

Benefice Profile

The Seven Churches

Parishes of: Aldwinckle, Clopton, Pilton, Stoke Doyle, Thorpe Achurch, Titchmarsh, Wadenhoe



Maintaining & aiming to grow the Christian presence in the Seven Churches Benefice

2022

Welcome

Would you enjoy living and working within a rural benefice set in the beautiful Nene Valley? If so, you would be welcomed into a community which offers a set of interesting opportunities and challenges as you seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

If so, then please read on.

In putting the profile together, we have been as open and honest as we can be about:

- a half-time post – how, together, we think we can make this work
- who and where we are as a Benefice
- how we see the priorities for the next five years.

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Vision

Most profiles start with a Vision Statement, so this is ours:

Maintaining & aiming to grow the Christian presence in the Seven Churches Benefice

It would be lovely to come up with some more powerful and aspirational words, but to be honest much of the time we seem to be swimming hard against the tide simply to stay still. That said, there are opportunities and, prior to covid, against the national trend of declining church attendances in rural areas, this Benefice was holding its own and some parishes were flourishing. The relationship between church and community was strengthened during the time of lockdown.

We live in extraordinary times, so we are looking for a supportive and invigorating relationship with our new rector to help us revitalise and grow while addressing the difficulties in relation to the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and residual effects of covid and how these are impacting on church and community life. We value leadership and teaching to maintain and strengthen our Christian community and outreach.

Half-Time Post.

How, together, we think we can make this work.

In an ideal world we would be looking for a full-time priest to look after our Benefice of 7 churches, but the reality is that currently we simply cannot afford it.

It would be unrealistic for someone working half-time to cover all the bases so, in our view, it will be important to prioritise, using all the people resources available and play to everyone's strengths. Communication and team building through leadership and organisation will be key.

Exactly how this will work in practice will be for discussion and development over time and will need to be tailored to balance the needs of the rector, and the whole Benefice whilst not losing parish identity.

Set out below is what we are looking for from an incumbent – both the personal and practical qualities - and then we set out what we will endeavour to offer in support.

At this stage we have taken as read that any applicant will be fully au fait with the general duties and responsibilities of a parish priest and with all the requirements such as safeguarding issues.

WE ARE LOOKING FOR A PRIEST WHO:

- endeavors to model a ministry of care, kindness, compassion and prayerfulness; is open minded and sensitive to the needs of others with good social, communication and listening skills
- has vision, relates well to people of all ages, especially enthusing young people and will be welcoming to people of different socio-economic, gender and ethnic backgrounds, and those in different kinds of relationships
- is spiritually discerning and able to identify the gifts of others whether lay or ordained
- will motivate others by teaching and preaching the word of God
- will become known in our parishes by being seen in the villages and at village events and by visiting
- will value and cherish the people of this Benefice making full use of the people available in support of ministry, working closely with the ministry team, Churchwardens, PCCs and other willing helpers, delegating tasks to them such as visiting the house bound and preparation for baptism, confirmation, weddings and funerals
- will work with each parish to help identify and fulfil their individual needs and will provide leadership in reaching out to those who come to church regularly and those who do not, to help us grow our church
- values rural ministry and understands the challenges facing farming communities, village schools and small businesses
- is forward thinking whilst appreciating tradition
- has a sense of humour!

OUR COMMITMENT IS TO HELP BY:

- continuing to take responsibility for the fabric of the buildings
- giving practical and emotional support and assistance
- shouldering more of the day-to-day administrative tasks including chairing and running PCC meetings
- meeting as churchwardens on a regular basis to arrange cross Benefice co-ordination and mutual support
- being your eyes and ears in each parish
- communicating and working with you and with each other
- building links between the church and our own communities and by our actions live the Word
- having the confidence to take on more responsibility where we can
- being welcoming and friendly and making sure we are not too demanding
- working with you and the ministry team to achieve our Vision.

Who and Where are we as a Benefice?

We are a Benefice of 7 parishes, and we have tried to show you who and where we are in the following SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

Our aspiration is to be a Christ centred Benefice that will embrace the local community and continue to spread the Good News primarily by living the Word.

Strengths

We are or at least aim:

- to be relaxed, warm, open minded and welcoming to all sectors of society
- to reach out to the vulnerable and distant members of our community by continuing to provide online live worship usually twice a month via Zoom with those present taking part in readings, prayers and singing along to recorded music
- to hold one or more Holy Communion services in the Benefice each Sunday, to ensure everyone has access to a Holy Communion service at least once a month in their church, being supported by our ministry team as well as local retired clergy
- for some churchwardens to continue to lead morning, evening prayer and compline
- to increase the number of people writing and leading intercessions for both online and in church services
- to build on the attraction of special services, such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance which are well attended by regular church goers and the wider community
- to be innovative and supportive to each other as we try to work together for special services, fund raising and social events
- to continue with monthly Sunday school which is organised by a member of the congregation and held as part of the Family Holy Communion service
- to consider alternative forms of worship such as Thursday Praise, via Zoom, which was introduced during lockdown and continues
- to continue to enjoy live music in church which is currently provided by a team of very good and talented organists
- to continue with our weekly breakfast and discussion group involving members from across the Benefice
- to continue to hold a Lent study group drawing people from the congregation and wider community
- for PCCs to meet and function, chaired by a lay chair
- for PCCs to continue to take responsibility for the church buildings which are generally in sound condition with no major expenditure planned in relation to repairs and maintenance
- to have knowledgeable and reliable treasurers who manage our accounts and help with increasing regular giving and claiming gift aid

