

Parish Profile

The Seven Churches Benefice

Aldwinkle, Clopton, Pilton, Stoke Doyle, Thorpe Achurch, Titchmarsh, Wadenhoe



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

2021

Welcome

If you would you like to come to live and work in a rural benefice with a set of interesting opportunities, we hope that you will read our profile and apply for the post of Rector of our benefice.

Whilst much of this profile reflects the position of the benefice pre-covid, we have also included a section explaining the impact of the pandemic, our response and how we see the future effects of the pandemic in both the short and long term.

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

- Who we are as a benefice;
- How covid has impacted on the benefice;
- Where we are in our spiritual life;
- What issues we are facing in the world of the rural church;
- What the challenges and opportunities are likely to be for all of us; and
- What we are looking for in our new rector.

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Our Vision Statement is:

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.

Prior to covid, against the national trend of declining church attendances in rural areas, this benefice was holding its own and some of our parishes were really flourishing.

We now live in extraordinary times, and so we are looking for a supportive relationship with our new rector to help us emerge from the pandemic revitalised and motivated to build on our pre-covid progress.

Who are we as a benefice?

We are a benefice of 7 distinct parishes - some have ageing congregations; though others have attracted young families living locally. The churches are generally in a satisfactory state of repair, though the funds available to maintain each of them differ widely.

Some parishes have less members willing and able to help with and run services while others rely more heavily on ordained or lay ministry support.

In small communities such as ours, the “law of small numbers” applies: a very few people can make a big impact. For example, if a prominent supporter of a church dies this could result in a windfall financial gain through a legacy, or the loss of a substantial income stream or both. If a PCC is composed of willing but ageing members, then the energy for attempting new things and for fundraising can be diminished until a younger generation can be encouraged to step up.

In the Seven Churches Benefice it is fair to say that we are not all in the same place in this cycle and currently each parish has a different blend of needs.

Church wardens, treasurers and PCCs consult informally in a number of different ways such as experience with architects and builders, choice of security systems and auditing of accounts. We have recently decided to hold more regular churchwardens’ meetings to consider strategic issues and further share experience and ideas.

Each of the parishes has provided a brief description of their village and their church and these can be found in Annexes A & C

Impact, Response and Consequences

In March 2020 when the Government ordered all the churches to close it had a tremendous impact on all Christian communities.

We no longer had the ability to worship together in our churches. People were isolated in their houses.

Finances took a huge hit while there were no more collections or fundraising opportunities.

Government and national church leadership seemed to be struggling. Initially at least, other than at the local benefice level, very little spiritual guidance seemed to be given.

It was clear that we would need to pick up the baton and organise ourselves!

Response

As people started working from home and employing technology to hold on-line meetings, it was decided to give this a go for on-line church services. A number of parishioners had already tried the broadcast/streamed services but, although worthy, had found them remote and unengaging.

Our first experimental service was for Maundy Thursday (9th April 2020) where a “last supper” service was held. This was such a success that a Good Friday and two Easter Sunday services, including a sunrise service, were put together quickly and held on-line.

After this, on-line services were held weekly – a communion service was held once a month and the others were morning prayer. In addition, a monthly on-line afternoon family service was held. Invitations to the local on-line services were sent out to the whole benefice and gradually some people from further afield, with village contacts, heard about us and also joined in. Members of the congregation read lessons (Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel) and led prayers. Two members of the clergy team took part each week – one leading and the other preaching. This opportunity for so many to contribute to each service, and just the ability to see other people and chat before and after the service, provided great support through this difficult time.

At the start of the pandemic all the parishes got involved with local village support networks to identify vulnerable people and to help not only with practical tasks like shopping and collecting prescriptions but also listening and providing comfort. This support continued at least until supermarkets and healthcare providers had put in place more robust and dependable arrangements.

Once Government allowed churches to re-open some in the benefice did so – although some people, particularly those with underlying health issues, were still reluctant to come out - and we continued with on-line services.

Consequences

Finances for both 2020 and 2021 have taken a substantial hit as indeed they have for all parishes and the diocese itself. It is unlikely that all parishes within the benefice will be able to pay their full parish share this year. Some will be able to as they have sufficient reserves.

In some cases, it may take several years to recover fully to the pre-covid position as reserves are rebuilt and confidence in participating in fundraising events is restored.

Where are we in our spiritual life?

Church services

Since March 2020 we have been holding on-line services. Until May 2021 this involved a weekly Sunday morning service (1 in 4 Holy Communion and the rest Morning Prayer) and a monthly Sunday afternoon family service. Since May 2021 the on-line Sunday morning services have reduced to twice monthly. Services in church resumed in Summer 2020 – although some churches again suspended services in church during the subsequent lockdowns. Later in this profile we have set out the current service pattern, attendance figures for 2019 and other relevant statistics.

