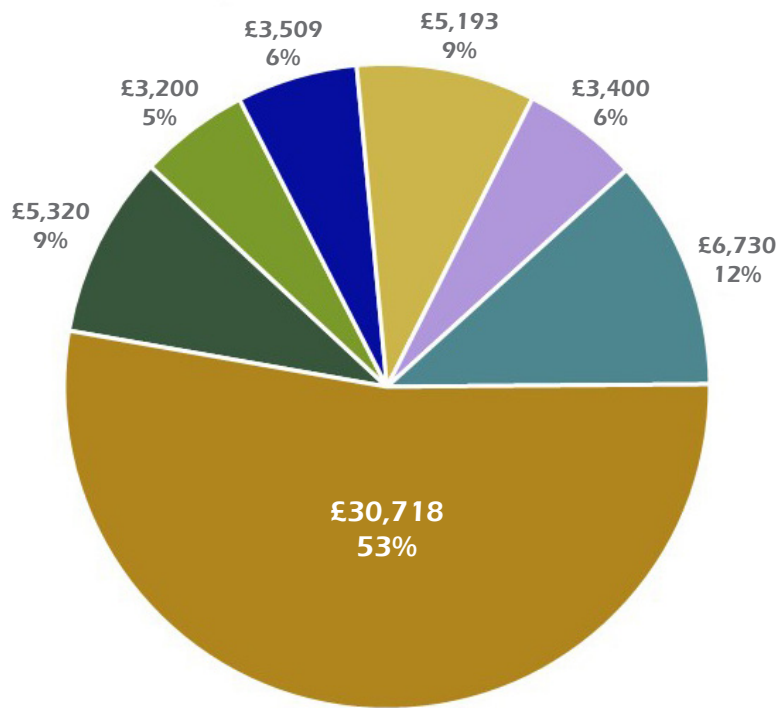
Mission and Finance

Mission, fundraising and giving overlap a lot in our communities. Fundraising events are important occasions for reaching out to our communities and for fostering a sense of togetherness, especially in our villages where the church may be the only organisation present. There is quiet support from many people who don't necessarily come to many services, but for whom the church is nonetheless important.

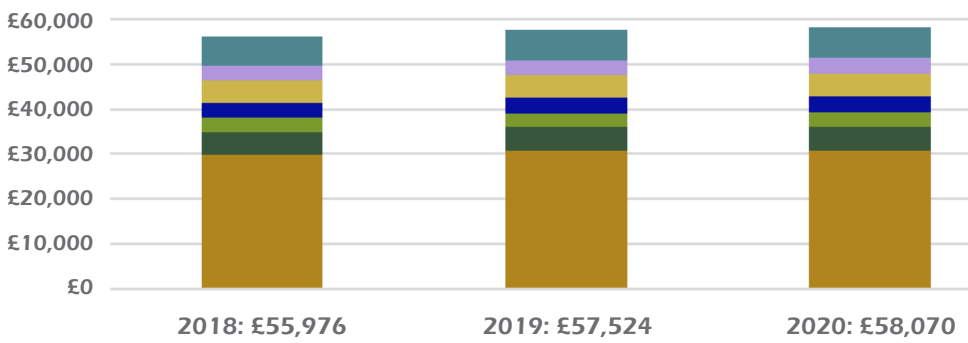
The Benefice pie chart shows that we pay our way by contributing to the Diocese about £2,000 above the cost of a stipendiary minister (currently estimated at £56k). This disguises considerable variations in the wealth and giving of different areas; some are struggling, and some have the cushion of reserves. Weobley, as the centre of population, bears about half our parish offer. We benefit enormously from having an active and energetic deanery treasurer, who maintains an oversight of all deanery finances to ensure that we manage our resources wisely.



WEOBLEY & STAUNTON BENEFICE  
PARISH OFFER 2020  
+£2,000 contribution to the Common Fund



WEOBLEY & STAUNTON BENEFICE  
PARISH OFFER 2018 - 2020





# A typical monthly pattern of services

WEEK NO. DATE	NOTES	WEOBLEY	SARNESFIELD	NORTON CANON	STAUNTON ON-WYE	BYFORD	MONNINGTON ON-WYE	LETTON
<b>WEEK 1</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> June  7 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (White)	Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> 10:30 Weobley BCP Holy Communion	10:30 BCP Holy Communion					Saturday 1 <sup>st</sup> June 15:00 Wedding Monnington	10:30 BCP Holy Communion  Banns
<b>WEEK 2</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> June  Pentecost (Red)		10:30 Eucharist (CW)	09:00 Café Church	11:00 BCP Holy Communion				
<b>WEEK 3</b> 16 <sup>th</sup> June  Trinity Sunday (White)		10.30 Eucharist (CW)  12.30 Baptism					Sat 22 <sup>nd</sup> June 12:00 Wedding Monnington	10:30 Mattins (lay led)
<b>WEEK 4</b> 23 <sup>rd</sup> June  1 <sup>st</sup> after Trinity (Green)	Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> Healing Service & BCP Holy Communion  Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup> 13:00 Wedding Weobley	10.30 BCP Holy Communion	09:00 Service of the Word		(In Village Hall) 10.30 Eucharist (CW)	17.00 Patronal Festival Communion		
<b>WEEK 5</b> 30 <sup>th</sup> June  2 <sup>nd</sup> after Trinity (Green)		10.30 Eucharist (CW)						

# Clergy Accommodation

## WEOBLEY VICARAGE

The vicarage is situated in Weobley less than 100 yards from the church. It was built in the 1980s and has been well maintained. Downstairs there is a study, cloakroom and WC, kitchen utility room, sitting room and dining room. Upstairs there are four bedrooms and a bathroom. There is oil-fired central heating and double glazing throughout. Outside there is a large garage and parking space together with a pretty, mature garden with a stream running through and pleasant views across Weobley.