- to continue with regular churchwarden meetings providing a forum to share experience with architects, builders, church security systems and also importantly consider strategic issues and share ideas

Weaknesses

We are impacted by:

- small numbers of young families attending worship and small congregations where the loss of one family can have a large impact on numbers and finances
- the legacy of our church buildings which are expensive to heat, maintain and insure and when restorative work is required then the costs are high
- the lack of facilities and encumbrance of pews in most churches. Only one church currently has toilet facilities and a full kitchen on site – although others are able to call on nearby facilities
- the ongoing impact of Covid 19 on numbers attending church
- our ability to understand and finance the technology required to deal with climate change

Opportunities

As we see these:

- we have an enthusiasm for growth, and we are prepared to put in the effort needed to deliver this
- we are ready to take on more responsibility to support the rector and ministry team
- our two church schools are keen to involve the church in services, collective worship and input into the curriculum. We have been managing to do this with the help of our ministry team and clergy from neighbouring Benefices.
- a small group of older teenage Christians started a Youth Group prior to lockdown and are now ready for future involvement in church life
- we are prepared to try different types of music without losing traditional hymns
- some parishes are working together for fundraising which has stimulated enthusiasm and growth
- we must continue to keep the church at the heart of the community partly as we are dependent on non-churchgoing community members for both financial and practical support but also, more importantly, so that we can continue to provide spiritual and moral support.
- we aspire to continue the reordering of our churches and the installation of serveries and toilets so we can make them more fit for purpose and available for other community use as well as church activities
- A new rector would give us the opportunity to review our service pattern and service type including intergenerational services and innovative forms of worship

Threats

We perceive these as:

- our villages - particularly those without a school - tend to consist of aging populations
- many older church members do not welcome change in relation to types of worship and hymns
- older teenagers face pressures from outside and often don't find current styles of worship attractive
- the parish share is a challenge. Even going from a full-time priest down to a half-time priest in 2018, was £49535 in 2020 - thankfully this has been held at the same level for 2021 and 2022 but is still too much for us to find easily with reduced giving due to financial pressures
- the cost-of-living crisis with the increase of utility bills has direct impact on our finances and also impacts on monies coming in from fund raising as the community is stretched between church, village groups and supporting other charities
- the division of the parish share between the seven churches has always been a matter of debate and whichever formula is used there are winners and losers
- climate change and the request that we become carbon net zero is a major concern with old boilers and electrical heating systems. We need to investigate new ways of heating our buildings without relying on fossil fuels and these are bound to require substantial investment.
- diocese action promoting industrial development on arable Glebe Land in the Nene Valley has impacted on the Church's relationship with our local communities. Many villagers, including churchgoers, are against the industrial development with some villagers finding it difficult to dissociate their local Church from the position taken by the Diocese. There have been financial consequences with a few regular givers removing their support.

How we see the priorities for the next 5 years

We appreciate that achieving our vision is going to take place over more than the next few years and will be ongoing. In the next 5 years we hope, working with us, that our new incumbent will:

- provide spiritual guidance and work with the ministry team developing our styles of liturgy so they provide opportunities for different forms of worship to meet the needs of a wider demographic
- engage children, young people and families with church and maintain their interest as they grow older
- listen and discern our individual and benefice needs and desires and provide pastoral support and guidance
- be conscious of the need to address climate change which will take some of our energy, time and focus

Want to know more about us?

Each parish has prepared a short statement about the life in their village and church. These are located in Appendix A.

Rather than make this document a reading marathon, we have not included details about the church buildings other than a photograph in Appendix B. A snapshot of information can be provided for each church if required. Information is also available on [A Church Near You](#) website.

Information about the rectory, which is in Aldwinkle, is given in Appendix C.

We have included some information about our current service pattern, special services and previous year's benefice data in Appendix D.

Is this the next step for you?

Does this challenge interest you?

Is God calling you?

If so, you can find out more about the benefice on these websites:

www.titchmarsh.info

www.oundledeanery.org.uk

www.Achurchnearyou.com

Informal contact can be made with:

The Archdeacon of Oakham and the Rural Dean of Oundle The Venerable Alison Booker
Archdeacons Office, Cheryl Cullen (PA) 01733 887019
Archdeacon.Oakham@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Assistant Priest in the Benefice: Rev'd Dr Beatrice Brandon; beatrice@healingministry.org.uk

Reader: Carolyn Brawn Tel 07805416947; cabrawn@hotmail.com

An application form can be obtained from:

The Archdeacons Office

Tel 01733 887019

The Diocesan Office, The Palace, Peterborough PE1 1YB

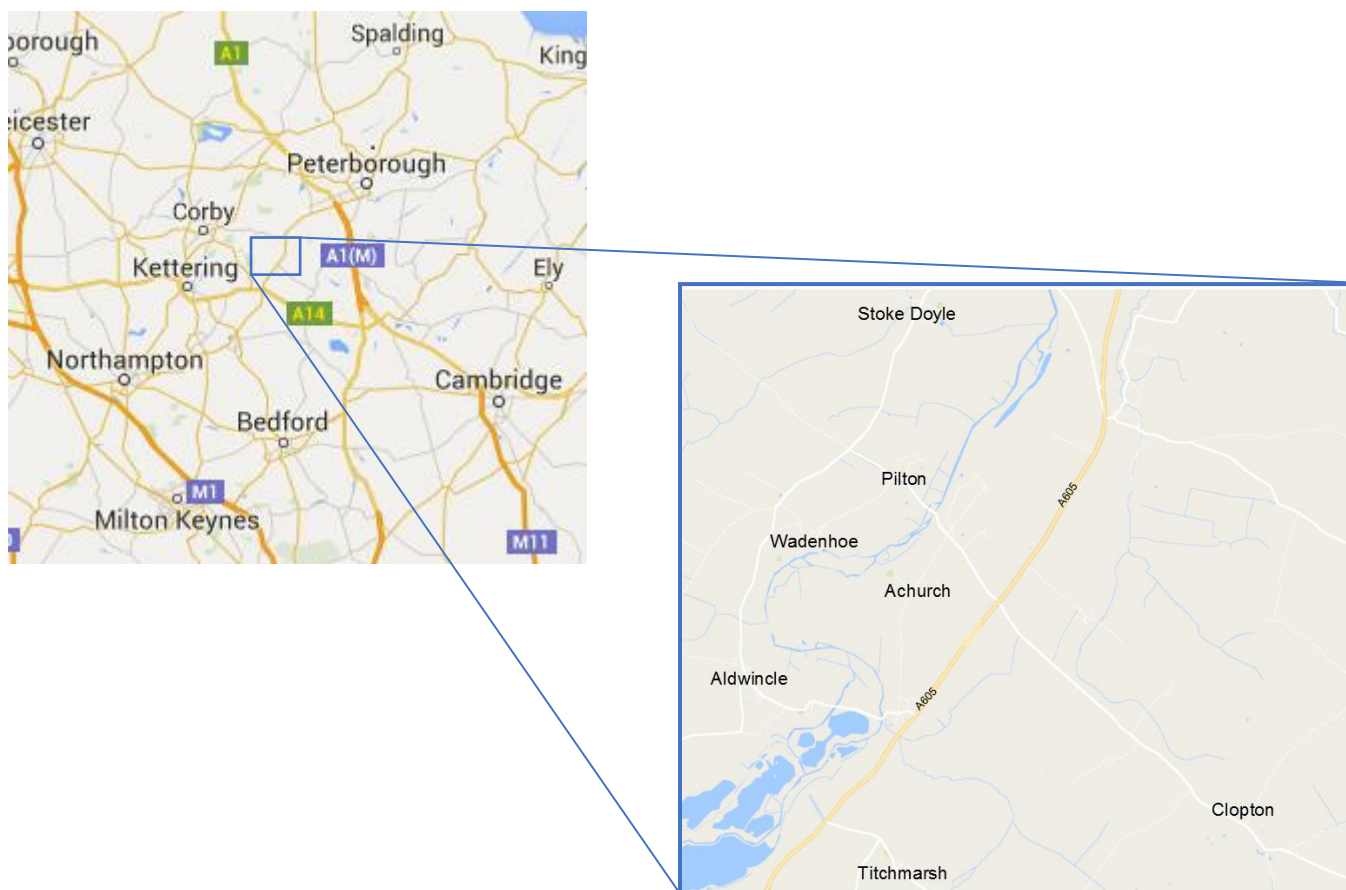
archdeacon.oakham@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Benefice – Communities

For the first half of the 20th Century and for many hundreds of years before, the Seven Churches Benefice was primarily a farming community with associated trades and services. The number of farms, and particularly their need for manual workers, has decreased, although local trades and services still abound. However, homeworkers and those who work outside the community have increased.

The Benefice comprises 7 rural parishes in the Deanery of Oundle, lying within the Nene Valley.

The Benefice lies between the market towns of Thrapston and Oundle and is within easy reach of Peterborough, Northampton and Cambridge. Our excellent transport links - both road and rail - mean that access to London and other parts of the UK make this rural location an attractive place to live.



In addition to the churches, village halls in Aldwinckle, Titchmarsh and Wadenhoe provide a hub for social activities in the Benefice.

The parish council is the same as the ecclesiastical parish in: Lilford cum Wigsthorpe, Thorpe Achurch and Thorpe Waterville PC; Aldwinckle PC; Titchmarsh PC and Clopton parish meeting. Whereas Pilton, Stoke Doyle & Wadenhoe have a joint parish council. In some cases PCC members are also Parish Councillors.

Each of the parishes has contributed a short description of their community which can be found below.

Aldwincle

Aldwincle is a small village and civil parish in East Northamptonshire. The name of the village is probably derived from the Old English personal name Ealda or Alda meaning Old, and Wincle, a bend in the river. It is a beautiful location, situated on the River Nene between Thrapston and Oundle. There are fishing lakes and a nature reserve which have been developed from the original sand and gravel pits in the area. These places attract many visitors to the village.

Aldwincle has a mixed population of around 350 people, many now retired who have moved to the village. Employment in the area is a commute to local towns, although since Covid times we have seen many people in the village now work from home. There are a number of small home-based businesses, a garage and a village shop, as well as a farm and a hair and beauty salon.

We have a very well established Primary School in the parish, Trinity CE Lower School. In 2019 the school became an academy with the Peterborough Diocese Education Trust. The school's mission statement is, "Growing hearts, minds and souls". St Peter's Church is involved in many different areas of school life.