Recently we undertook a survey to ask how people would like to see the provision of church services post-covid. We saw an opportunity to maybe do things differently as we emerged from the pandemic.

The results were interesting. Some of the main messages to come out of the detailed responses showed there was:

- a lot of support for continuing with on-line services - particularly as these helped some of those less able to get to church;
- good support for family services and continuing with the monthly Sunday School;
- some reticence about travelling for services in other parishes within the benefice with a lot of “maybes” being ticked;
- a strong preference for traditional hymns with organist – although supporters of the family services indicated more willingness to experiment with modern and/or live music;
- a clear minority favour traditional services, are not interested in on-line services and would prefer BCP services in their own church at least once a month; and
- significant support for monthly evening services – Compline or Evening Prayer

In the light of the information gathered we would hope to be able to undertake a review of the benefice service pattern with the new clergy team.

Study and Discussion

Except in Summer there is a weekly discussion group on Wednesday mornings. Since April 2020 this has been held on-line but from September 2021 has resumed in Titchmarsh Church with breakfast. The group uses the bible and/or study guides (e.g. the Pilgrim and York courses) to stimulate varied and interesting discussions covering the history of the Bible, biblical interpretation and its relevance to modern life.

During Lent there has been an evening study group, generally led by the Rector, which in 2021 went on-line. Short benefice-wide studies, using the Pilgrim series, have been run on an ad-hoc basis.

Young People and Children

Details of services and activities for young people and children are set out in Annex G.

Thursday Praise

In June 2021 a monthly Thursday Praise was instigated by our Reader. This is an hour of worship online involving prayer, readings and music from traditional hymns to modern worship songs. There are live contributions from piano and guitar. People are encouraged to bring readings to share either biblical, Christian literature or poetry, and it provides worship with a difference from liturgy led services.

What issues face our rural church?

The Church of England currently faces many issues but some of these are particular to rural churches and the Seven Churches Benefice in particular:

- 7 parishes/communities with different needs and expectations to be supported by a half time priest;
- Small populations and smaller congregations responsible for the cost, maintenance, insurance and restoration of old buildings – some of which are very large and/or listed;
- Having buildings which are not designed or suitable for the 21st century nor the size of congregation – many with pews and no catering or toilet facilities, and with antiquated and expensive heating;
- The continuing impact of covid on income streams – many rural churches rely on community fundraising events;
- The Parish Share, even going from a full-time priest down to a half-time priest in 2018, has risen from £40600 in 2016 to £49535 in 2020 - a rise of around 22%;
- The allocation of Parish Share between parishes has always been a bone of contention because whatever formula is used for the breakdown of our benefice contribution, some of our parishes will be adversely affected;
- Diocese action promoting industrial development on arable Glebe Land in the Nene Valley which is impacting on the church's relationship with our local communities.

What are the challenges and opportunities likely to be?

- 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. We intend to use the regular Church Wardens meetings to see how we can better achieve this, acknowledging that we must be open, honest, prepared to compromise and seek to help each other more.
- We must keep the church at the heart of the community as we are dependent on non-churchgoing community members for both financial and practical support.
- The impacts of climate change are affecting the whole world and we need to play our part in trying to move our churches to net zero by looking at new ways of doing things.

We are looking forward to the appointment of a new rector who will work with us and provide guidance to help us rise to the challenges.

What are we looking for in our Rector?

Someone who:

- endeavors to model a ministry of care, kindness and compassion;
- has vision, relates well to people of all ages, especially enthusing young people;
- will provide leadership in reaching out to those who come to church regularly and those who do not, in order to help us grow our church;
- will work with each parish to help identify and fulfil their individual needs;
- is forward thinking whilst appreciating tradition;
- is open minded and sensitive to the needs of others with good social and communication skills;
- will be welcoming to people of different socio-economic, gender and ethnic backgrounds, and those in different kinds of relationships;
- is able to organise, delegate, motivate and help develop the gifts of others;
- has a sense of humour.

OUR COMMITMENT IS TO HELP BY:

- being welcoming and friendly;
- giving practical and emotional support ;
- continuing to take responsibility for the fabric of the buildings;
- building links between the church and our own communities and by our actions live the Word;
- working with you to achieve our Vision.