*Weobley Vicarage and the view from the garden*

## THE CURATE'S HOUSE, STAUNTON-ON-WYE

In recent times the Weobley & Staunton Group of Parishes has had a significant reputation for providing a training incumbency for the Hereford Diocese. Curates in training in the Group Benefice benefit from excellent accommodation in the Staunton-on-Wye parish. There is a modern, well-appointed house with a sizeable garden which is ideally suited to a young family and it is conveniently located near the primary school and the village surgery. Staunton-on-Wye is also comfortably situated equidistant between Weobley and Hereford and is well served by the celebrated Oakchurch Farm Shop.

The house is currently let but could be made available for a curate if needed.



*The Curate's House*



# WEOBLEY

## *Church of St Peter and St Paul*



## THE PARISH

The Parish of Weobley is located in the north west of the County, 11 miles north of the county town of Hereford and eight miles west of the market town of Leominster. It is predominantly rural in nature, and the village of Weobley is one of the largest rural settlements within the County. The north of the Parish comprises a relatively open agricultural landscape with views across a flat-ish plain. To the south the land begins to rise with parkland and increasing amounts of wooded slopes, giving the entire landscape a timeless quality. There are numerous public rights of way throughout the Parish including *The Wych Way*, a long-distance footpath

linking *Offa's Dyke Path* with *The Cotswold Way*. Although employment is mainly in the agriculture sector, there is a small Industrial Estate - Whitehill Park and Primasil Silicones Ltd.

## THE VILLAGE

Weobley, pronounced *Weblee*, is a picturesque village of timber-framed black and white houses together with some development in the 1970s, serving a lively community. Weobley's population of 1,255 has remained fairly stable up until 2011 - the most recent census, but there has been a number of housing developments since, leading to a significant increase. Like all Herefordshire, Weobley contains a high proportion





of people over 60 years thus a significantly lower proportion of young and middle-aged adults, but it is hoped that with the new housing, these figures will become better balanced in the near future.

The village is fortunate to have a doctor's surgery with dispensary, a dental surgery, a butcher, two hairdressers, a village store and greengrocer, as well as several eateries and two pubs. There is a primary school and a senior school serving not only Weobley but the wider community.

There are many opportunities to get involved in village life with a wide-ranging choice of groups or societies. Among these are the Museum and Library staffed by volunteers, the Royal British Legion, a thriving bowls club, The Scouts, the Women's Institute, Gardening and Wildlife Trust and a very active Young Farmers in the next village.

Our more elderly villagers are well catered for with a twice weekly delivery of lunch - Weobley Meals - supplied by one of our excellent pubs and a monthly luncheon club at Hopelands Village Hall. The village hall is a modern facility, recently updated with LED lighting, digital projector and laptop connection. It also has good carparking and a well-appointed children's play area.



### THE CHURCH

The Church of St Peter and St Paul is a prominent feature in the village and surrounding countryside with its magnificent spire being the second tallest in the county. The church, which is Grade 1 listed, was founded in the 12th century with major extensions in the 14th and 15th centuries and some restoration in the 19th century. There is an excellent Ingram & Co organ installed in 1909, together with traditional pews and furnishings. It can seat about 300 people with easy wheelchair access. The north aisle has been re-ordered to provide an area for meetings, coffee mornings, teas and after-service functions. Two toilets and a very well-appointed kitchen were installed in the base of the tower in 2005. There is an enthusiastic team of bell-ringers who ring each Sunday and are available for weddings and funerals. The church is surrounded by a large and well-maintained churchyard with mature trees and abundant wild life, all of which is much enjoyed and appreciated by our local community and our many visitors. The church is open during daylight hours.

A service is held every Sunday at 10.30am using either BCP or Common Worship and attended by between 30 and 40 worshippers, the majority being of retirement age. Coffee and biscuits are served after these services



as part of a warm and friendly opportunity to chat with fellow worshippers and visitors. A Healing Service and traditional BCP service is held mid-week once a month. A successful Taize Service was held recently and is to be repeated. Members of the congregation are actively involved in the ministry of the church as readers, sides-men, chalice bearers and intercessors. Our excellent organists provide a high standard of music which is enjoyed and appreciated and we look forward to re-establishing a choir. Our Electoral Roll currently numbers 86. We lack a Churchwarden at the moment, but we have a Secretary, Treasurer and Lay co-Chairman and the PCC, which has nine members, is strong, active, enthusiastic and works well together.