Aldwincle has a well-used Village Hall with various weekly classes including Zumba, Art, Yoga and Upholstery. The Friendly Club for senior members of the community meets once a month as does the ladies social group, Birds of a Feather. Originally the Village Reading Room, it has been extensively refurbished to include a catering standard kitchen which is a good resource for church, village events and for private hire. There is also a children's play area situated in the grounds.

We have a Community Choir and a Sign Language Club, which on occasions participate in church services here and at Thorpe Achurch. Although our regular congregation is not large, we are well supported by villagers at special services such as Remembrance, Harvest and Crib service. A group of people keen to ring the bells is just getting started.

The PC and the PCC work hard at supporting the village community. Our annual pancake lunch draws many villagers. This year we are arranging a Christmas Tree Festival working closely with Thorpe Achurch.

In the village there is an historic Baptist Chapel. The village also benefits from having another Anglican church building from the days when Aldwincle was two separate villages. This Church is dedicated to All Saints and was declared redundant some years ago. It is now in the care of the Churches' Conservation Trust. All Saints was one of the first churches to introduce "champing" and has proved popular with walkers and canoeists using the nearby River Nene.

Aldwincle has its place in history, being the birthplace of the poet, John Dryden, 1631-1700, and the English churchman, historian and author, Thomas Fuller, 1608-1661.

For a successful applicant wanting to come to Aldwincle to live and work in our beautiful rural environment, we can offer you a warm welcome, support and a varied but satisfying and interesting way of life.

Clopton

Clopton is in the main a linear village along the B662, on the border with Cambridgeshire; there are approximately 60 houses with about 150 residents. Originally a farming village the population would have been mainly agricultural workers and their families but now only a small number of the population are directly involved with farming. The present population is a balanced mix of all ages, the occupations of the residents are varied with the majority working away from the local area. During recent times an increased number of residents are working from home, spending more of their amenity time locally and demonstrating an increased enthusiasm for the area.

For our Rogation service we travelled the village with tractors and trailers giving thanks at all the traditional places. We were joined by a gospel choir for our harvest celebration, with food served during the interval. A service of Remembrance was held with the last post played by the village trumpet player. Our Christmas celebration has most recently taken the form of a congregation participation Nativity complete with donkey and sheep, followed by turkey rolls. We've held successful fund raisers in the form of a quiz night with fish and chips, and a wine tasting evening.

We have taken the approach of encouraging all people to feel welcome and comfortable within the church building and have held our services on different days through the week to encourage those who have other commitments at weekends to still join us. The events were well attended and received promising feedback; however, we have not been able to gather since the Nativity of 2019.

We are looking for an incumbent who can help us build on this contemporary expression of church and allow us to complement those other churches in the Benefice who offer more traditional worship. The village lacks amenities and is off the public transport network; with no village hall, shop, or pub. We believe that St. Peter's can offer the village a central hub, not only of faith but also for other community purposes. We would like to encourage the use of the building for social interaction as well as personal reflection, through this use we hope to bring the community together, enabling us to involve more residents who have different qualities and skills to offer and would otherwise choose to stay outside of our church community.

We currently have a book share corner, which prior to covid, was proving very popular and encouraging people to visit the church.

Pilton

Pilton, being the smallest parish in the Benefice with only 55 inhabitants (24 households), is also one of the smallest villages in the Diocese. Our monthly Communion service usually attracts a congregation of about 6, with the fifth Sunday service averaging attendance from across the Benefice of about 15. The majority of parishioners celebrate the main festivals in the Church calendar and play an active role in fundraising events in aid of the Church. In addition to Church services, we have used the building for a variety of activities, such as a popular series of classical music concerts, tai chi exercises, village meetings and local history exhibitions. Although Pilton is a small, scattered community, it has an energetic PCC which works closely with other parishes in the Benefice through the sharing of resources, fundraising events, auditing of PCC accounts, conservation of church monuments, Harvest Suppers and Remembrance Day Services.

Manor Farm, in the centre of the village, is the main economic hub of the community, with 4 family members also farming in neighbouring Achurch and Titchmarsh. Apart from farming, residents are also engaged in a variety of professions including accountancy, child care, engineering, insurance, school maintenance, telecommunications, painting and decorating. There are 10 young people under the age of 9 and 10 people are no longer in fulltime employment.

Stoke Doyle

Being the second smallest parish in the Benefice with only 40 houses, Stoke Doyle is a very friendly community where everyone looks out for their neighbour. This was particularly apparent in the Covid pandemic when a Whatsapp group was set up - 'the Hub', and volunteers carried out shopping and prescription runs for those unable to leave their homes. This community spirit extends to the church; although the congregation size is small and parishioners mainly elderly, residents are always willing to support fund raising events, by making cakes, buying tickets or helping with church cleaning. Our wildlife churchyard is a very important part of Stoke Doyle life with willing helpers for mowing, the Open afternoon in the summer and the Churchyard clear up in the autumn.

St Rumbald tower houses a wonderful ring of 5 Thomas Eayre Bells. The whole village community supports projects like the recent bell restoration, with volunteers giving many days to assist with the re-hanging. Now we enjoy the sound of the bells again, which ring for some of our services, and of course on the regular Wednesday afternoon ringing practice which attracts ringers not only from the village but the Benefice and beyond.