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

<https://wadenhoechurch.org.uk/>

www.oundledeanery.org.uk

Informal contact can be made with:

The Rural Dean of Oundle Revd Stephen Webster 018232 275631
stephen@stpetersoundle.co.uk

Assistant Priest in the Benefice: Revd Liz Waller Tel 01733 242412; eawaller@btinternet.com
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 Archdeacon of Oakham

Tel 01733 887017

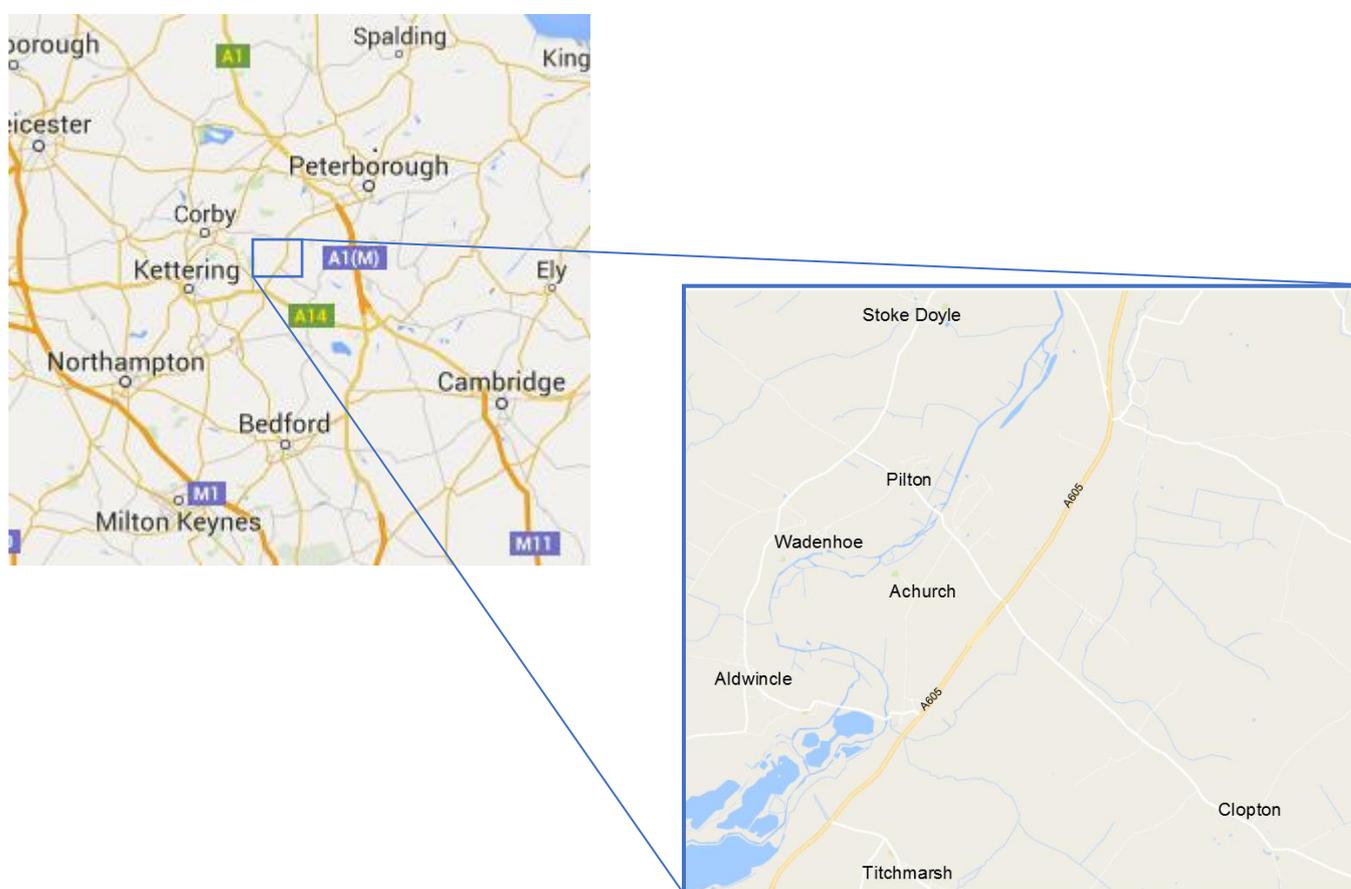
The Diocesan Office, The Palace, Peterborough PE1 1YB
archdeacon.oakham@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Benefice – Villages

In 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 Aldwincle, Titchmarsh and Wadenhoe provide a hub for social activities in the benefice.

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

Village of Aldwincle

Aldwincle is a long, attractive, largely stone-built village (with many Grade II listed buildings) in a bend of the River Nene. It has two 13th century churches (one is redundant) and a Baptist Chapel. The remains of an Anglo-Saxon settlement lies in its north east and two more are further south.

It was a community based on farming and was part of the Lilford estate. The Merchant Venturers acquired it after the war. They reduced the number of farms to one, dividing up the land between them. Most of the houses were sold. One of the farms offers B and B and has holiday cottages over-looking a trout lake and is next to the Titchmarsh Nature Reserve. Being on the Nene Way it attracts many walkers and cyclists. There is a small, well stocked village shop and a garage which does MOTs and services and repairs cars.