We aim to raise £10,000.00 each year through fund-raising, and whilst this does bring in much-needed funds, we also believe it to be a vital part of our outreach within the local community. We are fortunate to have a supportive group, the Friends of Weobley Church, who provide funds to maintain and repair the fabric of the church mainly through a very successful annual Art and Crafts Exhibition and Sale.

The Primary school holds both its Harvest Festival and Christmas Service in the church and the Ecumenical Open the Book team visit the school regularly. We are delighted that the Senior School

has asked for a vicar to attend their Carol Service this year too. Messy Church is held in the Methodist Chapel. A Julian Group meets weekly and Study groups are held in conjunction with the Roman Catholics and Methodists. The incumbent is invited to be Chaplain to the Royal British Legion and the annual Service of Remembrance is held in Weobley Church and around the War Memorial in the churchyard.

We have a strong relationship with our Roman Catholic and Methodist friends through Churches Together in Weobley whose representatives meet regularly to plan services and social events which include Christmas Carols in the centre of the village, a Good Friday Walk, a Pentecostal Walk and celebratory meals. These play an important part in projecting our church communities into everyday village life.

### OUR AIMS

There have been some difficult pastoral issues within the village and church communities; these are now in the past. With significant new housing being built in the village and across the Parish there will be opportunities to reach out and enable our church and the wider community to grow and come together.

The introduction of the Group Benefice Council together with a Group Administrator is being realised as a great benefit to our Parish. It is proving supportive and helping us to learn more about the other churches in the group, their members and their needs, and enabling us to co-operate and work together more fully. We hope this will become permanent. We are working towards introducing a wider variety of services to encourage more family participation and to hold Group Benefice services when there is a fifth Sunday in the month.





# NORTON CANON

## *Church of St Nicholas*



## THE VILLAGE

Set in beautiful, rolling countryside, Norton Canon counts just over 100 houses and is home to 200 people. The village is spread over a large area with no distinct village centre. We are somewhere in the middle of the benefice for population. This is a rural parish with mixed farming and cider apple orchards prevalent in the major part of the village.

## SITUATION & AMENITIES

With the A480 running through the village from Hereford to Lyonshall and Kington, it is served by a Post Office and a motor mechanic, a seasonal farm shop selling soft fruit and flowers in summer and Christmas trees in December. Sadly of late we have lost the public house and the privately owned nursery school. We do have a well-appointed village hall with splendid facilities and ample carparking space.

Close to the Welsh border, Hay-on-Wye is approximately 14 miles, there is ample

opportunity for sightseeing and walking and within and adjacent to the village there are both foot and bridlepaths. The Cathedral City of Hereford with its Chained Library and Mappa Mundi, as well as Kington and Leominster are all about 10 miles distant and within half a mile of the village there is a regular bus service linking Hereford and Kington.

## CHURCH & CHURCHYARD

The lovely Church of St Nicholas possibly dates from circa 400 AD judging by a large incised stone of Romano-British origin underpinning the south transept. A woman of whom generations of schoolchildren may well have learnt is Lady Godiva of Coventry. In 1086 her sister, Wulviva, made grants to the Church in the manor of Norton Canon. The church was rebuilt, according to an incised stone in the porch, in 1706 and in many ways is unusual in having a stone-built medieval tower, circa 12th century, with a brick nave, chancel and transepts.



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## NORTON CANON

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We do not have stained glass, but the windows are again medieval and grisaille glass. There is even what appears to be a little medieval graffiti scored into the glass.

In the last ten years the fabric has been the subject of major refurbishment with the tower being re-roofed and the weathervane re-gilded, new drains installed around the perimeter and significant interior redecoration. More recently our bells have been refurbished, a new frame installed and a sixth bell cast and installed to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee, so there is nothing major necessary by way of renovation and repair at the moment.

With the bells now re-installed and a joy to ring - they are fairly light bells and are often used to train young bell ringers - we do see visiting ringers frequently.

The Church boasts a fine organ, which has been completely restored as well as having the keyboard extended and three new pipes added; this work was concluded in 2009. The Chancel is the responsibility of The Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral, and this helps the Parochial Church Council keep insurance costs as low as possible.

Our churchyard is regularly mown, especially around the more recent memorial stones, but



some of the older parts are left for meadow with an abundance of flora and fauna, snowdrops, primroses, vetches, moondaisies and daffodils being seen in season along with slo-worms, recently installed bat and swift boxes to encourage and protect the wildlife. A modest downside of the church is there is limited parking, although for weddings and funerals fields adjacent to the church are used for overflow parking when they are available. The church has no water connected, and therefore all water for refreshments has to be carried to the church. There are no toilet facilities, and nowhere suitable to install chemical ones as there is no way they could be serviced.

### FUNDRAISING

The major works since 2005 have shown that the parishioners can be and have been instrumental in raising large sums of money and we were fortunate in being awarded grants to see projects brought to fruition. We were also gratified to receive bequests.