Other recent projects undertaken include the installation of a kitchenette / servery adjacent to the organ, the refurbishment of the north windows, repair of the west doors and we continue to persevere with plans for a toilet / store room, in a new building. Stoke Doyle is very supportive of the annual Ride and Stride raising money for the Northamptonshire Historic Churches Trust, and projects benefit from grants from the NHCT and, of course, half the sponsorship money comes back to the church.

Monthly communion services have a small but loyal congregation with about half coming from Oundle or the Benefice. Our special services of Harvest, Rogation, Remembrance and more recently a service raising money for Ukraine are always well supported. A music group, the Ruff Recorders, have regular practices in the church and contribute to services and particularly to a 'Christmas Cracker' an evening of readings, music and carols that has been held for more than 20 years.

We look forward to welcoming a new incumbent who would support and encourage us in our small community by visiting and getting involved in our projects and activities as well as services.

Titchmarsh

Titchmarsh is an active community with several village organisations involved in running various facilities and fundraising events. The PCC is an integral part of that community and PCC members serve on the Clubroom Committee, Fete Committee, Playing Fields Committee and are involved in running the Village Shop (a community enterprise).

Although there is a relatively small cohort of regular churchgoers, the wider village give strong support to the church through regular giving, attendance at fundraising events, helping with churchyard tidying and other tasks. This support has strengthened over the last few years since the reordering of the church which has led to more extensive and varied use of the facilities, e.g. Monday Morning Café run by PCC members and a rota of village volunteers, messy church, forest school, village fete, fruit & vegetable show, exercise classes, concerts, meetings, fundraising events, birthday parties, and in 2016 a wedding reception.

However, the recent sale of a development option on Glebe Land in the parish is providing a challenge to the relationship between this church and the local community as well as affecting other churches in the Nene Valley.

Titchmarsh PCC took a leading role during the covid pandemic – initiating on-line church services which continue to this day and taking an active part in "Support@Titchmarsh" a group set up to deal

with the early impacts of the pandemic by identifying vulnerable members of the community, providing help with shopping, picking up prescriptions and providing comfort & emotional support. Titchmarsh PCC see ourselves as relaxed, welcoming, non-dogmatic, open minded and cheerful. We see the complementary relationship between priest and congregation as embodying two-way learning & support.

To find out more about Titchmarsh please visit www.titchmarsh.info

Thorpe Achurch

The 13th Century church, located in Achurch and in good repair, serves as the parish church for 4 villages: Achurch, Thorpe Waterville, Lilford & Wigsthorpe. It is situated in a very tranquil location and has been listed as one of the 100 best churches to visit in the county. A very popular footpath on the Nene Way leads through the churchyard. The church is opened regularly to encourage passers-by to visit.

Although the villages enjoy cordial relations, they do see themselves as individual communities and events are rarely shared: for instance, separate parties were held to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. They are very small communities, so residents in each village generally know and are supportive of each other. During Covid, younger residents helped those more vulnerable or shielding with shopping, prescription collection etc. Whenever it was allowed, the church was always opened for parishioners and visitors to safely enter and use the church for private prayer.

Church congregations are generally small and mostly come from Achurch. Other villages tend to feel less connection to a church that is some distance from their home communities. Larger events, such as the Christmas Carol Service and Harvest Festival are attended by residents across the parish. We have also held Experience Christmas and Experience Easter events which attracted visitors from both the villages and the surrounding area.

We want to build on our work to encourage more people into the church. Currently, opportunities to do so are limited by the age of the building and resulting lack of facilities. An application for a faculty to install a toilet and servery has been submitted. We hope to be able to welcome more of the community for events, increasing wider participation in church.

Wadenhoe

Wadenhoe has a rural community of approximately 120 residents. While there are very few families with young children, the age range of the residents is broadly balanced between the younger residents, middle aged and retired.

The church has a small worshipping congregation for the two regular services (Communion and Evensong) every month but has a close working relationship with many non-churchgoers from the village who are always willing to help and support the church with many of the usual day-to-day tasks, such as, cleaning, providing and arranging flowers and greenery to decorate the church on special occasions and churchyard mowing. They also help with the preparation of the church for the Christmas Eve Crib Service by setting up the stable scene with the provision of a 'stable door' and straw on the floor and provide a donkey and some sheep for the crib service and the donkey which usually leads the procession up the hill into the church on Palm Sunday.

From time to time, the church is also used by some musicians from outside the Benefice for CD recording sessions of string arrangements for cello and also for violin and cello duets.

Information about the church and wider village and village hall can be found at

wadenhoechurch.org.uk and at www.wadenhoetrust.org

Our Churches

All of the churches in the Benefice are listed and range in age from early medieval to Victorian. Visitors to our churches comment on the wonderful atmosphere of peace and friendship they experience.

Much work has been undertaken over the last twenty to thirty years and the churches are now all sound and weathertight. A great deal has been done in recent years to improve heating and lighting. Some reordering has been undertaken and there are still aspirations for further restoration and development. A sense of tradition has been maintained whilst providing for a wider range of use in some churches. We are keen to provide a welcoming environment and appreciate that further developments are required in some of our buildings. The PCCs are very active in this area and the communities (including non-churchgoers) have been very supportive.