The voluntary controlled primary school has a current roll of 150. Here the rector conducts assemblies and generally has a good relationship. Unfortunately, it only has very few children from the village. A bus transports the older young people to the secondary school in Oundle. The village hall has recently been refurbished and has good resources (see parish council website www.aldwincleparishcouncil.org.uk). It is well used by local organisations and families.



Village of 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.

Village of Pilton

Pilton, one of the smallest parishes in Oundle Deanery, consists of 52 people spread across 24 households. It is a picturesque hamlet, in a conservation area. Manor Farm, in the centre of the village, is the main economic hub of the community, in that it provides employment for 4 family members. They use fields for sheep, cattle and arable farming in Achurch and Titchmarsh, as well as Pilton.

Six properties are in the open countryside beyond the main part of the village. The parish also includes a farmer with a small holding, and another farmer from the neighbouring parish of Stoke Doyle rents a few fields. During the COVID pandemic home working has become the norm. People have been working for themselves, or for companies based in Oundle, Barnwell, Polebrook, Peterborough, Molesworth and/or Huntingdon in a variety of professions, including engineering, architecture, insurance, accountancy, telecommunications, catering, painting & decorating. Ten people in the village are no longer in full time employment and a London based family has a second home in the village. Young people under 18 constitute 20% of our population.

Pilton has close historical links with other villages in the Benefice, having been linked to Wadenhoe as a United Benefice since 1926. The rector of both parishes lived either in Wadenhoe or at Pilton Manor. From its origins as an estate village, Pilton also has close working and family connections with Lilford and Achurch.

Village of Stoke Doyle

Stoke Doyle Parish covers an area of 636 hectares - a mixture of arable and grazing land in two farms. The River Nene marks the eastern boundary of the parish which slopes gently upwards to the west, divided only by the north-south Oundle-Aldwincle road.

The village itself consists of forty-one houses, a church and a pub. The present population is some 83 persons (67 adults & 16 young people under eighteen years of age). Traditionally they would have been mainly agricultural workers and their families, however now it is a very diverse population. The majority of residents work outside the parish boundary, some quite local, others commuting to Peterborough and the other major towns, and even to London. An increase has been seen in the last couple of years in people working from home, and of course this has increased more during the pandemic. These are both home office workers working for major commercial organisations or running their own businesses with the aid of internet communications, and a number of small business entrepreneurs, operating from home and the local vicinity, covering the village and the surrounding area.

The village community is always supportive of church fundraising events such as concerts, the annual Ride and Stride for the Historic Churches Trust and churchyard open days and churchyard clear ups, and the biennial village party has involved the majority of villagers. The obvious assets of the village lie in its history. These can be seen in the listed and other historical buildings which date from the early seventeenth century to the mid nineteenth century and include The Old Rectory, St Rumbald Church, Manor Farm House, the Shuckburgh Arms, Mill House, and The Row (the row of 14 cottages which runs through the centre of the village).



Villages of Thorpe Achurch and Lilford Cum Wigsthorpe:

This parish comprises of 4 hamlets: Achurch, Thorpe Waterville, Lilford and Wigsthorpe. The number of households in the parish is 421. Each hamlet has its own strong individual identity and a good community spirit. Most houses are privately owned and are lived in by a wide age range, from young families to retirees.

Most of the houses in Achurch, Lilford and Wigsthorpe were built as accommodation for the estate workers of nearby Lilford Hall in the 19th century, replacing medieval villages. Achurch consists primarily of a row of former estate houses, now privately owned. The parish church of St John the Baptist is located here. The farmhouse is no longer a working farm and the former farm buildings have recently been converted into 4 houses.

Lilford residents live mainly in a row of old estate houses on a private road owned by Lilford Hall. There is one farm in the hamlet.

Wigsthorpe is situated across the A605 and at the furthest distance from the other hamlets and is a farming community with two farms and a few houses.

Thorpe Waterville still retains some pre 19th century houses including Thorpe Castle, with the remains of a medieval manor in its grounds, mixed in with 20th century properties. A small development of modern houses next to the former railway station and railway workers' houses is separated from the rest of the village by the A605. It also has a popular public house, The Fox, situated by the main road.

Although the four communities are very different in character, harmonious relations between them are fostered by having one Church and a common Parish Council.

Village of Titchmarsh

Titchmarsh is a geographically large parish with a boundary of some 18 miles which is walked in May each year. It is by some margin the largest parish in the benefice in terms of geographical area, its population of around 600, and the size of its church building. The village has around 260 houses and boasts a CofE primary school, community shop, public house, clubroom (hosting a pre-school), playing fields and a pavilion as well as the Grade 1 listed church.