An example of how parishioners who are not regular worshippers can assist was the taking down and putting up of the bells and bell frame. To ease the costs, helpers assisted the professional team from John Taylor & Co, the bellfounders, to work in the tower and it was

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## NORTON CANON

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an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Those who had helped and others from the group enjoyed a visit to the foundry to see our new bell being cast and to have a tour of the premises.

The PCC accounts are currently in credit; however the parish share does account for the bulk of our expenditure. We are currently paying our Deanery Synod cost and parish expenses on time, as well as other ongoing costs. As all parishes we have to work hard to balance the books, but this is helped by the introduction of the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) and a lottery. Last year we held a very well supported cream-tea event, and host a regular grand draw and Christmas fayre in December.

### SERVICES & COMMUNITY WORK

The church used to have two services a month on the first and third Sunday at 09.00am. Historically, our style of worship favoured Book of Common Prayer, and following the decrease in attendance at church, St Nicholas was made a Festival Church. During the summer of 2019 two meetings were held in the village hall regarding the viability of St Nicholas. Both meetings were well attended, and the feeling was, that although many of the villagers were not church-goers, they definitely wanted to maintain the presence of the church in the village. It was requested that a regular monthly service be re-instated at 11.00am and alternate between the formal BCP and a 'more Jolly' Service of the Word. This has now been put in place. In addition to the regular Service we celebrate our Patrons Day with a Toy Service, where toys and gifts are donated to the Hereford and Worcester Womens Refuge. In the Autumn we celebrate Harvest Festival, and in December a traditional Carol Service with parishioner participation.

For our Church leadership we have two churchwardens one of whom doubles as the Treasurer, Secretary, Lay Co-Chair and Benefice Representative. Since the village meeting we have had three new members join the PCC and they are injecting new enthusiasm into the church which is encouraging for the future.

The Group supports a Lent lunch fundraising initiative and the most recent beneficiary has been The Cart Shed in Norton Canon.

### THE FUTURE

The challenge is to expand our congregation, bearing in mind the age range and the rural and scattered nature of the area but we are confident that with the right incumbent, the assistance of the parishioners and the help of God, it can be achieved.





# SARNESFIELD

## *Church of St Mary*



The Church of St Mary, Sarnesfield stands within an historic sacred enclosure marked by the ring of yew trees which encircle the churchyard wall. An ancient and intriguing site indeed.

But St Mary's is not all history and notable antiquity. Youthful and energetic churchwardens, and a lively PCC add dynamism to the life of the church in ways that do great service to such a small, truly rural community. A mixed community, both in age range and occupation - a leaning towards farming would not escape the visitor for long - the population of Sarnesfield now sways gently from one side of 50 to the other. There are 35 on the Electoral Roll.

There is one Sunday service a month - on the 4th Sunday - and these are Services of the Word or Communion (CW) every third month. The congregation is modest and stable, although on the increase from 2018 to 2019, and interactive! We enjoy traditional religious worship, but given with a light hand that suits all complexions of faith. An important focus for St Mary's is to be welcoming and supportive and so the church was designated an Inclusive Church in 2018.

We especially enjoy a good sermon, which may well have a secular theme and which encourages participation. And, in searching for a new Rector, we would welcome someone





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## SARNESFIELD

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with a love of music and hymn singing – someone able to lead us when the congregation is not at its largest. The acoustics of the church are good, and the occasional concert shows this off to good effect. Someone enthusiastic about working collaboratively with our organists would hit the right note.

Festival services - Easter, Harvest, and Christmas for example - are joyful occasions and well attended. They provide opportunities to engage with a wider community which may then become enthusiastic about joining more often with our regular congregation. With this in mind, a new incumbent able to enter into village and rural life easily and enthusiastically would be welcome. Equally, an incumbent skilled in helping lay members of the congregation become gentle advocates for mission would add strength to our parish church's role in the community, and help us in growing our congregation as we move forward.

While the PCC has money in the bank, pays its contribution to the Common Fund in full and on time and manages its accounts most efficiently, balancing the books can be a challenge if it's not one of those years when we're blessed with four weddings and the attendant fees.



This is where 'The Sarnesfield Ladies' – a group open to all ages and both genders we should emphasise – comes into its own. Traditional as it may be, cake stalls each year raise significant funds and with experience gained over 15 years of cake-selling, the reputation for delicious cakes and teas underpins St Mary's annual Open Weekend in May. Each year has a theme – 'Coffee, Cake and Wedding Bells' for example – and curated displays drawing on aspects of the history of the church are allied to floral decoration and a well-run café. This event also generates excellent funds and beneficial good will too. It's a weekend at which the wealth of support for the church from those who might not be regular worshippers is so clearly demonstrated. Other regular fundraising events include concerts, soup & sweet lunches and summer teas in the church.

The PCC keeps in contact with these 'friends', by writing and distributing three or four newsletters each year and this too can stimulate interest in projects that are underway or that we hope to initiate in the future. A lot of thought and effort goes into maintaining the fabric of the church and with the help of grant-making bodies and donations the PCC has been able to invest sizeable sums without impacting upon the day-to-day budget of the church. Most recently we have raised c.£12,000 to



introduce a new Ellacombe System of bell ringing to the tower in which we have four bells; two of which will have staples removed and be retuned at the same time.