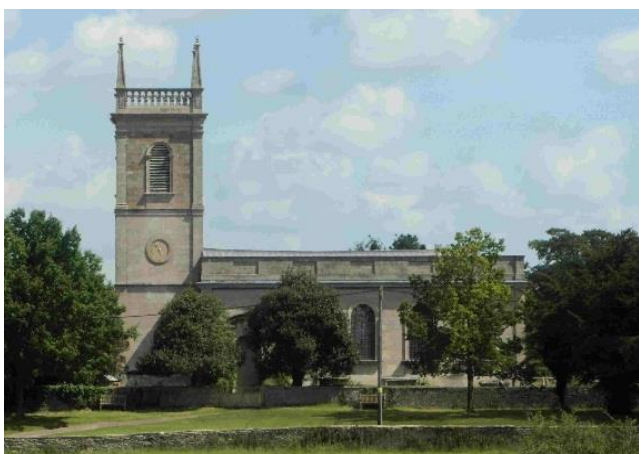
St Peter, Aldwincle



All Saints & St Mary, Pilton



St Rumbald's, Stoke Doyle



St Mary the Virgin, Titchmarsh



St Michael and All Angels, Wadenhoe



St John the Baptist, Thorpe Achurch



St Peter, Clopton



Aldwincle Rectory

The Benefice rectory is in the centre of Aldwincle – although well set back from Main Street. It is situated next to the church, playground and village hall, a short walk from the primary school and farm. The Nene Valley footpath runs along the north side of the property. The village also has a small shop and a garage although it does not sell fuel.

The house has the benefit of double glazing, loft and cavity wall insulation. Heating is provided by an oil-fired boiler with the oil tank being situated behind the large single garage. There is an open fire in the lounge and patio doors lead into the garden.

The study is a good size for parish work and is accessed immediately from the front door, although the downstairs W.C. is further along the hallway.

The house is in reasonable decorative order.

The living room (and patio), dining room, kitchen and 3 of the bedrooms have good views across the garden (a belt of bulbs from end to end in spring) to a field, owned by a number of near neighbours, which is used for community events and occasionally grazing sheep.

The kitchen has a galley layout with a breakfast bar and whilst narrow has good views into the garden. There is an adjoining utility room housing the boiler and a Belfast sink.

Upstairs the property has 4 bedrooms, 3 of which are a good size and all of which have good sized built-in wardrobes. The main bedroom also has a fitted sink/vanity unit. In addition to the downstairs W.C. there is a family bathroom upstairs, a separate W.C. and a separate shower room. The loft is part boarded and spacious.

The garden is large and, whilst mostly grassed, has a number of mature trees and significant hedging. It also has some wildlife friendly areas, mainly along the boundaries and under the trees. It was much enjoyed by the previous rector's grandsons. The garden has its own private gate onto the Nene Valley Way. It is only a 20 minute walk to Wadenhoe, and a few yards down the path there are stunning views across the river to most of the Benefice!

Our Current Services

Current regular service pattern is shown in the table below:

Time	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
9.00am	Holy Communion		Holy Communion Morning Prayer	Holy Communion	
10.30am	Holy Communion with Sunday School	Holy Communion Online Morning Prayer	Holy Communion	Holy Communion Online Morning Prayer	Holy Communion Benefice Service Morning Prayer
4.30pm				Family Service	
6.00pm		Evening Prayer or Compline	Evening Prayer	Evening Prayer	
7.30pm	Thursday Praise - online				

Holy Communion services are Common Worship.
Morning Prayer is adapted Common Worship
Evening Prayer and Compline are Prayer Book

Special Annual Services

Christmas - Carol services are held in all churches; Christmas Eve Crib services are held in Wadenhoe (with donkey and sheep!) and Aldwincle; Midnight Holy Communion is held in Titchmarsh and Stoke Doyle; and a Christmas morning service is held in Achurch.

A Christingle service is held each year and in 2020 took place on-line with children from across the Benefice joining in. In 2021 the service returned to Titchmarsh church and was well attended by children from other parishes. The two schools hold their own carol services in church.

Pre-covid attendance over the Christmas tide is usually around 1400 adults and 250 children.

Lent - Ash Wednesday is celebrated and a weekly Lent discussion group meets.

Mothering Sunday – normally celebrated in more than one church with the giving of flowers.

Palm Sunday - A special service is held in Wadenhoe which usually includes a procession led by a donkey up the hill into the church.

Holy Week and Easter - Maundy Thursday is kept with a Holy Communion service and supper in Titchmarsh. The three hours on the cross are marked with a service for each hour in one of the churches. Easter Day is celebrated with Holy Communion. A sunrise service is held in Wadenhoe which prior to covid was followed by breakfast.

Attendance over Holy Week for the Benefice is usually around 250.

Patronal Festivals - Each parish celebrates its Patronal Festival.

Rogation - Clopton marks rogation tide by a worship - walk through the village which is well attended by the villagers. Stoke Doyle usually has an evening rogation service which is also well attended.

Harvest Festivals - Each parish celebrates Harvest with a thanksgiving service. Harvest suppers/lunches are linked to the services with some parishes sharing a meal. The two schools celebrate harvest by bringing the children into church to present their gifts.

All Souls - At All Souls-tide we hold a special service each year to which the families and friends of those who have died in recent years are invited. This has been found to be very helpful to many people.