Titchmarsh is an active community with several village organisations involved in running various facilities and fundraising events. Members of the PCC serve on the Clubroom Committee, Fete Committee and Playing Fields Committee. Other village groups include a reading group, music group and walking group

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, Big Lunch, fundraising events, birthday parties, and in 2016 a wedding reception.

In 2019 Titchmarsh PCC ran a very successful stewardship campaign which turned an £8k loss in 2018 into a £8k profit in 2019. Although finances were hit in 2020, the results of the campaign together with healthy reserves enabled Titchmarsh to pay its Parish Share in full for 2020 and the parish will be in a position to do so again in 2021.

Early in the covid pandemic, Titchmarsh PCC set up a weekly on-line service and invited members from all round the benefice and beyond to join us. On Christmas Eve we had attendees from New Zealand, Portugal, Hampshire and Kingston-upon-Thames enabling families to worship together at this special time of year. On-line services are continuing although currently less frequently. More information about these services is contained in Annex D.”

Members of the PCC and congregation were heavily involved in “Support@Titchmarsh” a group set up to deal with the impact of the pandemic. Before other agencies became organised, Support@Titchmarsh hit the ground running, identifying vulnerable members of the community, providing help with shopping, picking up prescriptions and providing comfort & emotional support.

The congregation of St Mary’s appreciates the history, tradition and evolution of the Christian faith whilst being prepared to be challenged by new ideas and different styles of worship. Currently our church services reflect this willingness for diversity and we would like to see this range of different services continue and expand even further.

We see ourselves as relaxed, welcoming, non-dogmatic, open minded and cheerful. We see the relationship between priest and congregation as being one of two-way learning & support.

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

Village of Wadenhoe



The pretty village of Wadenhoe is situated in a conservation area in the north-east of Northamptonshire alongside the river Nene, hidden from the bustle of modern life yet close to major access routes and lying about four miles west of Oundle. Wadenhoe has a lively community of approximately 120 residents with a broadly balanced age range between young families, the middle aged and the retired.

The village consists of about 68 picturesque houses and cottages, many of which are thatched, and a magnificent Jacobean Manor House (Wadenhoe House) in an elegant landscaped garden setting. Approximately 40% of the properties in the village are privately owned and the remainder are under the control of The Wadenhoe Trust. The Trust was established in the main to conserve and enhance for the public benefit the aesthetic architectural qualities of the village properties and as a result the village has not lost its rural charm and character and with the help of the residents ensures that the best traditions survive. Another purpose of the Trust was to further the advancement of religion. The village has a busy Public House situated on the banks of the river Nene, a well-appointed Village Hall also on the river, a small development of business units used by solicitors and a photographic studio.

Information about the wider village and village hall can be found at www.wadenhoetrust.org

Titchmarsh Glebe Land

In July 2020 the Peterborough Diocesan Board of Finance informed Titchmarsh PCC that it was in the process of negotiating a development option on 114 acres of Glebe Land within the Parish. Titchmarsh PCC were incensed both by the lack of consultation and the lack of consideration of the potential impact on relations between the church and the rest of the village community and put forward a comprehensive and detailed response opposing the option sale. There was a strong feeling that what was being proposed undermined **all** five marks of mission. Other parishes in the benefice were also concerned about the impact the Diocese' action would have on their relationships with their communities. Unfortunately, the Diocese gave no meaningful feedback and there remains no evidence that our response was properly considered. The Diocesan Board of Finance decided in November 2020 to proceed with the sale.

More recently further development on adjoining land has been proposed by a third party. Together these two proposals could create 300 acres of logistics and industrial units bordering the village. Such a development would be huge even on a national scale and should it go ahead will have a devastating impact on the community and the environment. Titchmarsh PCC intends to give all the support it can to the community in opposing both schemes and welcomes the support it has had from all the PCCs in the benefice and the Parish Councils.

Benefice - Church Buildings

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.

Each of the parishes has contributed a short description of their church building.

St Peter, Aldwincle



Not only is the church of St Peter a Grade I listed building, but in its grounds is a Grade I listed churchyard cross.

The earliest part of the church is an 1189 – 90 cylindrical pier with some crudely carved green men in the north aisle. The building has been added to, rebuilt and restored through the centuries. It was last reordered in 2013 when the 13 C font was moved to make it possible to gather round it during a Baptism. The removal of several pews has enabled us to accommodate the school more easily, to hold concerts and to have a nave altar for special services.

There are five bells. The lead-covered roof is safe-guarded by a security alarm.

The east end of the churchyard is kept as a wildflower meadow.

Our last quinquennial inspection report, completed in August 2016 was good but it suggested we should have our interesting medieval glass checked by an expert.