### BUT WHAT OF OUR CHURCH ITSELF?

As we have seen, St Mary's stands on an ancient sacred site. But In more modern times - certainly in the 12th century - a simple Norman church was built and over the next three centuries a tower, south aisle, south chapel, porch and a new roof were added. Unchanged down the years, St Mary's is approached through a well maintained churchyard which is the resting place of John Abell; the 'most celebrated architect of his time' and leading practitioner of the Black & White style of building that is so evident throughout the English Marches. The interior of the church is of great delight to parishioners and visitors alike as, simply decorated, the church is a place of exceptional calm; ideal for reflection and religious worship.

The celebrated chronicler of *The King's England*, Arthur Mee wrote of St Mary's: 'We should come to it in summertime when

the church is framed in green by the lovely trees, and red roses climb around its ancient porch. Here is beauty for those who love it, and antiquity for those who love that.'

Our *Notes for Visitors* leaflet tells much of the story of our church; a church that has seen patronage from both Catholic and Anglican families and congregants down through the history of the Church of England. It's a church with a history and a spirit and a keen eye on its future role in the community.

Unarguably there are challenges ahead but St Mary's is a lively parish and we look forward to working with a new, collaborative incumbent for the Group. An incumbent with a strong sense for the importance of pastoral care. A person who has the gift of acknowledging the individual identity of each parish yet has the desire to invite each to contribute to the shared life of the Group in times when we feel there is greater emphasis on the seven parishes working more closely together through the newly formed Group Benefice Council. A person who can give spiritual guidance and leadership when it's needed and who has the understanding to see when those moments are upon us.





# STAUNTON-ON-WYE

## *Church of St Mary*



Staunton-on Wye is the second largest of the villages in our Church Group and has some 400 inhabitants. Set on a hill above the valley, there are magnificent views over the fields and orchards which stretch out towards the river Wye and the hills and mountains of Herefordshire and Wales. It is a rural paradise for walkers and artists.

### OUR VILLAGE

Staunton is very well served by a primary school and a pre-school, both of which flourish on the same site, a thriving doctor's surgery, a well-appointed village hall and two pubs, one in the village and one on the village boundary. Below the village stands the widely renowned Oakchurch Farm Shop. There are several mixed arable and livestock and fruit farms as well as several small businesses in the village. In recent years a good number of new houses have been built including a set percentage of affordable houses.

We owe the presence of the primary school and the surgery

to the Jarvis Charities; a charity founded in the 18th century but still thriving today and a continuing, generous benefactor to individuals and organisations in Staunton-on-Wye, Letton and Bredwardine.

### CHURCH & CHURCHYARD

St Mary's is an Inclusive Church. It has signed up to a declaration of inclusivity which can be seen on the Group of Parishes' website. It also confirms each year its adoption of the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy, a summary of which appears on the group website.

The Church of St Mary, which still retains some Anglo-Saxon and Norman features, stands at the top of the stony hill which gave Staunton-on-Wye its former name - Standune. The list of Patrons includes a 15th century Lord of Standune. It also shows that 200 years ago the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church Oxford acquired the patronage of St Mary's. Consequently, the incumbent of St Mary's benefits from this patronage. In the words of the Dean and Chapter, *'ChristChurch, Oxford is in*



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## STAUNTON-ON-WYE

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*the happy position of being able to support the incumbents of its 90 livings through the revenues of the Dr South Trust, which is able to assist with grants for study, administration and holidays, as well as offering a biennial conference and loans for the purchase of a car'.*

The Churchyard is extremely well kept by a Staunton couple with a mowing business. That this is appreciated is shown by compliments we have heard. Sadly, the entries in the visitors' book about the state of the church and particularly its recent state of decoration were less complimentary. Consequently, in 2016, when we were notified that the church had been placed on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register', we immediately took steps to start improving our finances by setting up our own lottery and by holding regular coffee mornings in the Village Hall. Next, we began the process of determining the necessary work and levels of financing needed to carry out the work.

With substantial help from the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as other Trust funds and the efforts of our very successful fundraising committee, building work started in July 2019, with a completion date set for April 2020 at a total cost of £250,000. We are particularly pleased with the generous support received from our own village.



In return for its grant of £155,000, the Heritage Lottery Fund has asked us to undertake over the next ten years a programme of exhibitions and talks to promote the heritage. We have already planned a programme of events which we will start to implement when building work is complete and we would value an incumbent who will take a direct managerial interest in this work.

Thankfully our bells are in good order and we have a ring of six bells which when refurbishment of the church is complete will be rung again not only by ringers who live locally but from time-to-time by visiting bell-ringers and for Diocesan Bell-ringers courses.

### WORSHIP

Before the church was closed we had two Sunday Communion (CW), but currently we are having one service a month in the Village Hall because it has been necessary to close the church since tiles were dislodged from the roof and water caused a fall of plaster.

We are also looking forward to the re-introduction of fifth Sunday Group Services at Staunton and our sister parishes within the Group, and anticipate that Staunton will once again follow its service with an informal

bring-n-share lunch as was the tradition in recent past times. This, along with major festivals, is the type of service at which we are joined by the Staunton Community Choir, a choir which includes several church members and brings added joy and engagement to our services.