Remembrance Sunday - services are held in at least three churches with a service conducted at the War Memorials on the village greens in Wadenhoe and Aldwincle when the names of those villagers who died in the two Great Wars are read out and remembered and a wreath provided by the church is laid on the memorial in their memory. In Titchmarsh as part of the church service, names are read out, a wreath placed on the War Memorial in the churchyard and a villager plays the Last Post & Reveille on the bugle.

Benefice Data

	Aldwin cle	Clopton*	Pilton	Stoke Doyle	Thorpe - Achurch	Titchmarsh	Wadenhoe
No. on electoral role	21		15	15	13	42	16
Average attendance in 2021	18		9	13	10	19	12
Attendance Easter 2022	Maundy Thursday – HC + Supper 14 Good Friday – 11am 11 , Noon 7, 1pm 8 Sunrise Service 6am 19 Easter HC 10.30am Aldwincle 28, Titchmarsh 39						

Information in the table below relates to 2021 and summarises for the Benefice

As the numbers are small they can vary significantly from year to year.

Baptisms	Marriages	Funerals
5	1	5
	1 blessing	4 internments
		6 burial of ashes

Youth and Children's Work

Schools

Titchmarsh CofE and Trinity CofE (Aldwincle) have a close relationship with the churches in their villages. Trinity school is now an academy in the Peterborough Diocesan Trust and has one church nominated governor. Titchmarsh school has two foundation governors. Both schools serve the village communities and also have many children from the neighbouring towns of Thrapston and Islip.

Titchmarsh School usually holds church services 2 or 3 times a term with special services held for May Day, Leavers, Harvest Festival & Christmas. During the vacancy this has increased to twice a month. The school has also been involved in educational activities relating to the restoration of the organ and other art projects.

Trinity School celebrates Harvest, Christmas, Easter and end of year with a special service in church as well as other services. During the vacancy conducting Collective Worship in school has increased to at least twice a half-term. In 2020 and 2021 the children made Christmas cards for the elderly and those living alone which were distributed by members of the Benefice. An RE day was held in July 2021 with the rector and reader assisting on the playing field with prayer stations linked to the school values.

Family Services

All services welcome people of any age. However, Family Services do provide worship with a more active involvement of young people. At the start of lockdown these services went on line and involved contributions from young people as readers, leading prayers and responses as well as a fun activity. From May 2022 the Family service returned to church on the fourth Sunday of the month initially at Titchmarsh.

Sunday School

Sunday School resumed in March 2022 and is held on the 1st Sunday of each month as part of morning Holy Communion. This is run by Dr Kate Hughes with help from others and attracts several families.

'Youth Worship' for all the deanery takes place in Oundle on the third Sunday evening of the month.

Benefice Youth Group

A Benefice Youth Group was established in the autumn of 2019, meeting monthly in different churches. It was organised by Carolyn Brawn, Reader, with the assistance of Caroline Hope and Dr Kate Hughes. It was well supported by teenagers from the Benefice and also from neighbouring villages – attendance was about 13. The group closed at lockdown and now many of the original members have moved on with pressures of exams. Following discussions with the Souster Youth Trust, we are hoping to relaunch.

Monday Morning Cafe

This takes place in Titchmarsh church and attracts people of all ages from tiny tots to the more mature in years. It was started by PCC members and village mums but now it is run by a rota of villagers.

Benefice Groups, Activities, Communication

The Benefice has a large number of activities associated with the churches. Some are held in church as well as in nearby village halls. Each parish runs their own funding raising events and occasional benefice ones have been held.

Regular events include:

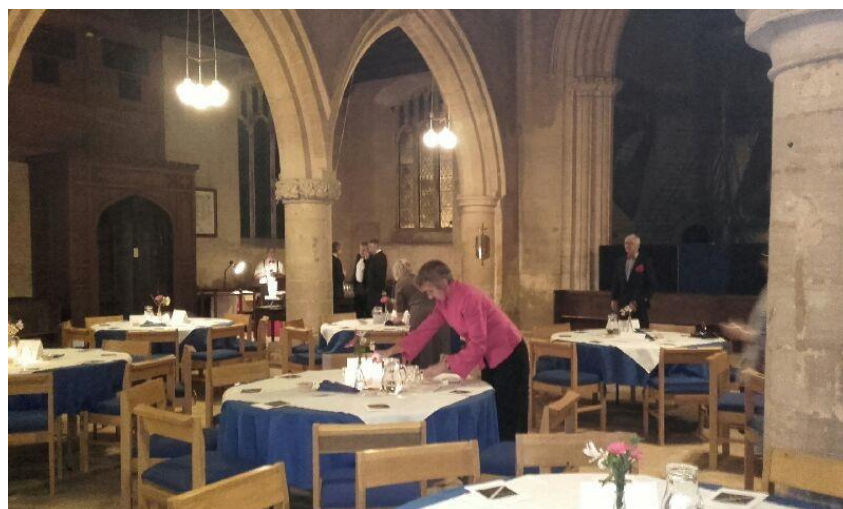
- Bible study
- Monday Morning Cafe
- Friendly Club
- WI
- Messy Church
- Forest School
- Book swaps

Annual events include:

- Fetes
- BBQs
- Rogation walks
- Christmas extravaganza
- Harvest Lunches and Suppers
- Christmas Fayres
- Big Lunch
- Concerts
- Oundle Festival - Music in Special Places
- Oundle Organ Scholars
- Quizzes
- Summer Balls

One off events:

- Birthday parties
- Wedding receptions
- Arts & Crafts exhibitions
- Fashion Shows
- Medieval evenings with ceilidhs
- Murder Mystery evenings
- Macmillan Coffee Mornings
- Tours of the Church – U3A, history groups
- Church Open days
- Open Gardens - Teas
- Wine tastings
- Singing classes & rehearsals
- Dance classes



Communications

Pink sheet - The Benefice has a free bi-monthly church newsletter which includes a letter from the rector or ministry team, details of all church services and updates from each parish on church and non-church events. It is delivered to all households in the benefice except for Titchmarsh where copies are left in the church and the village shop.