St Peter, Clopton

St. Peter's Church Clopton is a Victorian building erected in 1862, it replaced a medieval Church that had fallen into disrepair. The Church building is in a solid state requiring only general maintenance rather than restorative work. The roof was restored in 2008 with the support of English Heritage. A number of families within the parish support the church financially and/or help with cleaning and maintenance.

Our new churchwardens, Gareth and Julian, took over in early 2018, when church funds were depleted. Their aim was to raise the required funds for the material running of the church building and begin to build a community, with the church at its centre.

Like many rural churches our congregation had declined over the years, recently with the help and support of Brian we have begun rebuilding a community with a variety of events in St. Peter's.

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.

All Saints & St Mary, Pilton

The Church, built in local limestone, is mainly 13th century with a 14th century south porch. The bells date from 1480, 1550 and 1610. Our Victorian stained glass (all made by J. Hardman & Sons of Birmingham), encaustic floor tiles and carved wooden pews were installed as part of the extensive renovation that took place during the 1860s and 1870s.

Over the past 20 years our PCC has been engaged in an on-going programme of restoration, including the re-gilding and re-instatement of the weathervane, repairs to chest tombs, lime-washing the church walls, new lighting, two new windows, installation of



external glazing to protect 5 stained glass windows, new heating panels, refurbishment of the bells and the belfry, and roof and porch maintenance. In consequence, the last four quinquennial reviews have concluded that our Church is in a good state of repair.

Our monthly service usually attracts a congregation of 7 communicants, plus one or two Wadenhoe and Stoke Doyle residents. We like to have a family service on the 5th Sunday, which attracts an average attendance of about 12. The majority of parishioners play an active role in fundraising events in aid of the church, with concerts of classical music proving particularly popular in recent years. Our PCC has 8 members drawn from an electoral roll of 15.

St John the Baptist, Thorpe Achurch



The church of St John the Baptist was built in 1218 probably on the site of an older church. It was restored in 1862 when the north aisle was added and is a Grade 2* listed building. The east window depicting Our Lord the Good Shepherd is particularly beautiful when the morning sun shines through it. The building is in good repair with recent reroofing of Collyweston slates. Quinquennial inspection took place in June 2021 and there are no major works required.

The PCC aims to install a toilet and servery and improve the heating in the near future to make it a more useable space and encourage wider participation in church

events across the parish.

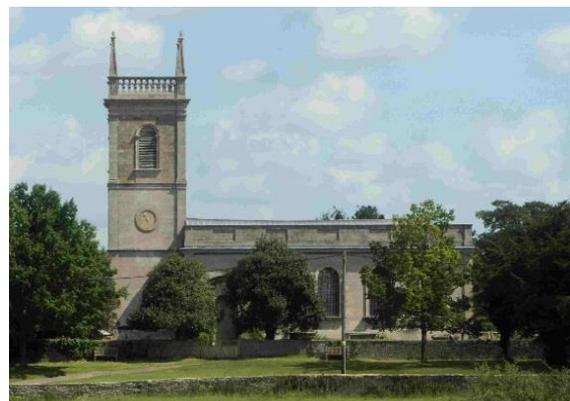
All inside furnishings date from the time of the restoration and include reredos, choir stalls, pulpit and organ as gifts from the Powys family of Lilford Hall. A large iron-bound wood chest from 1570 used to keep registers of baptisms, weddings and funerals and a bier are features. The church has four bells which are rung.

Church congregations are generally small and the majority of regular attendees tend to come from Achurch. It is perhaps unsurprising that the other villages tend to feel less of a connection to a church that is some distance from their own communities. However, larger events, such as the candle lit Christmas Carol service and Harvest Festival, are attended by residents across the parish.

St Rumbald's, Stoke Doyle

Stoke Doyle is the second smallest parish in the benefice, and at the end of Church Lane, a little away from the present village centre, is our fine Georgian Church of 1722, set at one of the highest points of the village.

The simplicity of the church, which replaces an older medieval (1265), church built on the same spot, has a single space of nave-cum-sanctuary which is a delight especially when sunlight streams through the clear glass of the c. 3,500 panes in the Georgian windows and shadows of the trees outside play on the color-washed walls. Surrounded by silence or the sound of sheep it can be a profoundly peaceful place.



There is a room north of the sanctuary, through an iron grill, which was formerly a mortuary chapel, and houses a very fine marble memorial by J.M.Rysbrack, but now serves as the vestry. The monument to St Edward Ward Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer is our finest and most noteworthy monument but much of the church remains untouched in modern times and many of the furnishings are contemporary with the new Georgian building. These include the four gilded panels which form a kind of reredos behind the altar (and carry the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the

Creed), the communion rail, the font, and the pulpit. The sounding board which was once above the pulpit has been used to make a lintel over the door into the tower.