### FUNDRAISING & OTHER EVENTS

The Church's fundraising committee and other committed individuals have from various events, raised significant funds for the church and provided interest for those attending. Like the Saturday coffee mornings these provide social contact and community-wide goodwill. In the last couple of years, we have had a daffodil weekend at Easter, and in 2018 the event was accompanied by a small exhibition in the church. This remembered L/Cpl Leonard Lewis, the only Herefordshire born holder of the Victoria Cross and whose statue now stands in Hereford's Old Market. In 2018 we also had a very popular auction of promises, and in 2019 we have promoted a dog show, a cyclothon, a scooter rally and at the December fair a competition for the children at the village school to produce model angels and a flower arranging competition for adults. Like our other special events and coffee mornings it proved to be very successful.

### PROVISION FOR CHILDREN

With, as we have noted, a flourishing primary school with 100 children on the roll in the village, we would very much like to have as our next incumbent a priest who relishes the challenge of attracting children of all ages to become part of our all-inclusive church community.

In recent years a group of people from Staunton and other local churches have successfully run 'Open the Book' weekly in the primary school, and both 'Messy Church' and Sunday School, in the Village Hall. Sadly, health issues among our lay enthusiasts and then our group curate finishing his curacy has meant that these important activities for our younger parishioners have had to be put on hold as finding successors to our original team of leaders has been difficult, but we value them highly and we are ambitious to see them re-launched in the not too-distant future.

But we are not standing still. Our very popular Crib Service on Christmas Eve always sees the church full of children and young families and once a year the whole school performs a concert before an audience of parents and guests in the church.

We also retain excellent links with the village schools. At the primary school our incumbent is an ex-officio member of the Board of Governors and the Vice-Chair of our Parochial Church Council is an elected member.

To sustain the interaction between the school and St Mary's we arranged to take the church weathervane when it was taken down for repainting to be taken to the school and the pre-school for the children to see and touch it. We are also arranging a site visit from the senior class in the school to see 'work in progress' and then, when the building work is complete, resuming invitations to all classes to visit the church and take part in interactive talks. Led by the Rector and a retired priest resident in the village, these talks have focused on the use in worship of significant parts of the church. Alongside these, the Reader will lead an interactive quiz to stimulate interest in the history of the church and its location, starting with the age of the hill (a moraine) on which St Mary's stands.



## INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

We are fortunate that two retired priests and a Reader live in the village. They visit people when appropriate and by attending different village functions and belonging to other village organisations they meet many of the residents from Staunton and other villages in a relaxed atmosphere. As in most rural areas there is a lot of informal caring and visiting by church members and others in the village.

In equal measure, our church coffee mornings - which provide a comfortable meeting place for residents and friends - and our other fundraising activities provide opportunities for ministerial and lay members to speak to and get to know other members of the village. PCC and church members have been involved in many aspects of village community life, including the acquisition of a defibrillator for the Village Hall and the village flower-arranging group which decorates the church for major festivals. Staunton has a tangible sense of local community and many villagers who do not attend the church are very well disposed towards the Church.

## SERVING A WIDER COMMUNITY

As members of our sister churches have shared in our children's work, we help them in some of their initiatives such as Norton Canon's Common Larder, and along with these sister churches we support the Lent Lunches organised each year in aid of charities, both local and international. All seven churches participate with all the other parishes in the Kington and Weobley Deanery in giving financial support to a Priest in Training in Tanzania.

## THE FUTURE

We hope and pray that our new incumbent and leader will encourage, equip and enable us, both children and adults, to do God's work in Staunton and beyond, so that together we can play our part in helping our neighbours and one another to find God, grow in faith and help the coming of his Kingdom.





# BYFORD AND MANSSELL GAMAGE

*Church of St John The Baptist*



## THE PARISHES

Since the closure of Mansell Gamage church in the 1950s, St John the Baptist church at Byford has served both our small parishes although few people in Mansell now seem to feel a connection to our church. Houses in Mansell (population around 60) are mainly spread out along the road to Weobley; Byford (population 110) is split into three distinct settlements and to move between them you have to use the A438, a main route into Wales with

fast moving heavy traffic and no pavement or footway. Our parishes have no shop, surgery, post office, village hall or pub; these facilities are available in neighbouring villages, though not all in the same village or even in the same direction. Although surrounded by farmland - mostly apple orchards and livestock - few people now work on the land or even within the parishes. There are not many young families and we would mostly class ourselves as middle-aged or active retired.





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## BYFORD AND MANSELL GAMAGE

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### CHURCH BUILDING AND FINANCE

The church was begun in the 12th century, extended in the 15th century and heavily restored by the Victorians. Our last Quinquennial inspection, in January 2019, showed that it is in reasonable repair and we are just beginning a restoration project for our three bells. It is cold in winter but always welcoming, especially for festival services when we have all the pew candles lit as well as those on the altar - we are heavily into candles at Byford.