Titchmarsh Times - is a free bi-monthly village newsletter which includes details of the services for the benefice, the rota for Titchmarsh and the rector's letter as well as local news and other articles. It is paid for by Titchmarsh Parish Council and is distributed to every house in the village.

Achurch and Wadenhoe have their websites managed by a member of the congregation. Titchmarsh's website is sponsored and paid for by the Parish Council but the church content is managed by the churchwardens. All churches feature on A Church Near You.

A Benefice facebook page was established as the Benefice went into lockdown. This is managed by Caroline Hope, who updates services and special events. The page has a good following.

Charities we support:

Royal British Legion
Cransley Hospice
National Churches Trust
Northants Historic Churches Trust
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
The Children's Society
Thrapston Food Bank

Titchmarsh sponsors students in the Bombay Teen project which is run by the Rev Deveraj. The charity helps remove young girls and children from the red-light districts of Mumbai and gives them a safe place to live and an education, all within a Christian ethos.

Support Available

Benefice ministry team:

Dr Beatrice Brandon – NSM Assistant Priest

Carolyn Brawn - Reader

Marilyn Percy – Lay Minister in training

There are licensed Eucharistic assistants in all churches. The churchwardens of Titchmarsh are happy to take non-eucharistic services if required.

Dr Kate Hughes – Sunday school leader

Each parish has a PCC with secretary and treasurer. Titchmarsh meets monthly with a churchwarden taking the chair. Other parishes meet less frequently with the lay vice chair taking the chair. Churchwardens and PCC members maintain the fabric of the buildings and organise any necessary rotas.

Members of the congregations, including young people, are involved in lesson reading and writing and leading intercessions.

The Benefice is very lucky to have a number of excellent organists who provide music for most services.

The Benefice takes the Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults very seriously. To assist the Rector, the Reader has now been appointed to process DBS applications.

One Parish Safeguarding Officer covers Titchmarsh and will also cover Clopton.

One Parish Safeguarding Officer covers Aldwincle and Thorpe Achurch.

At the current time the appointment of Parish Safeguarding Officer(s) to cover Pilton, Stoke Doyle and Wadenhoe is under discussion.

Deanery Overview and Support

The Deanery of Oundle is a largely rural deanery that lies within the Archdeaconry of Oakham in the Diocese of Peterborough. It comprises 36 parishes that are organised into seven benefices with eight stipendiary clergy and many active and supportive retired clergy. There are two larger centres of population: Oundle (c6000) and Thrapston (c7000). The population of the villages range between c1200 (King's Cliffe) and c50 (Pilton).

The Rural Dean is the The Venerable Alison Booker, also Archdeacon of Oakham, this is not envisaged to be a long term situation as we are advertising for a Rural Dean and Incumbent in the Deanery. The Deanery has a long-established culture of close partnership and common working between clergy and lay ministers. All clergy and lay ministers belong to the 'College of Ministers', our equivalent of a clergy chapter, which meets monthly for, amongst other things, bible study, prayer and discussion. In addition, there is a well-attended weekly College of Ministers communion service at 8:30am on Tuesdays. An annual quiet day is also part of our programme as well as social gatherings.

As we pray together and share together so we look to support and encourage one another in outreach and ministry. We want to work together to see our churches grow in numbers as people come to faith in Christ and then grow in that faith. The Deanery is successfully responding to the diocesan strategy of moving towards an entirely cost of ministry based share system. Though this is a challenge for smaller parishes we are excited to be in a diocese where there is a heart to see church growth and a strategy to fund it. We are committed to keeping our current benefice boundaries – not creating larger benefices – and seeking patterns of ministry which suit each setting. When it comes to paying parish share we have a history of helping each other, when needed, across parish and benefice boundaries.

The deanery schools are experiencing the pressure that comes with change. In September 2015 the ten Lower Schools all became Primary Schools as East Northamptonshire phased out middle schools and became 'two-tier'. Prince William School became a Secondary Academy with a Sixth Form Centre. In addition, the independent Oundle School and its feeder prep school Laxton Junior are a strong presence in Oundle town.

The Oundle Churches' Youth Association (OCYA) works with young people in schools across the whole deanery – which is also the Prince William School catchment area. A monthly Youth Worship service for young people across the deanery, and across denominations, takes place in Oundle and we benefit greatly from the support of the Archdeaconry Youth Missioner, Steve Chadwick.

St Peter's, Oundle has a CYM (Centre for Youth Ministry) intern, working within the town, local schools and the deanery. The clergy support this work and are active within their benefice schools. A Candlemas service is held in February. Every Year 4 child in the deanery – from every school (state and independent; Church and community school alike) - attends as together we celebrate Jesus the Light of the World.

The deanery has a strong identity, a supportive college of ministers and a common desire to see our churches grow.