To the west is the tower with a bell-chamber at the top housing the clock and 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 can enjoy the sound of the bells again, which ring for some of our services, and of course on practice nights.

Recent projects that we have undertaken and are looking to undertake in 2022/23 include the installation of a kitchenette / servery adjacent to the organ, the refurbishment of the north windows, repair of the west doors and a toilet / store room, in a new building being located in the south west corner of the churchyard.

Special services like Harvest, Rogation and Remembrance services are well attended and we have a reputation for staging some wonderful concerts which take advantage of the excellent building acoustics.

The churchyard of St Rumbald represents one of the best remaining examples of limestone grassland in the area, and careful management, involving the wider village community, strikes a balance between a 'tidy' churchyard and one managed for conservation and wildlife and is now recognised as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

St Mary the Virgin, Titchmarsh



The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin has been the centre of the Christian community in Titchmarsh for some 800 years, and is constantly evolving to cater for 21st century life. The church is remarkable for its magnificent tower, its long and lofty clerestory, its spacious chancel and its light and uncluttered interior. It houses an early TC Lewis pipe organ, installed in 1870, some fine stained glass by Messrs Hardman of Birmingham, a collection of interesting monuments (the Dryden, Pickering and Creed families), and a peal of 8 bells.

Over the last thirty years the church has been made weatherproof, the interior has been reordered – with the pews removed – and a servery and toilets installed. This has led to the church being used for many more church and community events. In 2016 the TC Lewis organ was restored and major works were undertaken on some of the stained glass, including the west window, and associated masonry. Early in 2021, a state of the art audio-visual system was installed which has expanded the possibilities for both religious and community uses of the church. Generally speaking, all critical major work has been done. Having said that, there are other aspirational projects such as installing modern lighting, improving the children's area, restoring the monuments (some of national historical interest) and redecorating. The PCC is lucky in that there is a lot of expertise and commitment within the PCC, churchgoers and the wider village.

St Michael and All Angels, Wadenhoe

The 800 year old Grade 2* listed church of St Michael and All Angels stands on an ancient site in the middle of farm grasslands at the top of a hill overlooking the wide expanse of meadowland of the Nene Valley. It is isolated from the village of Wadenhoe which lies below by the River Nene. The dedication of the church has changed over the centuries being recorded as St Giles in the 16th century and shortly after as St Michael and All Angels. There was a temporary reversion to the name, St Giles, for a few years at the beginning of the 19th Century. The church has a small worshipping congregation for the two regular services (Communion and Evensong) every month. Special services are held on Palm Sundays which usually include a procession led by a donkey up the hill into the Church while the special Crib Services held on Christmas Eve usually include a procession of a couple of donkeys and some sheep into the church. Both of these occasions are very popular with children. On Remembrance Sundays a special service is always conducted at the Village War Memorial when the names of those villagers who died in the two Great Wars are read out and remembered. Because of its delightful position, the church is also an ideal and popular choice for weddings. Part of the route of the long distance Nene Way footpath runs through the village and churchyard to Lyveden New Bield, the unfinished Elizabethan lodge and moated garden which is a place of historic interest owned by the National Trust.



For further information, see Wadenhoe Church Website, www.wadenhoechurch.org.uk, and www.wadenhoehistorygroup.org and select Chapter 4, Wadenhoe Church

Aldwincle Rectory

The 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	Achurch HC		Pilton HC Titchmarsh MP	Titchmarsh HC	
10.30am	Titchmarsh HC	Wadenhoe HC Online MP	Aldwincle HC	Stoke Doyle HC Online MP	Benefice Service (rotating) HC Pilton Family service
4.30pm				Family Service online	
6.00pm		Titchmarsh EP or Compline	Achurch EP	Wadenhoe EP	
7.30pm	Thursday Praise - online				

* Clopton at the present time celebrates festivals and does not have a regular pattern of worship.
 Holy Communion services are Common Worship.
 Morning Prayer is adapted Common Worship
 Evening Prayer and Compline are Prayer Book

Special Services in a Normal Year

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. In 2020 services did continue with necessary precautions.

A Christingle service is held each year and in 2020 took place on-line with children from across the benefice joining in – all were given a chocolate Christingle and equipment to make their own Christingle which was delivered to the childrens' homes.

The two schools hold their own carol services in church.

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. In 2021 this took place online in an evening.

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

In 2021 an online service followed by the distribution of Simnel cake and flowers to all ladies who had attended and the elderly members of the congregation.

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.

In 2020 some of these were held outside followed by refreshments.