Like most churches it has its good and bad points. Its long narrow nave with fixed pews make some activities difficult and only the rear half of the nave is heated. Different levels make access for wheel chairs tricky and there is only a small parking area. On the plus side we have a TC Bates organ, and the open space without fixed seating in the chancel and Lady chapel gives us good flexible opportunities for festival services and for post-service refreshments, as well as somewhere to park Burt the donkey during quiet moments in the Carol Service. We have invested in a portable ramp and the neighbouring landowner generously makes his field available for parking whenever we ask him. Our most striking feature is our mediaeval wall paintings, one of St Margaret of Antioch and the other of the Virgin Mary



as Mater Misericordiae, sheltering human souls under her cloak, while St Michael the Archangel weighs souls and the devil tries to tip the balance.

Our treasurer says that we are reasonably sound financially though, like all good treasurers, he always urges us to be cautious. We increase our Parish Offer by a small amount each year, pay our full share towards the Group's expenses and our parishioners contribute to charitable initiatives like Lent Lunches and Food Bank. We run a Bonus Ball lottery which raises about £1,700 a year which is used to pay for the church and churchyard running costs.

### LIVING CHURCH

We are a friendly, generous lot, always willing to answer a local need or support any good cause presented to us, but because of the layout of our village, and lack of natural meeting places, it is only too easy for people to become isolated and detached from the local community and church.

At the beginning of 2018, tired of the interminable discussions about low attendance at our twice monthly BCP services, the PCC took the decision to stop counting numbers and instead to concentrate on using our church as a focus for the



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## BYFORD AND MANSELL GAMAGE

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community through shared activities and worship; a decision welcomed by our Rector.

We began by collecting contact details from as many households as possible in the parish so we are able to tell them about church services and social events and keep them abreast of what's happening including the current vacancy consultation. Now more families are getting involved, some people are meeting each other for the first time after living here for several years, and our electoral roll numbers have almost doubled - and we've heard some very interesting ideas about what our residents are hoping for in their new Rector!

We've also changed our service pattern. We now have one service a month, currently held at 5pm on the last Sunday in the month, which may be either a BCP Communion (regular attendance six to nine), or a Festival service using modern liturgy, at which we get congregations of 30 - 70 depending on the type of service, all ages from four to eighty and representing all sections of the local community. As well as special services at Harvest and Christmas, we have held an Easter Vigil, Patronal Festival Eucharist and a Pet Blessing Service, and last March we had a service for the Annunciation, held in the Lady chapel, at which one of our PCC members gave the address. We work at making our services family-friendly and try to actively involve as many families as possible - we will cherish the memory of the Camel Song performed by two of our youngest members at a previous carol service - and they are usually followed by refreshments.

We adopted a formal Inclusive Church statement at the start of 2018; we have 26 on the electoral roll and a Parochial Church Council with seven members. One of the churchwardens can lead services when needed.

### LOOKING FORWARD

One challenge we see ahead is to find ways to engage with more people at Mansell Gamage. We will continue to work with our Byford community through our services and activities and we hope that the Eco Church initiative may offer us further opportunities there. We would like to explore different types of service - perhaps a Candlemas Celebration when our churchyard is a sea of snowdrops, an occasional weekday BCP Communion, Taize services, or perhaps a peaceful evening service in the Lady chapel using an Iona liturgy. Above all we hope that our new Rector will challenge and inspire us to put Love of God and Love of Neighbour at the heart of everything we do.





# MONNINGTON-ON-WYE

## *Church of St Mary*



There are only about 30 permanent residents in the village: four households with children, some working people with adult children, and some very wise (although obviously never opinionated) community elders. However Monnington, and especially its church, holds a special place in people's hearts, and there is a sizeable Monnington "diaspora", consisting of grown up children, people who used to work here when agriculture was a more hands-on business, and people who have moved away for one reason or another, but never quite left. We keep in touch in all the usual ways including an erratically produced church newsletter. As a result our high

days, holy days and parties bring many old friends - in fact the village population sometimes doubles.

This is an agricultural area dominated by Bulmers cider orchards. There is a little local employment in the orchards and at Monnington Court. There is no shop, public transport or school; local children attend the outstanding pre-school and primary school in Staunton-on-Wye, and we all use the superb GPs' surgery there. Older children attend the high school at Weobley. The church is the only community building in Monnington and we all rely on each other very much.





Monnington is on the Wye Valley Walk and we have a steady trickle of walkers and holidaymakers passing through. Many express their appreciation of our beautiful church, especially for the fact that it is always open. We are delighted that visitors come, and we are conscious that we could probably do more to encourage tourism, for example by making thematic and historical links with other churches. We recently hosted a group of about 40 members of the Kilvert Society for the weekend. Francis Kilvert's sister was married to the rector of Monnington, and he was a frequent visitor.

### CHURCH & COMMUNITY

St Mary's is a festival church, and we usually have seven services a year, plus of course any weddings, baptisms and funerals there may be. In the past, as and when needed, there has also been a successful monthly home communion service on a Monday morning, for the benefit of parishioners who are too old or infirm to walk to the church or who simply prefer the timing or the warmth; this has not been needed in the past couple of years but we would like to revive it if needed. We do not regard our festival status as a step on the road to closure; there is much practical affection and care for the church both locally and from further afield.



It is really important, in a community as small as this, that everyone - of any churchmanship or none - should feel included. Unless we all pull together, with such small numbers, things simply won't happen. The only community events in Monnington revolve around the church. We have a spring clean inside the church and an autumn churchyard tidy, if possible followed by lunch; a Rogation Day walking service, starting from Byford and ending up with a hog roast in Monnington; a summer Evensong with a superb visiting choir from Holy Trinity, Hereford; harvest festival and tea; and a social Christmas gathering after the carol service - we quite like our grub!

We try to support all the things going on in the benefice aimed at the wider world - for example, the Lent lunches in support of local charities, the food bank, and the women's refuge in Hereford at harvest time. We would also like to see the continuation of the vicar's discretionary fund, quietly and effectively used to help those in need on our doorstep.

As far as stewardship is concerned, despite the very small population, Monnington pays its parish share in full and on time, with the help of its friends.



### OUR CHURCH BUILDING

St Mary's is a Grade I listed church of ancient origins, largely rebuilt in 1682. Public access is down a footpath along a brook (the owners of Monnington Court kindly allow a short cut across their garden for services). It does not have vehicular access, electricity, gas, toilets or running water, and there is no local wish to install any of those things. It is a very special place; one of the highlights of the church year is our carol service, which starts in daylight and finishes after dark, by the light of oil lamps and candles.

The church is in a good state of repair; we are active in applying for grants, and with this help we have renewed the French drains this year and carried out some stonework repairs and repointing. Another round of grant applications has been submitted with a view to continuing the repointing in 2020.

The church is kept open on a daily basis, and the comments in our visitors' book show how very much appreciated this is. It is one of Simon Jenkins' '*1,000 best*'. We love it.





## LETTON

### *Church of St John the Baptist*



The Grade 1 listed church of St. John the Baptist has a history stretching back before the Norman Conquest. Over the last two decades, some major repairs have been undertaken with the help of grants. The side chapel has been converted into a community space which allows for different styles of service and community use. Temporary kitchen units have been added to the vestry to facilitate catering, and there are plans for the provision of an external toilet.

The church is open daily during daylight hours and attracts visitors.

The churchyard has been managed in accordance with the Caring for God's Acre management plan for many years. The church has excellent acoustics, of which several young musicians have recently taken advantage to produce recordings.

Letton considers itself an Inclusive Church - meaning all are welcome, whatever their orientation or beliefs. There are two services on the 1st and 3rd Sunday's in the month. We have tended to be rather traditional, BCP matins, or Common Worship but we are open to change.





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## LETTON

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The Electoral Roll has increased to 22 and our Sunday attendance is between five and 12. There are relatively few children in the parish, but a number of them did go to Messy Church when it was running. There are no young families currently coming to Letton church, though children occasionally come with their grandparents. The Baptism book shows but rare baptisms, though in the past year there have been three weddings and two funerals; a useful boost to the funds.

### FUNDRAISING

We are a parish which relies on our fundraising and parish giving to pay its way annually. Our contributions to the restoration grants have been either in volunteer hours or special fundraising. A few years ago a member undertook a 'Cathedral Quest', aiming to cycle to all the cathedrals in Wales, Scotland and England without a support team. He managed Wales, Scotland and most of England and succeeded in raising several thousand pounds for the church and Prostate Cancer. The previous year he cycled from Letton to Westminster Abbey where the then Dean of Westminster greeted him, and subsequently came to Letton to give the service at Harvest.

Four years ago the Guinea Service was reinstituted. An 1810 will had left a small



charity "to pay the minister of Letton Church one Guinea for a sermon in the Church on the 29th October, yearly, forever". Most recently the sermon was given by the Bishop of Hereford, just before his retirement. The congregation votes to decide whether or not the preacher has earned the guinea.

The usual fundraising activities are the 100 Club Lottery, the Christmas Fayre on the first Saturday in December and the Sunday Afternoon teas during the school summer holidays. These have now been enjoyed for over 20 years with many regular visitors from both near and far.

We have the usual harvest and pastoral services. Traditionally we have a choir for the Christmas Carol Service, and this year just gone we held a 'Not Midnight Mass' at 9pm on Christmas Eve. There is increasing support between the churches in the benefice and we look forward to the development of the Benefice Council and the benefits that might bring. This year we aim to produce our Mission Action Plan and increase our PCC membership.

Letton does not have the ideal congregation to attract a spiritual leader, our belief systems are patchy, and no doubt vary from person to person, and from time to time. Our strengths might be that we believe in





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## LETTON

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Christian values, the need to maintain them and pass them on. For this reason we have considered adopting St. Dyfrig as a festival saint. He probably started our Celtic church in the 7th Century, as he did many in the South Hereford and South Wales area, keeping Christianity going in a low key way during agnostic times. While we very definitely hesitate to link ourselves with any saints, (pride not being a christian virtue!) the sense of often battling against the odds is not so far from our experience. We recognise that Christian virtues are much the same as virtues in any other religion and that the power of prayer and meditation is of universal advantage.

With this in mind we are seeking a minister who will enable us to develop and clarify our belief system.