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

	Aldwincle	Clopton*	Pilton	Stoke Doyle	Thorpe - Achurch	Titchmarsh	Wadenhoe
No. on electoral role	19	10	15	17	13	42	18
Average attendance in 2019 over 2 mths	9	0	9	26	9	11	12
Average attendance at online morning service	2020 during lockdown MP 33, HC 35 2020 some churches open MP 26, HC 24 2021 most churches open MP 27, HC 18						
Average attendance at Family online service	2020 19 2021 18						
Special events online	Christingle 2020 59 Mothering Sunday 2021 53						

Information in the table below relates to 2019.

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

	Baptisms	Marriages	Funerals
Aldwincle	0	0	1
Clopton	0	0	1
Pilton	0	0	0
Stoke Doyle	1	0	0
Thorpe Achurch	0	0	1
Titchmarsh	0	4	0
Wadenhoe	0	1	1

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 holds church services 2 or 3 times a term with special services held for May Day, Leavers, Harvest Festival & Christmas. 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. At least twice a term the rector is invited into school to take an assembly. In 2020 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. Prior to covid these were held at 4.30pm in Titchmarsh on the 2nd Sunday of the month and in Achurch on the 3rd Sunday of the month. At the moment the Family service is continuing online and has attracted an increasing number of families.

Sunday School

Prior to lockdown, a Sunday School was held on the 4th Sunday of each month as part of morning Holy Communion. This was run by Dr Kate Hughes with help from others and attracted several families. It is hoped that we will be able to start up again soon.

'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 is 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. Each evening focused on a topic and included food! We are starting again in September 2021.

Secular Youth Group

There is a Youth Group in Titchmarsh which meets on alternate Fridays during term-time but this is secular.

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:

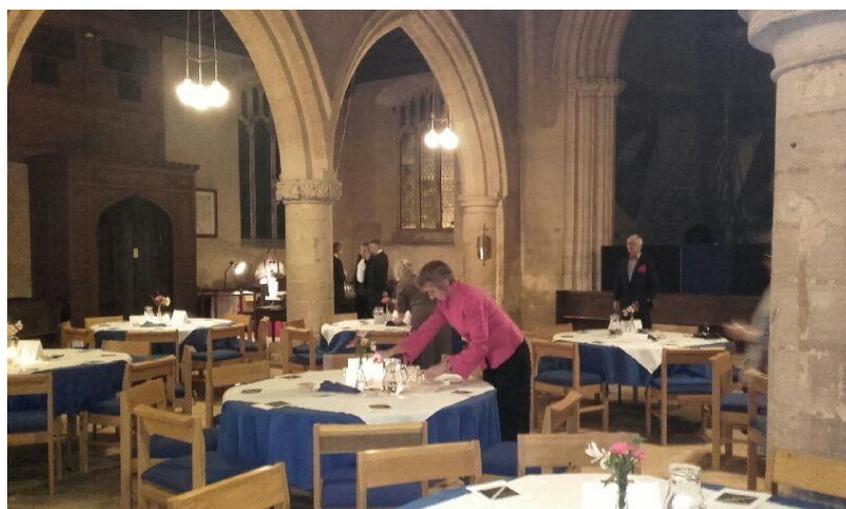
- Bible study
- Monday Morning Cafe
- Friendly Club
- WI
- Messy Church
- Forest School
- Book swaps

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
- 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, 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. 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.

Annex J

Support Available

Benefice ministry team:

Liz Waller - NSM Assistant Priest – retiring after Easter 2022

Dr Beatrice Brandon – NSM Assistant Priest,

Carolyn Brawn - Reader

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. 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 leading intercessions.

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

The rector is assisted in the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults by two Parish Safeguarding Officers (one covering Titchmarsh and one based in Aldwincle covering the other 6 parishes) and by the Diocesan Safeguarding Officers.

Finance

Recently, the benefice "parish share" and other expenses have always been paid in full. However, the parish share cost, as calculated by the diocese, continues to be an increasing fundraising challenge for all the parishes in the benefice. Most parishes have now exhausted their reserves and the lack of being able to fund raise for two years has meant that some of the parishes are really struggling to pay anything.

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

Titchmarsh sponsors students in the Bombay Teen project which is run by the Rev Deveraj and 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.

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 Reverend Canon Stephen Webster, who is based at St Peter's in Oundle. 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 fortnightly College of Ministers communion service at 8:30am on Tuesdays. During Covid, incumbents have met weekly on Zoom for mutual prayer and support and this now continues twice a month. 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.

Across the deanery we have good connections with all our schools – Church schools and non-Church schools alike. Until September 2021 two voluntary deanery support visitors worked in all the primary schools encouraging and supporting head teachers and leading Collective Worship. The clergy have fully supported this work and are also active within their benefice schools. We are now looking at how to build on this excellent foundation. 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. After a break in 2021 we plan to restart this in 2022.

Thrapston based Souster Youth Trust is a Christian charity providing high quality training and support for youth work across a wide local area. In addition 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.

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